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Acedia in the Local Church: Cultivating the Virtue of Charity as a Remedy for the Vice of Acedia

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ABSTRACT

The vice of acedia is one of the greatest challenges the church is currently facing. Acedia lies at the root of indifference, apathy, idleness, and a lack of engagement in the life of a community of faith. Paradoxically, acedia also manifests as dutiful, distracted service that seeks to maintain status quo or personal preferences. Adding to the complexity further, acedia will also produce an overwhelming desire to leave one's faith community for any other place that promises to meet one's needs or provide a more hospitable environment for one's growth.

The first step that must be undertaken against this forgotten vice is to describe acedia, name the primary ways it is attacking the local church, and identify the way scripture portrays its effects. This initial exploration is essential to the church's recovery because of the anonymity acedia currently enjoys. In order to begin to recover from the symptoms of acedia, the church must first be able to accurately name and diagnose acedia.

Prescribing a remedy for the vice of acedia will begin with a description of the teleological, teachable, and habitual nature of virtue. From this basic foundation a framework for combatting the vice of acedia and cultivating the virtue of charity will be constructed. The principle components of this framework include a narrative approach to forming telos and identity, a working understanding of habit and habit formation, and a practical introduction to the practices and habits that can rescue from acedia and cultivate friendship with God. Ultimately it is the implementation of a series of practices and habits that will enable the church to equip her members to live in the union and friendship

with God and one another we have been designed for, that has been frustrated and

destroyed by the vicious effects of acedia.

CHAPTER 1: THE PROBLEM OF ACEDIA

Introduction

The most significant challenge the church faces today is the vice of acedia in her members. While the terminology of acedia (and synonyms like accidie, torpor, despondency, and ennui) may be unfamiliar, the experience it describes is pervasive. Although we might recognize its symptoms in the story above, there is a lack of vocabulary that fully captures the complex and varied symptoms that affect congregations corporately and hobble her members individually. On the other hand, there has been a host of material written promising to remedy each specific symptom without the focus to cure the unknown and unnamed root cause. In order to affect lasting and wholistic change in the life of an individual and congregation, churches must accurately understand the enemy that is attacking and apply the correct defense against its schemes.

Modern Attempts to Name the Problem

The church in the West struggles to maintain or nurture passion and engagement in the life and programming of their congregations. Across denominational lines, congregations are experiencing a lack of passion and a steady decline in participation in the local church's worship gatherings and general programming.[1] As one pastoral leader says, "I believe that apathy is killing the Church, because many who claim to know Jesus

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[1] Aleksandra Sandstrom, "Church Involvement Varies Widely Among U.S. Christians," *Pew Research Center,* November 16, 2015, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/11/16/church-involvement-varies-widely-among-u-s-christians/. According to this study, only 30% of Christians say they are "highly" involved in their local church based on their attendance at corporate worship services and participation in other programming like prayer meetings or small groups.

do not understand or apply the life-changing truth of the gospel—and because they do not

know what the treasure of the gospel, they lack zeal. Nothing can replace the impact of a

passionate pursuit of God."[2] The experience of many Christians in our current context

could be characterized using adjectives like indifference, apathy, fatigue, inability to

pray, withdrawal, depression, lack of passion or direction, loss of identity.[3] Many of these

adjectives could also be used to describe the atmosphere in many of our local churches.

In the current search for the root of these complex symptoms, the diagnoses offered are

too narrow to overcome the challenge, too spiritual to be implemented, or too broad to be

effective.

The challenge of naming the problem too narrowly is illustrated in the literature

that focuses on only one symptom of acedia. For example, Lyle Schaller takes the

approach of naming the problem "passivity."[4] Schaller names twenty-seven sources of

this passivity, including the sense that the church's mission has been eroded and self-

preservation has risen in its place, limited programmatic emphasis on evangelism and

community ministries, an orientation toward the past rather than toward the future, the

dependence upon paid staff to carry the mission and vision, high turnover in staff, decline

in attendance to services or programs, and a congregational self-image of weakness,

powerlessness or insignificance.[5] While these are certainly challenges many

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[2] Robbie Symons, *Passion Cry: How Apathy is Killing the Church and How Passion for Christ Will Revive It* (Winnipeg, CA: Word Alive Press, 2016), xv.

[3] Jean-Charles Nault, "Acedia: Enemy of Spiritual Joy," *Commnio International Catholic Review* 31, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 248, https://www.communio-icr.com/files/Nault31-2.pdf.

[4] Lyle E. Schaller, *Activating the Passive Church: Diagnosis and Treatment* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1981), 34.

[5] Ibid., 51-63.

congregations face, Schaller's call to redefining the role of the local church[6] is far too

narrow a remedy to overcome the complexity of acedia. Scott Thumma and Warren Bird

try to address the same symptom by focusing on the things church leaders "can do to

reach the less-committed persons associated with their congregations."[7] Thumma and

Bird prescribe a process of listening to the members of the church in order to learn about

the sources of their inactivity so that they can lead all members into increasing

participation in the life and ministry of the church.[8] Finally, Larry Peabody uses the self-

defining adjective "spectatoritis" to describe this symptom.[9] The remedy Peabody offers

for this condition is to grow in the art of "one-anothering."[10] This one-anothering is

primarily discussed as a way to refocus and restructure the main gathering of the

congregation because the current form of church meetings results in what Peabody calls

"apprenticeships in passivity."[11] The common thread these resources share is the focus on

curing a symptom of acedia (in this case a lack of participation in the programming of the

local church) rather than the more complex root cause. While a lack of engagement in the

life and ministry of the local church in this manner is certainly a symptom of acedia,

simply increasing participation is not necessarily the cure, and in some cases may

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[6] Ibid., 71-99.

[7] Scott Thumma and Warren Bird, *The Other 80%: Turning Your Church's Spectators into Active Participants* (San Francisco, CA: Josey Bass, 2011), xxvii.

[8] Thumma and Bird, *The Other 80%*, xvi.

[9] Larry Peabody, *Curing Sunday Spectatoritis: From Passivity to Participation in Church* (Skyforest, CA: Urban Loft Publishers, 2016), 18.

[10] Ibid., 22-34. While the remainder of the book outlines the implications and application of Peabody's one-anothering, the basic foundation is established in this introductory section.

[11] Ibid., 78.

exacerbate the actual malady by feeding other symptoms (for example, dutiful over-engagement).

A second approach is illustrated by Francis Chan. In *Crazy Love,* Chan uses the adjective "lukewarm" from Jesus' letter to the church at Laodicea[12] to describe these symptoms. In his "profile of the lukewarm," Chan offers eighteen attributes of apathetic Christians, most notably that they love others but do not seek to love them as much as they love themselves, they don't really want to be saved from their sin, only from the penalty of their sin, they are moved by stories of radical acts of faith, but will not act themselves, they love God, but not with all their heart, soul, mind and strength, they love Jesus with a part of their lives, money and time, and they drink and swear less than the average person, but aren't substantially different in lifestyle than the culture around them.[13] Chan's appraisal of the symptoms the church is suffering is accurate and rooted in scripture. His call to "obsession"[14] is valid and necessary. The deficiency in this approach, however, is that the enemy we are facing is precisely the source of our indifference. Yes, the church ought to be obsessed with God and his Kingdom, however, in order to come to this place of single-mindedness the church will need to name and address the source of the indifference in a focused, practical, behavioral manner.

One final example of the current struggle to accurately diagnose the challenge we are facing is the call to discipleship. Dallas Willard claims that "nondiscipleship is the

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[12] Revelation 3:14–22. See Chapter 2: Biblical Foundations, 25-28.

[13] Francis Chan, *Crazy Love: Overwhelmed by a Relentless God* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2008), 65-82.

[14] Ibid., 129-148.

elephant in the church,"[15] and has written extensively on the need for the church to return to its divinely appointed mission of making disciples.[16] While there is no debating Willard's assertion that making Christlike disciples is the foundational call God extends to his church the general call to discipleship is too broad to address the specific and deadly vice at the root of apathy, indifference, and sloth. The practices, principles, and presuppositions Willard builds his spiritual formation framework upon will be referenced in the remedy section of this work, but to name the malady that manifests the symptoms besetting the church a lack of discipleship is too general to effectively address the root cause.

Many in the contemporary church are searching for a faithful framework that is: 1) big enough to express the multifaceted mixture of symptoms being presented, 2) accurate enough to diagnose the root cause, and 3) effective enough to prescribe a sustainable course of healing. The three examples above are merely representative of the search that is being undertaken to accurately name and treat the lack of health in the church. While it is beyond the scope of this work to fully explore this growing body of literature, it is the contention of this author that the most accurate and robust framework for naming and diagnosing the disease expressed in these various symptoms is found in the ancient Christian understanding of virtues and vices.

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[15] Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God,* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd., 1997), 301.

[16] Willard's vast library of discipleship works includes *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd., 1997)*, The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (New York: HarperOne, 2006)*, Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002), Dallas Willard and Don Simpson, *Revolution of Character: Discovering Christ's Pattern for Spiritual Transformation* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2005) along with dozens of articles and sermons.

The Ancient Christian Framework

The most accurate diagnosis of the source of this experience is that these complex expressions and emotions are the symptoms of the vice of acedia. Acedia has been described as "a will-based aversion to human participation in the divine nature through charity,"[17] and named in the traditional lists of deadly vices. Contemporary culture may be defensive or resistant to name indifference or apathy as a deadly sin, however, in the Christian understanding of identity, purpose, and living a good life acedia is not only included in the list, it is at the top of the list.

> Because it is about love—accepting God's love for us and the cost of loving him back—acedia earns its place among the seven capital vices, or deadly sins. We are made for love. To resist it is to deny who we are. In their reluctance to die to the old self, those with acedia choose slow spiritual suffocation to the birth pains of new life. They cannot fully accept the only thing that would ultimately bring them joy. They refuse the thing they most desire, and they turn away from the only thing that can bring them life.[18]

Evagrius

The first person in the monastic tradition to clearly articulate a description of the experience of acedia was a fourth century monk named Evagrius.[19] Prior to the famous lists of seven deadly sins, Evagrius named his "eight *logismoi*" ("evil thoughts"). In his writing, he calls acedia the "noonday devil" that attacks the monk in his cell and keeps

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[17] Rebecca Konyndyke DeYoung, Colleen McClusky, and Christina Van Dyke, *Aquinas's Ethics: Metaphysical Foundations, Moral Theory, and Theological Context* (Notre Dame, ID: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 178.

[18] Rebecca Konyndyke DeYoung, "Resistance to the Demands of Love." *Christian Reflection: A Series in Faith and Ethics* 49 (2013): 16, https://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/212247.pdf99872.

[19] Siegfried Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth: Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1960), 11-12, 17.

him from his work, makes it impossible to pray, and causes disdain for his place and his

brethren, longing for a place where it will be easier to pursue his vocation.[20] Evagrius

provides rich imagery for this demon that attacks the monk and with this imagery

illustrates the complex array of symptoms acedia induces. For example,

> Acedia is an ethereal friendship, one who leads our steps astray, hatred of industriousness, a battle against stillness, stormy weather for psalmody, laziness in prayer, a slackening of ascesis, untimely drowsiness, revolving sleep, the oppressiveness of solitude, hatred of one's cell, an adversary of ascetic works, an opponent of perseverance, a muzzling of meditation, ignorance of the scriptures, a partaker in sorrow, a clock for hunger.[21]

Or, in another of his works,

> A waterless cloud is chased away by a wind, a mind without perseverance by the spirit of acedia… A person afflicted with acedia proposes visiting the sick, but is fulfilling his own purpose. A monk given to acedia is quick to undertake a service, but considers his own satisfaction to be a precept. A light breeze bends a feeble plant; a fantasy about a trip away drags off the person overcome with acedia. The force of the wind does not shake a well-rooted tree; acedia does not bend the soul that is firmly established.[22]

In these examples, Evagrius establishes the deadly impact of acedia upon the soul it

ensnares. He also illustrates the challenge in diagnosing and treating this condition. This

initial formulation of acedia is essential to the prescription of a remedial practice.[23]

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[20] Evagrius Ponticus, *The Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer,* trans. John Eudes Bamberger (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications Inc., 1972), 18-19.

[21] Robert E. Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), ProQuest Ebook Central, 64.

[22] Ibid., 83-85.

[23] See Chapter 6, 103.

John Cassian

The next relevant stage in acedia's development is its translation from East to West,[24] and from the solitary monk to the monastery.[25] In his *Institutes*, John Cassian presents Evagrius' noonday demon as a malady that progresses from sadness. Sadness, in the ninth book of the *Institutes,* is described as an aversion to prayer, a resistance to relationship and wise counsel, an inability to engage in sacred reading, and a withdrawal from one's work.[26] The oppression of sadness naturally leads to the onset of acedia. Acedia, described metaphorically as a fever, takes possession of the afflicted one's mind causing disgust for one's location, contempt for one's community of faith, and robs one of the motivation or ability to complete the work, reading, or prayers entrusted to them.[27] As we see in the earlier work of Evagrius, there is a tendency to view other locations as ideally suited to the holy life the afflicted is called to which is being frustrated by their current location and companions.[28] The addition of a communal element to the experience of acedia is an important innovation Cassian introduces to the framework inherited from Evagrius.

> From this solitary mode of the religious life with its stringent asceticism… one's calling to the religious life took a communal form. In this second stage, the vice was understood less as a longing to escape solitary communion with God than as

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[24] Wenzel, 22.

[25] Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung, *Acedia's Resistance to the Demands of Love: Aquinas on the Vice of Sloth,* https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/7ca9/4112bd5467ee26048306070c71e74c499c77.pdf, 3.

[26] John Cassian, *The Institutes,* trans. Boniface Ramsay (New York, NY: The Newman Press, 2000), 211.

[27] Ibid., 219.

[28] Ibid., 219.

a temptation to shirk one's calling to participate in a religious community and *its* spiritual life.[29]

In Cassian's summary, we begin to hear ancient echoes of the voices of our contemporary congregations. "He (the monk afflicted with acedia) makes a great deal of far off and distant monasteries, describing such places as more suited to progress and more conducive to salvation, and also depicting the fellowship of the brothers there as pleasant and of an utterly spiritual cast."[30] Or consider this example from the same section, "Next, he glances around and anxiously here and there and sighs that none of the brothers is coming to see him."[31] One final example introduces a paradox by increasing the activity of the sufferer rather than keeping them from work, "the same malady suggests that he should dutifully pay his respects to the brothers and visit the sick, whether at a slight distance or further away. It also prescribes certain pious and religious tasks… On such things it behooves him to expend his pious efforts rather than to remain, barren and having made no progress, in his cell."[32] This paradox makes the sin of acedia so very difficult to accurately assess and remedy as some caught in the sadness of acedia will withdraw from work, prayer, and community while others take on great projects, visitation among the brethren, and exhausting work rather than faithfully attending to the voice of love that calls them to cultivate a deep and intimate connection with God.

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[29] DeYoung, *Acedia's Resistance,* 3.

[30] Cassian, 219.

[31] Ibid., 220.

[32] Ibid.

Thomas Aquinas

Thomas Aquinas took the classic seven vices and revised them once again, pairing each classic virtue with a pair of deadly vices. In this framework, acedia is presented as "a will-based aversion to human participation in the divine nature through charity."[33] This pairing brings the problem and the remedy into extremely sharp focus and adds tremendous clarity to our consideration in our modern, western church context. For Aquinas, sloth most clearly finds expression as an aversion to love. Aquinas uses two complimentary phrases to describe this; sadness about spiritual good, and disgust with activity.[34]

> In effect, acedia is a sin against charity in two ways, which meet in reality. On the one hand, acedia is a sin against the joy that springs from charity; it is sadness against what ought to gladden us most: participation in the very life of God. On the other hand, acedia is a sin against charity when it crushes or paralyzes activity, because then it affects the deepest motive force of activity, namely, charity, the participation of the Holy Spirit.[35]

The terminology of disgust with activity can at first glance be misleading and misunderstood as simple laziness. This misunderstanding, beginning with Cassian's idleness,[36] is repeated time and again in the common language of our church leadership and culture. There is no misunderstanding in Aquinas's works, however. He makes a clear distinction by insisting that acedia is a spiritual vice, not a carnal vice. The implications of this distinction are that sloth is not opposed to charity because of the

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[33] DeYoung, McClusky, and Van Dyke, *Aquinas's Ethics*, 178.

[34] Jean-Charles Nault, *The Noonday Devil: Acedia, The Unnamed Evil of our Times* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press. 2015), 57-58.

[35] Ibid., 80.

[36] Wenzel, 22.

physical effort required, it is resistant to the interior transformation that charity would bring about.[37] As clarifying as Aquinas's spiritual-carnal framework is, the paradox of resisting activity and frenetic activity is retained. "Aquinas noted that behind the rather gray face of apathy lay a spiritual monster: despair. The great goal of life—communion with God—is forsaken by diving into a sea of triviality."[38] The distraction and dissipation caused by acedia remains one of the most challenging aspects of providing an accurate diagnosis. For example, when considering the distracted activity of many congregations, Dallas Willard offers the metaphor of the treasure and the vessel.[39] Willard suggests that the vast majority of energy, debate, discord, and focus of a local congregation or denomination is on secondary matters that he associates with the vessel, rather than on the essential matters of making Christlike disciples.[40] This "activity-inactivity" paradox will be difficult to overcome as we attempt to craft a remedial course of action.

Conclusion

This survey of the complexity of acedia serves as an introduction to the scope of the problem and the challenge the church is facing in providing a remedy. The paradoxical nature of the symptoms produced by acedia has led the church to try to address the symptoms individually through programming, focusing on member retention,

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[37] DeYoung, *Aquinas's Ethics,* 178-179.

[38] William Willimon, *Sinning Like a Christian: A New Look at the Seven Deadly Sins* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005), 86.

[39] Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002), 235-237.

[40] Ibid.

and teaching right doctrine. These efforts have turned out to be ineffective in the battle

against the root cause and distracting from the primary purpose of the local church.

CHAPTER 2: BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

The biblical portrayal of acedia begins with the core understanding that acedia is a vice, and therefore a sin of action and habit that is opposed to the telos of an individual or community. This deadly vice is expressed as a resistance to fruitful labor in some individuals and as dutiful activity in others. The portrait of corporate acedia in scripture finds expression in the forsaking of first love in the pursuit of orthodoxy, and lukewarm complacency and self-sufficiency produced by affluence.

Acedia as Sin in John's Gospel and Epistles

Sin and Vice

Ancient authorities classified acedia as the chief vice in the original list of the eight deadly thoughts. Modern readers may chafe at the language of sin, especially used in regard to the experience of despondency, sorrow, anxiety, depression, and indifference that acedia produces in her victims.[1] But, as Karl Menninger says, "Let it stand that there is a sin of not doing, of not knowing, of not finding out what one must do—in short, of not caring. This is the literal meaning of acedia, recognized as a sin for so many centuries and plaguing us still."[2] In our current culture we are far more comfortable describing

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[1] Kathleen Norris, *Acedia and Me: A Marriage, Monks, and A Writer's Life* (New York, NY: Riverhead Books, 2008), 20-47. In this chapter Norris represents the many sides of this contemporary debate.

[2] Karl Menninger, *Whatever Became of Sin?* (New York, NY: Hawthorn Book Inc., 1973), 148.

these symptoms using psychological or emotional language. While there is significant

overlap between the symptoms of clinical depression and spiritual acedia, emotion and

psychology are not the focus of this study.[3] For our purposes we will limit the diagnosis

and remedial prescription to the spiritual experience of acedia, acknowledging that this

vice may produce physical, emotional, and relational symptoms. This focus does not

intend to communicate that medical or psychological treatment of depression is not valid,

important, or necessary. It is merely to articulate that medical and psychological

diagnosis and treatment are beyond the scope of this work.

A basic description of the concept of sin begins with the understanding that we as

humans are "missing the mark" in our relationship with God, one another, and creation

around us.[4] For the purpose of addressing acedia in a local church there is little benefit to

explore the many doctrinal and denominational layers that have accumulated over this

foundational understanding that because of the Fall, a fracture occurred in God's good

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[3] Norris has the bravery to wade into this issue, reflecting on the boundaries of depression and acedia in her own experience. She comments, "Is acedia depression? My answer is, No, not exactly, but I must struggle to articulate the difference with precision. My job is not made easier in the contemporary climate, when not to name acedia as depression can make one suspicious of being in denial, or worse, of judging people who are ill as being morally deficient. This is an area where only a fool would dare to tread, and this I tread along, trying to keep in mind the useful distinction Thomas Aquinas makes between acedia and despair. A contemporary scholar summarizes his insight: 'for despair, participation in the divine nature through grace is perceived as appealing, but impossible; for acedia, the prospect is possible, but unappealing." Kathleen Norris, *Acedia and Me: A Marriage, Monks, and a Writer's Life* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2008), 24.

[4] B. A. Milne with J. Murray, "Sin," *New Bible Dictionary,* ed. D. R. W. Wood et al. (Downers Grove, MI: InterVarsity Press, 1996). This extended treatment of sin explores the basic Christian theological understanding of this doctrine. Specific to the question we are exploring, Milne offers the following, "There are four main Heb. roots. *ḥṭ'* is the most common and with its derivatives conveys the underlying idea of missing the mark, or deviating from the goal. … The principal NT term is *hamartia* (and cognates), which is equivalent to *ḥṭ'*. In classical Gk. it is used for missing a target or taking a wrong road. It is the general NT term for sin as concrete wrongdoing, the violation of God's law… The effects of the Fall extend to the physical cosmos. 'Cursed is the ground because of you' (Gn. 3:17; *cf.* Rom. 8:20). Man is the crown of creation, made in God's image and, therefore, God's vicegerent (Gn. 1:26). The catastrophe of man's Fall brought the catastrophe of curse upon that over which he was given dominion. Sin was an event in the realm of the human spirit, but it has its repercussions in the whole of creation." Milne, *New Bible Dictionary,* 1105–1109.

creation, and this fracture is called sin. While some authors, like Willimon,[5] assert that

this general understanding is adequate to an accurate understanding of the seven deadly

sins, arriving at an accurate diagnosis and remedy will be better served by the term vice.

The reason for the term vice is that it narrows our focus from a generic, broad meaning of

sin to describe the deeply rooted patterns in our character that are nurtured and developed

over time. These patterns are larger than any one single act, but more specific than the

general disposition or propensity to sin.[6] Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung illustrates this

principle well using the imagery of tobogganing down a hill after a fresh snowfall. The

first few runs down the hill are slow as the sled pushes the fresh snow into a groove.

However, each successive run packs the snow a little more firmly and the run gets easier

and faster through repetition.[7]

To this point we have been using the terms vice and sin interchangeably. Moving

forward the specificity found in a more focused use of the term vice will serve our

purposes more effectively than the broad heading of sin in two ways. First, it will set the

foundation for an accurate diagnosis of the presenting symptoms. Diagnosing the

complex array of symptoms as a manifestation of a vice allows for an accurate

understanding of the paradoxical behavior being observed, whereas, naming each specific

manifestation as a sin leads to shallow and ineffective attempts to treat the surface of the

problem. Secondly, by articulating a vice as something that develops over time through

practice, we set a sustainable and realistic pattern for prescribing remedial action. For,

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[5] Willimon, 26.

[6] Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung, *Glittering Vices: A New Look at the Seven Deadly Sins* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2009), 34.

[7] Ibid., 13-14.

just as vices are cultivated over time, corresponding virtues can also be cultivated. For the

purpose of this survey of biblical literature, acedia is understood as a vice in light of its

resistance to the command to love in the writing of the Apostle John.

The Command to Love in John

In John's gospel, the command to love is most clearly articulated in the dialogue

between Jesus and his disciples in chapters 13-15. Beginning in chapter 13, Jesus

commands his disciples to love each other as he has loved them.[8] The pattern Jesus

establishes here is the self-giving, serving, obedient love he has put on full display in the

foot-washing that immediately precedes the command.[9] In this humble act of service

Jesus shows his disciples the full extent of his love.[10] The call to emulation continues in

the discourse as Jesus points to his loving obedience of the Father,[11] not only internally as

a feeling or intimate relationship, but in words and works.[12] Obedience to the words and

works of love bring Jesus's followers into full relationship with Jesus, with God the

Father, and with other disciples.[13] Jesus identifies the loving obedience of his followers

as the continuation of the works he has been doing,[14] and says that to neglect these works

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[8] John 13:34-35.

[9] John 13:12-17.

[10] John 13:1.

[11] John 14: 9-12.

[12] Gail R. O'Day, "The Gospel of John: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," *The New Interpreters Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes* vol. 9 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 732.

[13] Ibid., 733.

[14] Ibid., 746.

is to not love him.[15] In the final expression of this command in chapter 15, the basis of

the command to love is abiding in Christ as he abides in the Father.[16] This emphasis on

abiding is no internal, mental, solitary endeavor however, for "to remain in Jesus further

entails keeping the commands of Jesus, as he kept his Father's commands and remained

in his love."[17]

The connection between love and obedience is echoed in John's epistles[18] as he

repeatedly exhorts the saints to follow the pattern established in his Gospel. In John's

letters loving God is defined as obeying his commands[19] and loving one another,[20] while

disobedience and a lack of love for one another is equated with having no relationship

with God at all.[21] Within this context, loving obedience is expressing love in action not

merely as a feeling or in words.[22] If love is a divine commandment, then acedia (i.e.,

resisting love's demands) is sin. But in John's literature as outlined thus far, is acedia

truly a vice?

The nature of vice is more than a simple or isolated act or behavior, it is action or

behavior that has become habitual and is opposed to one's telos.[23] Kenneth Wuest's

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[15] John 14:24.

[16] John 15:9-10.

[17] George R. Beasley Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 36 (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1987), 273.

[18] Ibid., 195.

[19] 1 John 2:3-5.

[20] 1 John 3:21-23, 4:7-12.

[21] 1 John 4:8.

[22] 1 John 3:18.

[23] The concept of telos is explored in "The Teleological Nature of Virtue," 33.

translation of 1 John is helpful in articulating this essential distinction between sin and vice as Wuest repeatedly qualifies the loving obedience John describes using the adjective "habitual." One example is his translation of 1 John 2:10, "He who is habitually loving his brother, in the light is abiding, and a stumbling-block in him there is not."[24] In this translation, the virtue of loving one's brother is set in contrast with the vice of not loving in the next verse, "But he who as a habit of life hates his brother, in the darkness is, and in the sphere of the darkness is habitually ordering his behavior, and he does not know where he is going, because the darkness blinded his eyes."[25] The telos of the love command is most clearly expressed in the statements of Jesus that teach his followers that his love expressed to one another is their defining characteristic. Love is the trait that will distinguish them from all other people.[26] In the statements of love's perfection in the epistles,[27] love is made perfect through the imitation of their Lord and Savior.[28]

> If saints have this *agape* love habitually for one another, that shows that this love which God is in His nature, has accomplished its purpose in their lives. It has made us loving and self-sacrificial in our characters. This love has been brought to its human fulness in the lives of the saints.[29]

Therefore, acedia is a vice in as much as it is a habitual lack of love that is opposed to the telos of the command to love.

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[24] Kenneth S. Wuest, *Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament: For the English Reader*, vol. 13 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 122.

[25] Ibid., 122.

[26] John 13:34-35.

[27] 1 John 4:12-17.

[28] Beasley Murray, *Commentary*, 51-53, 195.

[29] Wuest, 166.

Acedia as Resistance to Fruitful Labor

When speaking of Evagrius' characterization of acedia, Sigmund Wenzel summarizes his thought as,

> …psychic exhaustion and listlessness caused by the monotony of life and the immediate surroundings or by the protracted struggle with other temptations… In the end acedia causes the monk either to give in to physical sleep, which proves unrefreshing or actually dangerous because it opens the door to many other temptations, or to leave his cell and eventually the religious life altogether. Hence, it can quite rightly be called the most dangerous as well as "the most oppressive" of all temptations.[30]

The experience Wenzel describes is most consistent with the portrayal of "the sluggard" in Proverbs. The Hebrew word ʿā·ṣēl is used fourteen times in the Hebrew Bible, all of which are in the book of Proverbs. The lexical description of ʿā·ṣēl includes "useless, lazy persons who always fail because of laziness that becomes moral failure."[31]

There are several characteristics of the sluggard in Proverbs that are worth noting.[32] First, and most overtly, the sluggard is lazy. As quoted above, Wenzel makes mention of the extreme and destructive pull toward rest and sleep the sufferer from acedia experiences. In Proverbs this pattern is clearly named and denounced. In Proverbs 6 for example, the sluggard is exhorted to forsake their bed, warning that poverty and destruction awaits.[33] This laziness is taken to the extreme in chapter 19, "The sluggard

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[30] Wenzel, 5.

[31] Warren Baker and Eugene Carpenter, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2003), 860.

[32] Robert Deffinbaugh, "The Way of the Wise: Studies in the book of Proverbs, ch. 6, The Sluggard," *Bible.org.* June 2, 2004, https://bible.org/seriespage/6-sluggard. While not directly quoted in the section that follows, this summary article provided a helpful starting point for this survey.

[33] Proverbs 6:9–11.

buries his hand in the dish; he will not even bring it back to his mouth!"[34] In this saying the one caught in sloth is too weary to lift the food he has just reached for back into his mouth. This deadly and vicious cycle ends in the destruction these passages consistently warn about.

Second, the sluggard is distracted. If the sluggard does express the intention of returning to their fields to work, they are quickly distracted or dissuaded from this pursuit. Two times the hyperbolic excuse, "There is a lion in the road, a fierce lion roaming the streets!"[35] is given as a reason to remain at rest. Chapter 26 continues with a helpful metaphor, "As a door turns on its hinges, so a sluggard turns on his bed."[36] In this passage the pattern of trying to churn up the willpower to go to work only to return to one's bed is aptly envisioned as a door swinging on its hinges. Acedia will not loose its grip on the victim, allowing them to be fruitful. It will use whatever fear, distraction, or accusation necessary to keep its victims trapped in this pattern.

Finally, the sluggard is unwilling to see their desires fulfilled. When suffering from acedia, there is a hopelessness or indifference to one's desires that feeds the sleep and sloth in the individual. There is a desiring that does not produce action but despair. For example, "The sluggard craves and gets nothing, but the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied,"[37] or "The sluggard's craving will be the death of him, because his hands

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[34] Proverbs 19:24.

[35] Proverbs 22:13 and 26:13.

[36] Proverbs 26:13–16.

[37] Proverbs 13:4.

refuse to work."[38] As Wenzel summarizes above, the individual caught in acedia cannot give themselves to the work or disciplines that would allow their desires to be satisfied.

Acedia as Dutiful Activity in Paul's Letters

1 Corinthians 12-14 is an extended treatment of the proper place of the spiritual gifts within the life of a local church and the abuses Paul finds in the Corinthian context. He writes this section of his letter as a correction to the improper applications of the gifts of the Spirit by restoring love to its place as the foundation of the spiritual gifts. While acedia is dangerous when it produces laziness, it is equally treacherous when it produces religious activity divorced from love.

> As an equally ironic result, religious activities can also function as just one more escapist, diversionary cover-up for the vice of sloth itself, traditionally understood. That is, we can use busy involvement in religious practices and programs to avoid giving ourselves in a real relationship of love with God. Our lives can be filled with church committee work and social groups and fundraisers, but empty of real relationship and worship—perhaps our frantic business is a symptom of our lack of desire for God himself and a preference for our own self-made kingdoms. Or worse, perhaps, worship itself becomes more self-entertainment than encounter with God. In these religious contexts as well, then, while busy activities earn more approval or disguise a lack of serious discipleship, they can cover over the real vice of sloth.[39]

In 1 Corinthians 13 the apostle Paul articulates a profound and inspiring description of love which establishes love's primacy in the behavior, character, and use of spiritual gifts in the Corinthian church. There are some commentators and scholars who suggest this chapter was a later addition to the letter Paul wrote, as a hymn to love

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[38] Proverbs 21:25–26.

[39] Kevin Timpe and Craig A. Boyd, eds., *Virtues and Their Vices* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014), 185.

and a display of eloquence,[40] and that it may be attributed to a different source. If this is

the case, this passage has little or no connection to the content and purpose of the rest of

the letter. Scholars like J. Smit argue convincingly against this interpretation, placing 1

Corinthians 13 in the rhetorical traditions of the ancient world,[41] proving a consistent

line of argument in the letter[42] and a useful connection to acedia in the life of a local

church. The rhetorical genre Paul uses in chapter 13 is referred to by some as an

"encomium"[43] and "genus demonstrativum"[44] by others. These rhetorical genres are used

for the comparison of persons or virtues with the aim of praising one person or virtue and

convincing the hearer to follow after them.[45] In this chapter, Paul praises love, placing it

above the spiritual gifts he has addressed in chapter 12 and will return to in chapter 14.[46]

The structure of chapter 13 closely follows the pattern established by these ancient

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[40] For example, David K. Lowery, "1 Corinthians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 535., Jamieson Fausset Brown coins the term "The New Testament Psalm of Love" for this text, Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, vol. 2 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 288.

[41] J. Smit, "The Genre of 1 Corinthians 13 in the Light of Classical Rhetoric," *Novum Testamentum* 33, no. 3 (July 1991):194.

[42] Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 610

[43] J. Paul Samply, "The First Letter to the Corinthians: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," *The New Interpreters Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, vol. 10 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 950-951.

[44] Smit, 214.

[45] Samply, 951. Please note that the call to the hearer to follow after love comes at 1 Corinthians 14:1.

[46] Stephen J. Patterson, "A Rhetorical Gem in a Rhetorical Treasure: The Origin and Significance of 1 Corinthians 13:4—7," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 39, no. 2 (2009): 89.

rhetorical forms: [47] prologue (12:31-13:3), great deeds (13:4-7), comparison (13:8-12), and epilogue (13:13-14:1).[48]

In the prologue Paul establishes love as the ultimate virtue by exemplifying the spiritual gifts in himself and displaying their inadequacy. In this section, Paul systematically dismisses the gifts being discussed in this larger context as inadequate apart from love and utilizes his embodiment of these gifts as an indirect critique of the Corinthian church.[49]

The prologue is followed by a list of great deeds or characteristics that support love's claim to supremacy. The virtues displayed by love follow ancient protocols for this genre of rhetoric[50] and put on display the actions love does. The list of seven things love does and eight things love does not do, forms a catalogue of virtues and vices that clarify the right character and function of love.

The third section of this text is a comparison of love and the spiritual gifts Paul seeks to subordinate. This subordination is based primarily on the immature, transitory, and defective nature of these gifts.[51] The thirteenth chapter concludes with an epilogue that summarizes the priority of love over and above the spiritual gifts. In these final verses Paul elevates love to its primary position among all gifts and virtues and calls the church to pursue this love as they also continue to pursue the gifts of the Spirit. Echoing

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[47] Smit, 205.

[48] Patterson, 951.

[49] Samply, 952.

[50] Ibid., 209.

[51] Ibid., 211-212.

the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount,[52] Paul calls for a correct heart as well as obedient action.

The problems caused by acedia include a propensity to dutiful, or good activity divorced from a loving heart. Paul's encomium reinforces the futility of this action. Paul's words cut right through even the best actions and virtues naming the only condition under which the true telos of these actions can be realized, agape love. Love's place of primacy is not only articulated here in 1 Corinthians 13 in relation to the dutiful action, spiritual gifts, and the other theological virtues, but also over the law in his letter to the Romans,[53] and over all the virtues of the holy life in his letter to the Colossians.[54] If love is lacking in any of these actions, they are robbed of effectiveness and become acedic rather than virtuous.

The Corporate Experience of Acedia in John's Apocalypse

The dynamics of acedia illustrated in the previous section have been specifically applied to the life and experience of the individual. However, as Gail R. O'Day says,

> The promises of divine presence are promises made to the community, not to the individual. All of the personal pronouns in these verses (John 15:12-24) are second-person plural, not singular. Jesus does not promise the Paraclete, or his own return, or the home-making of God and Jesus to individuals (14:23), but to a community who lives in love. … Relationship with Jesus does not depend on physical presence, but on the presence of the love of God in the life of the community. And the love for God is present whenever those who love Jesus keep

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[52] "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. [22] Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' [23] Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' Matthew 7: 21-23.

[53] Romans 13:8-10.

[54] Colossians 3:12-14.

his commandments (v. 21, 23), when they continue to live out the love that Jesus showed them in his own life and death.[55]

To illustrate the corporate experience of acedia, and the absence of the love commanded in his Gospel, we will turn to the letters to the seven churches in John's Apocalypse.

Acedia as Forsaking Your First Love

In the letter to the church at Ephesus,[56] Jesus is speaking to a community of faith that has forsaken the love that was once primary in her life.[57] New Testament scholars depict Ephesus as one of the oldest and most influential centers of Christian community in Asia.[58] Within this established Christian network there are at least four identifiable groups[59] with a diverse leadership structure.[60] Within this diverse Christian community, what does it mean that they had forsaken their first love?

While some commentators suggest that this critique indicates their love for Christ had begun to waiver,[61] other scholars suggest that the first love the Ephesians have forsaken is the fundamental call to love one another as Christ loved them,[62] while others

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[55] O'Day, 749-750.

[56] Revelation 2:1-7.

[57] Revelation 2:4.

[58] Craig Koester, "Revelation: A New Translation and Commentary," *The Anchor Yale Bible* vol. 38A (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 267.

[59] David E. Aune, *The Word Biblical Commentary: Revelation 1-5*, vol. 52A (Dallas, TX: Word Books Publisher, 1997), 140.

[60] Koester, 267.

[61] Paul Tribelco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus From Paul to Ignatius* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 348.

[62] John 13:34-35.

still equate "first works" with the character traits listed in 1 Corinthians 13.[63] However, as

Craig Koester suggests, "the problem seems to be that their opposition to false teaching

has led to a loss of love for other believers. Therefore, the Ephesians are called to do the

works they did at first, which would have been acts of service for others."[64] What Koester

is suggesting is that the church had stood firm against heresy and apostasy, but had

developed hard hearts toward the other Christian groups in their city. This position is akin

to the dynamic described by Dallas Willard as "mean" Christians.

> Christians are routinely taught by example and by word that it is more important
> to be right than it is to be Christlike. In fact, being right licenses you to be mean,
> and, indeed requires you to be mean—righteously mean, of course. You must be
> hard on those who are wrong, and especially if they are in positions of Christian
> leadership.[65]

While this emphasis on "rightness" is intended to function in a sanctifying way, it ends

up functioning in an acedic way by destroying love for other faithful Christ followers.

Willard calls this focus "self-defeating" as it keeps Christians from their goal of

Christlikeness.[66] As Wilfred J. Harrington succinctly articulates, "Orthodoxy is no

substitute for orthopraxis; it surely cannot replace the praxis of love."[67]

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[63] George Ladd, *A Commentary on Revelation* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972), 39.

[64] Koester, 269.

[65] Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 238.

[66] Ibid., 238-239.

[67] Harrington, 57.

Acedia as Lukewarm Self-Sufficiency and Complacency

In the letter to the church at Laodicea,[68] we encounter a church that has become proud, self-sufficient, and "lukewarm."[69] A common application of this powerful imagery is to suggest spiritual apathy in the church at Laodicea, connecting this metaphor to the source of the city's drinking water. Many commentators make reference to the hot mineral springs in nearby Hierapolis, and the cool pure water of Colossae in their exposition of this text. In contrast, Laodicea has to draw its water via an aqueduct allowing the water that is hot at its source to become tepid. This tepid water is abhorrent to drink and either alternative, hot or cold, is naturally preferred. From this perspective, the implication for the Laodicean church is that it would be preferable to be spiritually "hot" (passionate and intimately connected with the Father) or "cold" (pagan and far away from relationship with the Father).[70] In recent scholarship however, this framework is coming under scrutiny.[71]

This scrutiny has two main features: a criticism of the application of the local geography to the letter and a critique of the spiritual principle being exegeted. The first part of the critique suggests that the temperature of the local water source, and the preference for cold or hot water as a drinking source, is not founded, primarily because

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[68] Revelation 3:14-22.

[69] Revelation 3: 15-17.

[70] George R. Beasley Murray, ed. *New Century Bible: The Book of Revelation* (London, UK: Oliphants, 1974), 104-105. Also George Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 65.

[71] For a full treatment of the geographical context see Colin J. Hemer, "Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia In Their Local Setting" *Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1986), 186-191, Ebscohost. See also, Koester, *Revelation.* 336-337.

the hot mineral springs at Hierapolis were valued for their healing properties not their benefit for ingestion.[72] Since the test in Revelation is when these waters enter the mouth, the comparison with Hierapolis loses its connection to its context in the letter.[73] Not only are some scholars suggesting that Laodicea's drinking water was preferable to Heirapolis', the aqueduct system at Laodicea drew water from a source in the south and not Heirapolis in the north. This aqueduct system was similar to those found in Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum. If Laodicea's water was lukewarm and detestable, so too were the waters in these cities.[74] The second part of the critique is the spiritual application drawn from the contrast with Colossae and Hierapolis: that hot spirituality and cold spirituality are both preferred.[75] Notwithstanding the potential connection to the condition outlined in 2 Peter 2:21-23, if the metaphor is no longer connected to the local water supply, the interpretation to lukewarm spirituality begins to lack consistency.[76]

One alternative interpretation is found in the customs and practices surrounding hospitality during this time. There is research that suggests that both hot beverages and cold beverages were being served as a source of refreshment to guests during this period

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[72] Beale, 303.

[73] Craig R. Koester, "The Message to Laodicea and the Problem of its Local Context: A Study of the Imagery in Rev. 3:14-22," *New Testament Studies* 49, no. 3 http://digitalcommons.luthersem.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1009&context=faculty_articles, 409. Also, Craig Koester, "Revelation: A New Translation and Commentary," *The Anchor Yale Bible* vol. 38A, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 337, 343-344.

[74] Koester, "The Message to Laodicea," 410-411.

[75] Beasley Murray, 104-105.

[76] Beale, 303. Also, Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation of John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, MI: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2005), 98. Also Robert H. Mounce, "The Book of Revelation," *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmand, 1977), 125-126.

of history.[77] These hot and cold beverages were intentionally prepared and preferred as refreshing to guests in different seasons. If hospitality is in view by Christ as he addresses this local church, the offer to enter in to dine with them as the remedy brings the metaphor to a more natural conclusion.[78] Since spiritual indifference is not indicated by the metaphor of lukewarmness, where then is the connection to acedia?

The connection to acedia in Laodicea is their posture of prosperity and their self-empowered attempts at faithfulness that lead to complacency.[79] This church had become indifferent to the love of God, unable to be obedient to his call, and unwilling to be humble in service because of their perceived wealth and security. Their works and lifestyle had become indistinguishable from the culture around them, just as lukewarm water is the same temperature as the environment around it.[80] This lukewarmness is an abandonment of the commanded love of Christ – the primary mark of distinction for the church[81] – along with the intimate fellowship with Christ and others that sustains and marks this love relationship.[82]

These two expressions of corporate acedia are illustrative of challenges that need to be addressed in the current church culture. Acedia in Ephesus is displayed in a lack of love for other Christian fellowships in their community as a result of a pursuit of orthodoxy. In Laodicea it is a perceived self-sufficiency and affluence that robbed the

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[77] Koester, "Message to Laodicea," 343-344.

[78] Ibid., 412-413.

[79] Koester, The Anchor Yale Bible, 344.

[80] Koester, "Message to Laodicea," 415.

[81] Ibid.

[82] John 15: 1-17.

church of their distinctive Christlike love and the opportunity for communion and fellowship with Jesus.

Conclusion

These biblical passages serve as illustrations of the symptoms and expressions of acedia in the life of an individual and in the work of the church. In each of these passages, a remedy is also in view.

The survey of acedia's expressions in the life of the individual prescribes loving obedience, fruitful labor, and the cultivation of loving character as the remedy for this vice. In John's Gospel and Epistles, the remedy for the vicious behavior that resists love's demands is abiding in the presence, love, and words of Jesus, by obediently giving ourselves to the works and commands of Christ.[83] This straightforward remedy runs counter to the doctrinal and theological assumptions held by many Protestant Evangelical believers and denominations which mistake this work of obedience for a works-based understanding of salvation. Loving obedience to Jesus's commandments must be restored and this misunderstanding of the relationship between grace, works, and salvation needs to be addressed.[84] There is also a need to teach obedience to the followers of Christ using

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[83] John 14:15, 15:1-17, 1 John 5:2-3, 2 John 1:6.

[84] See ch 4: The Challenge of Works, 75.

tools like a catalogue of Jesus's commands[85] or by developing a "curriculum for Christlikeness"[86] in our churches as called for in the Great Commission.[87]

To the sluggard in the Proverbs, diligent and disciplined work is consistently prescribed.[88] Cassian calls for this proverbial wisdom prescribing manual labor "his chief weapon against acedia."[89] While the church cannot dictate manual labor in the same way the monastery could, there is a place for the church to call her members to service, engagement, and vocational ministry.

Paul's exhortation to the Corinthians is to restore love to the place of primacy, over all the spiritual gifts and Christian virtues.[90] His call to the church(es) is to clothe herself with Christ, develop and nurture Christlike character and specifically, put on love. In his letters, Paul does not leave this exhortation to love as a vague spirituality, rather he articulates observable behaviors that express and display this love. In the same posture the church must make love behavioral, observable, and habitual.

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[85] Jerome H. Smith, *The New Treasury of Scripture Knowledge: The Most Complete Listing of Cross References Available Anywhere- Every Verse, Every Theme, Every Important Word* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1992), 1490–1492. Smith has stated this position very well and has developed a simple listing of Jesus commands that provides a good starting point.

[86] Called for by Dallas Willard in *The Divine Conspiracy* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 311-374.

[87] Matthew 28: 18-20 "…teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."

[88] Proverbs 6:6-11 for example.

[89] Wenzel, 19.

[90] 1 Corinthians 13:1-14:1 and Colossians 3:14. I anticipate this being the most fruitful ground for cultivation arising from this survey primarily because of the accessibility of the practices to prescribe. For instance, it may prove difficult to prescribe manual labor to idle congregation members, however, it is plausible to offer training in the practices that will nurture and develop patience and kindness as a means to loving others.

Finally, the remedy offered to the churches at Ephesus and Laodicea is a return to the love that established them. The call to love God and others in a way that sets us apart from the world around us and draws us into fellowship with Christ and one another is still ours today. It is this love and fellowship that acedia frustrates and the cultivation of charity restores.

CHAPTER 3: THE FOUNDATIONS OF VIRTUE AND HABIT

Introduction

As the Biblical Foundations section has shown, the vice of acedia is expressed both individually and corporately, robbing the church and her members of the chance to fulfill their divinely appointed telos. Thomas Aquinas outlines his understanding of acedia (also known as sloth) as a sin against charity, and the source of many other vices.[1] Because acedia is primarily a vice in opposition to the virtue of charity, our search for a remedy begins with an understanding of virtue as a foundation for how to develop charity in the church and in her members. In order to establish this foundation, selected works from Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, and Alasdair MacIntyre will be used to highlight significant themes necessary for a remedy to acedia to be constructed.

Virtue and Habit

While there is not the scope within this document to explore the realm of virtue (and virtue ethics) fully, we will follow the work of N.T Wright,[2] James K. A. Smith,[3]

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[1] Thomas Aquinas. *The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas,* 2nd ed. trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (1920), online edition by Kevin Knight (2017): Second Part of the Second Part, question 35, http://www.newadvent.org/summa/3035.htm.

[2] N. T. Wright, *Virtue Reborn: The Transformation of the Christian Mind* (London, UK: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2010).

[3] James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009). Thank you Dr. Smith for introducing Aristotle, Aquinas and MacIntyre as the foundational trio for the concepts of virtue, habit, telos, and story. While we will follow Smith's focus on narrative in Chapter 5 - Story, and worship and liturgy as one of the necessary practices in Chapter 6 - Remedy, his premise is too narrow to combat the problem of acedia. I do agree with much of what Smith says about the teleology he finds in these three voices, but differ in the specific application of how MacIntyre defines a practice.

and others by exploring themes related to the renewal of virtue (and specifically the virtue of charity). The works cited in exploring these themes are: Aristotle's *Nachimachean Ethics* (referred to as *The Ethics* from this point forward)*,* Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* (referred to as *Summa*)*,* and Alasdair MacIntyre's, *After Virtue*. The principles that establish the necessary framework are that virtue is teleological, teachable, and habitual.[4]

The Teleological Nature of Virtue

The first component of virtue necessary to a corrective in our acedic church culture is the concept of telos. The Greek word telos is a nuanced and beautiful term that is difficult to adequately translate into English, which leads many authors to retain the Greek. Those who do translate this word often choose end, goal, or purpose as the translation. In the lexicon, telos has a range of meaning including, "achievement, fulfilment, execution, success, completion, perfection, final step, supreme stage, crown, goal, maturity, result, conclusion, end, cessation."[5] James K. A. Smith describes telos as a vision of human flourishing, which is communicated "most powerfully in stories,

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[4] In Aristotle's *Nachimachean Ethics* we find the foundation for establishing the teleological nature of virtue. While Aristotle's happiness is insufficient as the telos moving forward, his work sets the teleological and habitual framework we will build on. Aquinas is essential to our task as he further defines the relationship between habit and virtue and adapts Aristotle's framework to a Christian worldview. In doing so, he locates virtue within the larger context of habit, he establishes charity as the ultimate virtue to be pursued, and puts it in the service of union with God as the telos for all humanity. MacIntyre brings the teleological framework established by Aristotle and Aquinas into modernity with his treatment of emotivism and individualism. While I will continue to agree with Aquinas's telos, MacIntyre (and Smith, Wilson, Gottschall, and others) argues for the recovery of the narrative nature of how telos functions in the life of an individual or community. I will also rely on MacIntyre's definition of practice as a remedy for acedia, framed in a set of practices that must be adopted as a new habitus.

[5] Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. trans. Geoffrey William Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1985), 1161.

legends, myths, plays novels, and films."[6] Smith goes on to say that this vision begins to "govern and shape our decisions, actions, and habits. Thus, we become certain kinds of people."[7] Telos is developed in *The Ethics, Summa,* and *After Virtue* as the end toward which human beings, and the cultures they develop, are ultimately designed to achieve.

One of the English words that is consistently used in reference to the telos of an agent and its virtue is the word perfect. Different authors and philosophers make reference to the perfection of an agent through the development of virtue. The terminology of perfection may sound out of place with reference to human agency in a Christian perspective. However, in this specific usage it is entirely appropriate and accurate based on the concept telos is trying to capture. To illustrate, consider the wallet you use to carry your money and your personal identification. A common understanding of perfection would suggest that a wallet is perfect if it is pristine, free from marks, creases, or dents. It is perfect if the leather is not worn, if the stitching has not been stretched, and if the materials have not been marked by the inside of a pocket or the bottom of a purse. However, for a wallet to participate in its telos, it must indeed be found in pockets or at the bottom of the purse. Its perfection is found in the forming of creases, in the acquiring of marks, and in this stretching to accommodate the specific contents entrusted to its care by its user. The telos of a wallet is found in keeping personal and valuable items safe. A perfect wallet dwells at the bottom of your purse or comfortably waits in one's pants pocket, safely guarding the valuable objects inside. In the same way, Aristotle says that the perfection of humanity is found in the pursuit of and

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[6] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 53.

[7] Ibid.*,* 54.

embodiment of happiness,[8] but Aquinas says the perfection of humanity is found in friendship with God.[9]

The vice of acedia is viewed as a cardinal vice because it actively frustrates our ability to participate in the goal (or telos) of the Christian life. Aquinas holds "charity" as the chief virtue because it directs us to, and forms us for, "our divine identity— our communion with God in friendship."[10] As we have described acedia above, it actively works against, and distracts us from this divine purpose.

In his book, *You are What You Love,* James K. A. Smith re-introduces the Augustinian concept that human beings are, by nature, loving creatures. Smith offers this anthropology as a corrective to the modern worldview that we are, by nature, primarily thinking creatures.[11] This is incredibly significant in diagnosing our current context. If it is true that we are loving creatures, then the freedom and wholeness God offers is the freedom to love fully. Acedia rises up against this freedom and wholeness, stifling the innate desire and primary orientation to love by keeping individuals and communities from pursuing the disciplines and practices that would nurture this pursuit. DeYoung summarizes this frustrated union of love well,

> …in a nutshell, to be slothful is to be opposed to the joy we should have over being united with God and committed to him in love. Instead of rejoicing in God's presence in us, the slothful chafe at it and resent the claims that God's love makes on them. Rather than being willing to dedicate themselves to developing and deepening the relationship, they resist its demands. Although sloth can appear symptomatically similar to chronic depression, it is not a matter of brain

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[8] Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, 8.

[9] Thomas Aquinas, *Questions on Love and Charity: Summa Theologiae*, Secunda Secundae, Questions 23-46. (New Haven, MA: Yale University Press, 2016), 23.

[10] DeYoung, *Aquinas's Ethics,* 176-177.

[11] James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016), 3-10.

chemistry, but rather a habit of the heart. Sloth is not primarily a feeling: it is well entrenched and willful resistance, even as love is fundamentally a choice.[12]

Acedia is then primarily a vice in opposition to the virtue of charity, which manifests itself in a complex variety of symptoms ranging from disengagement, indifference, and apathy in one form, to over-engagement, dutiful service, and investing time and energy in secondary or trivial matters in other manifestations.

Telos in Aristotle, Aquinas, and MacIntyre

Aristotle begins *The Ethics* by exploring, with specificity, the good end toward which all humanity is oriented. After a brief discussion of the many alternate good ends that some will offer (wealth for example),[13] his initial assertion is that happiness is the telos for mankind.[14] Aristotle narrows this general happiness by naming the "best good goal" of political science which is the creation of a citizenship of good character consisting of "good people who do fine actions."[15]

Aquinas retrieves Aristotle's teleological understanding of the nature of man and the nature of virtue,[16] but expands upon Aristotle's happiness conclusion by adding a new category. Aristotle proposes that happiness is attainable through the intellectual and moral virtues he outlines in *The Ethics*. Aquinas also cites these virtues in his *Summa*, but immediately adds a second category to his Christian understanding of telos, "a certain

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[12] DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, 88.

[13] Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, 3-5.

[14] Ibid., 8.

[15] Ibid, 12.

[16] James E. Gilman, *Fidelity of Heart: An Ethic of Christian Virtue* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001), 6.

participation in divinity,"[17] which is attained through the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love.[18] These virtues are connected, mutually supporting, and hierarchical.[19] For our purposes, the primary result of Aquinas' exploration is that charity is exalted to the place of priority and preeminence over the other two,[20] because "the gift of caritas (charity) orders all of the other virtues, giving all of them a source in God's love for creation."[21]

Alasdair MacIntyre begins his exploration of virtue with the assertion that the teleological foundation available to Aristotle and Aquinas has been eroded by the enlightenment and modernity. The result of this erosion is an individualized ethic that destroys the virtuous life called forth by these seminal philosophers. MacIntyre uses the term emotivism. "Emotivism is the doctrine that all evaluative judgements, and more specifically all moral judgements are nothing but expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character."[22] MacIntyre's use of emotivism is explained by a parable he tells in which a civilization has lost a body of knowledge due to a catastrophe, but the jargon from the lost field is retained and in ongoing use without the necessary reference points to retain a fixed meaning.[23] Without

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[17] Thomas Aquinas, *Treatise on the Virtues*, trans. John A. Oesterle (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), 118.

[18] Ibid.*,* 121-122.

[19] Ibid., 139-159.

[20] Ibid., 158-159.

[21] Nancy E. Snow ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Virtue* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018), 234.

[22] MacIntyre, 11-12.

[23] Ibid., 1-2.

these fixed reference points, the terminology is defined in its specific use by its author.

Thus, he dubs our culture emotivist because in our moral or ethical debates each party

claims the right to evaluate the issue and make judgements based on their approval or

benefit. Judgement statements are no longer objectively evaluated by an external

reference agreed to by all parties. Consequently, a statement like "this is right" currently

has the same meaning as "I approve of this."[24] This emotivist culture is best summarized

by Christopher Lutz,

> It is a collection of autonomous individuals who struggle to balance individualism and collectivism, liberty and oppression, and chaos and control. They seek a rational basis for this balance, but they agree that moral choices are either essentially or effectively arbitrary. Each individual has his or her own arbitrary ends, and the state has another set of arbitrary ends; so questions about individualism and collectivism become questions of power, thus besides the options of autonomy and state control, there is no third option.[25]

Telos is a foundational concept in our understanding of virtue and vice because it

is only in relation to one's telos that an action can be determined to be virtuous or

vicious. Acedia is vicious because it keeps humanity from realizing its telos of loving

God and others.

The Teachable Nature of Virtue

The second theme necessary to construct a remedy for acedia is that all virtue is

learned. This school of thought begins with Aristotle's assertion that virtues are not

something we are born with or are naturally inclined toward. They must be taught (the

method of developing intellectual virtue) and habituated (the method for developing

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[24] Christopher Stephen Lutz, *Reading Alasdair MacIntyre's After Virtue* (New York, NY: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2012), 56.

[25] Ibid., 58-59.

moral virtue).[26] Aristotle presents three lines of argument to support this premise: first, virtues are developed in the same manner as every other skill or habit, second, virtue is a mean between two excesses, and finally, those who develop virtue are able to become virtuous.

Aristotle begins by proposing that virtues are cultivated in one's life in the same manner as one would learn a trade, an artistic skill, or any other endeavor. One is not born a carpenter; a person must study and practice under the tutelage of a skilled mentor. In the same manner, an individual can develop virtue in their life.[27]

The second idea is developed using a physical metaphor to explain virtue as a mean. In the same way that too much exercise and too little exercise are detrimental to building physical strength,[28] says Aristotle, excellent virtue is a mean between two extremes.[29]

Finally, the development of virtue by habituation toward a mean naturally increases one's capacity to be virtuous. Once an individual has taken in proper nourishment and performed the right amount of exercise, they develop strength. This cultivated strength naturally increases their capacity to taken in more nourishment and the practice of exercise helps them develop and display even greater strength.[30]

If we left Aristotle's theory of virtue at habituation, it would be purely mechanistic and behavior focused. Aristotle concludes this section of *The Ethics*

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[26] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 18.

[27] Ibid., 18-19.

[28] Ibid., 20.

[29] Ibid., 25-30.

[30] Ibid., 20.

however, with a helpful corrective to this conclusion. He claims that not only is a just person produced by doing just acts, they are produced by doing acts that are just as a just person would do them,[31] asserting succinctly that humanity is "…noble in only one way, but bad in all sorts of ways."[32] Therefore, we become virtuous by doing virtuous things, not just understanding virtuous theory,[33] and these good habits are not only the acts that bring about the telos, they form character in us, increasing our capacity to live a good life.[34]

The principle that virtue is teachable is essential to recover in our current emotivist context because it breaks down the barriers erected by our cultural understanding of individualism and autonomy. To say that all virtue is taught is also to say that all virtue is learned. In order to learn, one must submit oneself to the teacher and to the discipline involved in acquiring the understanding and abilities necessary to the task. This principle is absent in many of our church contexts. Following Jesus has been reduced to agreeing with his teaching and confessing our sin. For the church to recover from acedia it will need to embrace the understanding and practice of teaching one another to obey all that Christ has commanded.[35] The remedy section of this project outlines a core set of practices and habits that, if learned, will lead the church out of acedia and into a virtuous life.

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[31] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 22.

[32] Ibid., 25.

[33] Ibid., 19.

[34] Ibid., 23-24.

[35] Matt. 28: 18-20.

The Habitual Nature of Virtue

Aristotle, Aquinas, and MacIntyre share the conceptual foundation that virtue is the embodiment and enactment of good habits which, in turn, enable the individual and their community to progress toward and ultimately embody their common telos. These virtues are understood as good and excellent by their relationship to the telos and are cultivated by the habits that orient the lives of those who practice them toward this good and excellent purpose. In short, "Good habits… are 'virtues,' whereas bad habits are 'vices.'"[36]

In his treatment of the relationship between habit and virtue, Aquinas begins with habit since "habit is the proximate genus under which virtue falls."[37] "A habit, for Aquinas, is a quality or disposition that is stable, operational, valent, and nature-directed."[38] As we have already dealt with telos (i.e. nature-directed), we will look more closely at the first three aspects of Aquinas' description of habit.

First, Aquinas's understanding that habits are stable refers to the fact that habits are: intentionally formed and work in partnership with the will, they are difficult to change, and they persist in the life of the individual.[39] Aquinas uses the terminology "difficult to change" to distinguish between a disposition in an individual and something

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[36] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 55-56.

[37] Aquinas, *Treatise,* xv.

[38] Nicholas Austin, *Aquinas on Virtue: A Causal Reading* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2017) 29, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1t89k5h.7.

[39] Austin, *Aquinas on Virtue*, 29.

that has become a habit. If something is changed or lost easily it is not a habit, it is something the person was naturally disposed toward.[40]

Second, habits are operational in Aquinas's thought. The principle of operation simply means that habits are evidenced and made observable by action. Aquinas uses the example that "health" is a habit, but that one can only be said to possess this habit "when he can perform the operation of a healthy man."[41] Habit, in its operative sense, is one part action and one part potential, for it is not only the observable possession of the intended end (eg. health), it is the way we come to possess it. Habit is operative in that it is "… midway between pure potency and complete act."[42] This mid-way point between potential and possession is significant for Aquinas as it sets the foundation for his discussion of how habits increase, diminish, and are potentially corrupted.[43]

Third, habit is valent, that is, either good or bad.[44] In strictly natural, logical terms, Aquinas equates good and evil in relation to the nature of the agent enacting them. A habit is good if it is appropriate to the nature of the thing and is evil if it is contrary to the thing's nature. If the acting agent is a human being, habits consistent with reason are good (virtue), and habits of distraction or disorientation are bad (vice, or contrary to our nature).[45]

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[40] Aquinas, *Treatise*, 6-7.

[41] Ibid., 8.

[42] Ibid., 18. See also, Austin, *Aquinas on Virtue,* 29-30.

[43] Ibid., 30-41.

[44] Austin, *Aquinas on Virtue*, 30.

[45] Aquinas, *Treatise*, 47.

Aquinas agrees with Aristotle about the principle that virtue is a mean with regard to the intellectual and moral virtues, but will disagree when it comes to the theological virtues. Their disagreement stems from Aristotle's understanding that virtue is found in between the two vices of excess and deficiency.[46] Since the theological virtues are faith, hope, and love, for Aquinas, there is no sin in the excess of these habits.[47] The second point of contention between the theological virtues and the principle of a mean is that for Aquinas, theological virtues are infused. These infused virtues have a "supernatural source corresponding to their supernatural end—God."[48] Infusion does not negate habituation or increase, however, as "Once God gives a virtue… it is up to us to act on it, and acting according to an infused virtue in turn strengthens the habit."[49]

In this section we have focused on the teleological, teachable, and habitual nature of virtue. In the section that follows we will narrow our focus from virtue in general to the virtue that will be the foundation of the remedy for acedia, the virtue of charity.

The Virtue of Charity

We have now learned that telos of humanity is to be made fully alive, free, and living in union with the triune God in a relationship characterized by perfect love. This love can be developed through habits that are solid, operational, and valent. Scripture and Christian tradition offer a rich history of metaphors for this habit of relationship,

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[46] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 29.

[47] Aquinas, *Treatise*, 136-138.

[48] DeYoung, *Aquinas's Ethics*, 142.

[49] Ibid., 144.

including paternal love,[50] self-sacrificing love,[51] maternal love,[52] and marital love.[53] The

metaphor that best captures the virtuous life in union with God however is the fraternal

love of friendship. Aquinas develops the metaphor of friendship for our relationship with

God and calls this love charity.

Friendship for both Aquinas and Aristotle is confined to two parties that share a

sense of mutuality.[54] Aristotle begins his treatment of friendship in the eighth book of *The*

Ethics outlining three types of friendship people may experience; pleasure, utility, and

perfect.[55] The type of friendship most relevant to the discussion of virtue and charity is

the perfect friendship that exists on the basis of the goodness and mutuality of both

parties, meaning that this perfect friendship encompasses both the pleasurable (because

good people are pleasant with one another) and the useful (for good people are good to

one another)[56] and is developed through a growing familiarity between the good and

virtuous.[57] This perfect friendship is displayed through goodwill toward the other as good

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[50] Psalm 103:13.

[51] 1 John 3:16.

[52] Isaiah 66:13.

[53] Ephesians 5:25-33.

[54] Harm Goris, Lambert Hendriks, and Henk Schoot, eds., *Faith Hope and Love: Thomas Aquinas on Living by the Theological Virtues* (Paris, FR: Peeters Leuven, 2015), 196-197. In this essay on Charity in Aquinas and Augustine, Michael Sherwin briefly summarizes the points of connection and contention between Aristotle and Aquinas on the nature of friendship with God. Sherwin notes that both build their arguments on the same foundation, communion between two parties, but that Aristotle used this as the basis of his conclusion that friendship with God is impossible. Aquinas argues that friendship with God is not only possible, it is the telos of humanity, made possible by the grace of God.

[55] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics,* Chapter 8 paragraph 3, http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.8.viii.html.

[56] Ibid., Chapter 8 paragraph 4.

[57] Ibid., Chapter 8 paragraph 3.

actions for the benefit and love of the other.[58] Based on the necessity of mutuality,

goodness, equality, and goodwill, Aristotle contends that

> The friendship of children to parents, and of men to gods, is a relation to them as to something good and superior; for they have conferred the greatest benefits, since they are the causes of their being and of their nourishment, and of their education from their birth; and this kind of friendship possesses pleasantness and utility also, more than that of strangers, inasmuch as their life is lived more in common.[59]

Aquinas picks up on the themes of mutuality, goodness, goodwill, and love and

applies Aristotle's principles to the love he calls charity. Quoting Aristotle (whom he

calls "the Philosopher") he says,

> I answer that it should be said that according to the Philosopher in Ethics 8, not every love has the aspect of friendship, but only the love that comes with goodwill—that is, when we love someone so that we will him a good. … A certain mutual love is also required, since a friend is a friend to [another] friend. Now such mutual goodwill is founded upon a sharing of some kind.
> Since, therefore, there is a sharing of some kind between man and God, according as God shares his blessedness with us, it is necessary that upon this sharing some friendship be founded. … Now love founded upon this sharing is charity. So it is clear that charity is a certain friendship of man with God.[60]

For Aquinas this mutuality is accomplished through the grace of God mediated through

the presence of the Holy Spirit dwelling in the life of the follower of Christ.

> Now this sharing is not according to natural goods, but rather according to gifts freely given, since 'the grace of God is eternal life,' as is said in Romans 6. So charity itself surpasses the power of nature. What surpasses the power of nature can be neither natural nor acquired by natural powers, since a natural effect does not transcend its cause. So charity can be in us neither naturally, nor by natural powers that are acquired, but only by an infusion of the Holy Spirit, who is the love of the Father and the Son, whose participation in us is created by charity itself…[61]

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[58] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics,* Chapter 8 paragraph 5.

[59] Ibid., Chapter 8 paragraph 12.

[60] Aquinas. *Questions on Love and Charity*, 22-23.

[61] Ibid., 40.

Through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, God pours his love into our hearts[62] and makes us "like-natured friends of God."[63] This grace makes friendship with God possible and invites us to participate in his work. "In a life of charity, we not only receive God's love for us, but also return to God the love, affection and good will that God has shown us by seeking God's will and living faithfully according to the ways of God revealed to us in Christ."[64]

Charity is cultivated in delicate balance that needs to be found between the instigating and creating work of God, and the responsive, practicing work of people. For one of the paradoxes of the infusion of charity is that God graciously gives us his perfect love through the work of the Holy Spirit, but as Roberta Bondi says, "none of this happens without human effort. We must cultivate behavior appropriate to the virtues within us over a long period."[65] Bondi presses our participation further saying that maturing in love is a matter of taking on "whole patterns and habits of acting, seeing, and listening to other people on a day-to-day basis," and through these "concrete, particular, daily patterns and habits of love … learning how to love God and each other as our lifetime work."[66] Paul J. Wadell describes this gift and participation dynamic saying, "we move toward perfect participation in the divine life, and even share in it now, however incompletely, through charity, the virtue that directs all of our actions to God and forms

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[62] Romans 5:5.

[63] DeYoung, McCluskey, and Van Dyke, 149.

[64] Goris, Hendriks, and Schoot, eds., 201.

[65] Roberta C. Bondi, *To Pray and to Love: Conversations on Prayer with the Early Church.* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 40.

[66] Ibid., 98.

us in the love and goodness of God."[67] DeYoung articulates this mystery using the

metaphor of marriage to illustrate the interplay between the present experience of charity

as a gift of grace and the potential of charity as a state we are working toward. Just as a

couple is married as soon as they say their vows, they still have to practice the married

life and cultivate their relationship for the rest of their lives.[68] DeYoung continues to

articulate the nuances of Aquinas's description of charity saying,

> Human beings achieve union with God and our capacities reach their perfection
> when grace implants the New Law of love in our intellects and shapes our wills
> by charity, which enables our actions to conform to the infused virtues. For
> Aquinas, the moral project is to conform our nature to God's, and the virtues are
> his description of this process.[69]

This description of virtue brings to practical application passages from Paul's letters

where the church is instructed to "put on" certain attributes and put off others.[70] In these

lists, love – or for our purposes charity – is the primary attribute to nurture as it holds all

of the others together.[71] In these biblical passages, God's love is indeed "poured out into

our hearts by the Holy Spirit"[72] and yet it must be developed as a virtue. N. T. Wright

develops this principle with a flurry of metaphor:

> The love of which Paul speaks of is clearly a virtue. … It is a language to be
> learned, a musical instrument to be practiced, a mountain to be climbed via some
> steep and tricky cliff paths but with the most amazing view from the top. It is one
> of the things that will last; one of the traits of character which provides a genuine
> anticipation of that complete humanness we are promised at the end. And it is one
> of the things, therefore, which can be anticipated in the present on the basis of the

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[67] Goris, Hendriks, and Schoot, eds., 199.

[68] DeYoung, McCluskey, and Van Dyke, 176-177.

[69] Ibid., 173.

[70] Colossians 3:5-14.

[71] Colossians 3:14.

[72] Romans 5:5.

future goal, the telos, which is already given in Jesus Christ. It is part of the future which can be drawn into the present.[73]

The virtue of charity as described here is the telos of humanity. This virtue is cultivated through the practices of the church and embodied in the habits of the individual. The next section will introduce the practices and habits that nurture this primary virtue.

Practices That Cultivate Charity and Alleviate Acedia

We have established charity as the root of all virtue and highlighted the ancient understanding of habits. This section will outline practices that specifically address the symptoms of those individuals and groups suffering from acedia. These practices include stability (flourishing where God has planted us), discernment (knowing God's voice and understanding his will), obedience (choosing to do his will and fulfill his commands), and worship (engaging in Christian liturgy as a counter-formation in Christ, learning to glorify him with our lives). The practices of stability, discernment, obedience, and worship are briefly introduced below and will be woven together into a habitus that will give the church a treatment plan for those suffering from acedia.

The virtue of charity includes the practice of stability

The Bible uses several metaphors for the principle that God leads us to places and communities where he desires us to stay, grow, and mature. These places are not always comfortable or pleasant, but they are best for us. These metaphors include a tree planted

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[73] Wright, *Virtue Reborn*, 157. See also 162.

by the water,[74] a house built on a rock,[75] a branch on a vine,[76] a sheep in a pasture,[77] and a building.[78]

In these metaphors, the "job" of the one led to these places is to submit to the circumstances the master has provided, to know and appreciate the benefits and challenges of this place, and to put down roots so that fruit may be produced. There are seasons in each of these metaphorical places of growth: struggle, fruit bearing, and storms. All too often we interpret these seasons as cues to go elsewhere and wander off. The key to stability is a commitment to the understanding that God is not somewhere else, but he is to be found in the place he has led us to. So, the place we find ourselves in and the people we find ourselves amongst are the circumstances that God has orchestrated for our benefit.

Aquinas develops this concept under his treatment of loving others as a natural and necessary aspect of being a friend of God. Wadell suggests that Aquinas's understanding of friendship with God is akin to the monastic understanding of stability saying,

> We grow in friendship with God not by escaping the pivotal but often taxing relationships of our lives, but by faithfully embracing them, attending to them, and persevering in them. Our first duty in charity is to manifest our love for God by remaining responsibly committed to those neighbors who are uniquely connected to us and entrusted to us. … we grow in charity not by running from the often exhausting demands of love, but by steadfastly and patiently attending to them. Charity summons us not to drift away but to stay put, not to give up but to

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[74] Psalm 1:2-3.

[75] Matthew 7:24-27.

[76] John 15:1-15.

[77] Psalm 23.

[78] 1 Corinthians 3:9.

persevere, because we grow in friendship with God by our willingness to embrace the hard work of love in the graced but imperfect relationships of our lives.[79]

In John 13, Jesus is enjoying the "last supper" with his disciples and he gets up from the meal to do something shocking and transforming: wash the disciple's feet. The disciples are perplexed by this, but John gives us some insight into Jesus' intent in this show of service. John begins his account of this event by saying, "Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love."[80] In this text, the Greek terminology used for "full extent is "*eis telos,*" terminology that ties this display of love to our understanding of the perfect love we are to learn and incarnate (i.e. nature-directed). In other words, Jesus put on full display his self-giving love to demonstrate the fullness, end, and purpose[81] of his love in order that his disciples would embrace and embody this love in their lives. This is significant for our understanding of community, church, and stability as Jesus is putting on full display the created purpose or intended outcome of his self-giving love. The love that Jesus shows his disciples in his life, and puts on display for the entire world in his death, finds its telos in our love for one another.[82] This agape love for one another can only find its completion and embodiment within a safe, maturing, stable community as we learn to abide in Jesus, and to love one another.[83]

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[79] Goris, Hendriks, and Schoot, eds., 209.

[80] John 13:1.

[81] Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 691. "eis telos," (an idiom, literally 'into end'): a degree of completeness, with the possible implication of purpose or result—'completely, totally, entirely, wholly.' https://app.logos.com/books/LLS%3A46.30.4/headwords/ὁλοτελής

[82] See also 1 John 4:12, 17.

[83] John 15:1-15.

The virtue of charity includes the practice of discernment

When Jesus speaks of his disciples as his friends, the characteristics of this

friendship include knowing him closely, knowing his voice, and knowing his will.[84] The

art and practice of knowing God's voice is called discernment. Cultivating the virtue of

charity in our lives will involve a deepening awareness of, and attentiveness to, the voice

of our beloved, our friend, our God. This kind of friendship with God – friendship that

lends itself to discernment – is essential in the church's battle with acedia primarily

because of the complexity of symptoms this vice produces. Understanding the source of

our own thoughts and helping one another gain clarity and direction in response to the

temptations and desires acedia produces, demands the ability to hear God's voice clearly

and know his will. In the same way that the desert mothers and fathers offered a variety

of responses to these tempting thoughts,[85] we too must become adept at discerning God's

voice from the voice of acedia.

The virtue of charity includes the practice of obedience

Closely related to discernment is the practice of obedience. If hearing and

knowing God's voice so that we can understand God's will is the practice of discernment,

adjusting our life and behavior in response is the practice of obedience. Jesus says to his

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[84] John 15:1-15.

[85] By way of illustration, Norris lists a series of references to acedia in a variety of works. In this catalogue, she lists advice from Abba Anthony to work and pray in response to acedia (Norris, 288) followed shortly by advice from Amma Syncletica offering the Psalms as a remedy. (Norris, 289) To others caught in acedia the advice to remain in one's cell is given while to still others it is suggested not to pray but to take a little food and rest. (Norris, 39)

disciples, "if you love me keep my commands."[86] Christian obedience is primarily the submission to, and the fulfillment of, the commands of Christ as delivered in scripture and empowered by the Spirit. This principle is blatantly simple to understand, yet difficult to practice and sustain. The most important aspect of obedience to maintain in our battle against acedia is one's motivation. Jesus' words and example are very clear, the motivating force behind his obedience of the Father and our obedience by the Spirit is love. There is no room in the virtue of charity for legalism or begrudging and grumbling obedience. The virtue of charity says I love the Lord and understand his overwhelming love for me, therefore, what he asks I will do.

A second feature of Christian obedience motivated by love is mutual submission to fellow Christ followers. The command to serve one another is closely intertwined with the command to love God and love one another.[87] In the Christian understanding of love and community we are called to serve not only the master, but we are commissioned to serve our fellow servants in his name.

The virtue of charity includes the practice of worship

The practice of worship is a series of rites, sacraments, and rituals that are woven together to form a liturgy that reminds us of what God has done, who he is, and what our identity is in him. Christian worship is a primary resource for recovering from acedia as it is the place where one is re-storied[88] and restored in and through the Gospel. The practice

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[86] John 14:15.

[87] See John 13:1-17, John 15: 9-14, Romans 12:10, Galatians 5:13, Ephesians 5:21, 1 John 3:16-24

[88] James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 151.

of Christian worship and the habits it forms are a powerful force against the liturgies of the culture around us and the thoughts that beset us. As James K.A. Smith contends, worship reforms our loves from the love of self, stuff, and comfort to the love of God and others.[89] It is through the practice of worship, week after week, that the story of God becomes our story and the understanding of the way he is bringing about his kingdom is increasingly recognizable around us.

Cultivating the Virtue of Charity

These practices are essential for the church and individual members of the church in the cultivation of the virtue of charity. The cultivation of this virtue will not only become the fulfilling of the telos God ordains; it will also develop the habits leading to recovery from the vice of acedia. These practices will be defined further and woven together into a habitus for the church in Chapter Six.

Ultimately, the remedy for acedia is participating in the friendship God has made available to us by the ministry of the Holy Spirit described above and exemplified in the incarnation. In his excellent essay on the Christological remedy to acedia, Jorgen Vijgen explores the way Aquinas addresses this vice that stands in opposition to charity. Vijgen concludes that there are five motives for the incarnation and connects them all to the overcoming of charity's oppositional vice, acedia. Vijgen begins by identifying the incarnation as a remedy for the despair of acedia as Jesus's perfection in humanity is a

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[89] Smith develops this theme throughout his trilogy on worship: *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), *Desiring the Kingdom: How Worhsip Works* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), and *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016).

source of hope that we too can participate in the divine nature through the Holy Spirit.[90]

Despair can become what Vijgen terms degradation, the tendency to direct one's desire

toward a lesser telos than union with God when one feels that such union is impossible.

The dignity of humanity is reclaimed in the incarnation as God assumes our nature in

Christ.[91] The incarnation not only provides hope and dignity to humanity, it gives us a

foretaste of how to be truly human and the knowledge of "the interior life of God."[92] This

interior knowledge of God is offered as a "sweet" remedy to the vice of acedia in

Aquinas's works.[93] Vijgen moves on from this sweet knowledge to articulate that in

Christ, the love Aquinas calls charity is manifested in such perfection that it proceeds,

calls forth, and makes possible our response of love for God.[94] Finally, the mutuality of

friendship in Aquinas's and Aristotle's writing is made possible in the incarnation.[95] The

equality that God makes possible with humanity through the incarnation is related to

acedia because

> The sin of acedia opposes the virtue of charity because it rejects the relationship
> of union with God through which we become fully what we are meant to be.
> Christ's incarnation shows us that this 'becoming-in union-with-God' has already
> begun in Christ's gift, when he freely assumed human nature and showed us the
> depth of his love by leading us to live him in return.[96]

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[90] Goris, Hendriks, and Schoot, eds., 276.

[91] Ibid., 276-277.

[92] Ibid., 277.

[93] Ibid.

[94] Ibid., 278.

[95] Ibid., 280.

[96] Goris, Hendriks, and Schoot, eds., 281-282.

Conclusion

In this brief overview of the foundational principles of virtue and habit the aspects of the nature of virtue necessary to the treatment of acedia have been presented. These characteristics establish the cultivation of virtue as the fundamental approach to recovery from this spiritually deadly vice. The good news for this recovery project is that virtues are teleological, teachable, and habitual. In the following chapters the development of a narrative telos, a curriculum of love, and a program of habituation will be explored through the lens of story, habit formation, and a prescription of a series of habits and practices to be undertaken in and for the local church.

CHAPTER 4: HABIT

Introduction

At the conclusion of Chapter three, the habitual nature of virtue was introduced.

The introduction to the habituation necessary for an action to be considered virtuous

leads to a consideration of the process of habituation. In order for the church to recover

from acedia, it must develop a clear understanding of the process of forming new habits,

re-forming existing habits, and leveraging these habits to support foundational corporate

practices. While the specific habits and their corresponding practices will be articulated

in the remedy section, this chapter will focus on how actions become habitual, how

existing habits can be reformed and changed, and how the habitual practices of a

community can become more than just a collection of individual habits, but rather a

habitus.

How Habits are Formed

Modern accounts of habit formation are based on four interconnected

components: cue, craving, response, and reward.[1] These interlocking components must

occur in succession in a repeated fashion to successfully form a habit.

The first thing that must take place for a habit to be formed is the cue. A cue is

defined most simply as a trigger for "…your brain to initiate a behavior. It is a bit of

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[1] These basic components of habit formation are consistent across many modern models. See Charles Duhigg, *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business* (Toronto, CA: Anchor Canda, 2012), 31-59, and James Clear, *Atomic Habits:An Easy and Proven Way to Build Good Habits and Break Bad Ones* (New York: Avery, 2018), 47-55.

information that predicts a reward."[2] A cue can be almost any internal, environmental,

circumstantial, or behavioral experience. The key principle for intentional habit *formation*

is that the cue must be very obvious and overt. If, however, the goal is to stop or break an

existing habit, the cue must be hidden or even invisible.[3]

"Cravings are the second step, and they are the motivational force behind every

habit. Without some level of motivation or desire … we have no reason to act. What you

crave is not the habit itself but the change in state it delivers."[4] Using the example of a

box of doughnuts, Wolfram Schultz says,

> There's nothing programmed into our brains that makes us see a box of doughnuts
> and automatically want a sugary treat.… But once our brain learns that a
> doughnut box contains yummy sugar and other carbohydrates, it will start to
> anticipate the sugar high. Our brains will push us toward the box. Then if we
> don't eat the doughnut, we'll feel disappointed.[5]

This simple example illustrates the nature of cravings, and their importance in creating a

habit. The sense of anticipation of a reward and the feeling of disappointment if the

reward is not realized provides the motivation, energy, and drive to complete the next

phase of habit formation: the response.

The third step in the "habit loop"[6] is the actual behavior or habit. If the cue has

been obvious enough to start a craving, and the craving has been strong enough to

overcome the obstacles, and the person is able to complete the behavior, the response will

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[2] James Clear, *Atomic Habits: An Easy and Proven Way to Build Good Habits and Break Bad Ones* (New York, NY: Avery, 2018), 47-48.

[3] Ibid., 53-55.

[4] Ibid., 48

[5] Charles Duhigg, *The Power of Habit: Why we do What we do in Life and Business* (Toronto, CA: Anchor Canada, 2012), 48.

[6] Ibid., 19.

occur. All of these conditions must be satisfied for the response to be enacted.[7] B.J. Fogg articulates this most clearly in his "B=MAT" behavior model. This simple equation states that Behavior = Motivation, Ability, and Trigger, meaning that a behavior will only occur if an individual has sufficient motivation, the actual ability to act, and an obvious trigger to initiate the action.[8]

The formation of a habit does not end with the response being enacted however; it ends with a reward. Behaviors become habitual because they furnish a reward. If the reward is not consistently realized, the behavior will not become habitual. James Clear summarizes the process so far as, "The cue is about noticing the reward. The craving is about wanting the reward. The response is about obtaining the reward. We chase rewards because they serve two purposes: 1. they satisfy us and 2. they teach us."[9]

How Habits are Re-Formed

With this basic understanding of the habit loop and its components in place, the elements of forming a new habit can be leveraged to re-form an existing habit. One of the things that makes habit re-formation so difficult is that habits aren't extinguished, they are replaced.[10] In other words, many habit change attempts fail because they simply try to extinguish a habit or stop a behavior. This can be accomplished short term by willfully ignoring a cue, denying a craving, refusing a response, or offering punishment rather than

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[7] Clear, 48-50.

[8] B.J. Fogg, "A Behavior Model for Persuasive Design," *Persuasive '09* (April 26-29, 2009), https://www.mebook.se/images/page_file/38/Fogg%20Behavior%20Model.pdf

[9] Clear, 49. See also Duhigg, 49.

[10] Duhigg, 62. Duhigg describes this principle as his "Golden Rule of Habit Change."

reward. However, once the will to make these conscious choices is fatigued the habit will resurface. The habit re-formation process that Duhigg and Clear articulate does not try to extinguish existing habits, in fact it does quite the opposite, it tries to harness the power of existing cues, cravings, and rewards to motivate better behavior.

The habit re-formation process begins with an audit of sorts, identifying and clarifying the distinct components of the habit loop. Alcoholics Anonymous, for example, begins with helping alcoholics create an inventory of their triggers, then replaces alcohol with other routines that give the reward that alcohol used to.

> In order to offer the alcoholics the same rewards they get at the bar, AA has built a system of meetings and companionship — the 'sponsor' each member works with — that strives to offer as much escape, distraction, and catharsis as a Friday night bender. If someone needs relief, they can get it from talking to their sponsor or attending a group gathering, rather than toasting a drinking buddy.[11]

To illustrate this audit and replace process, let's consider the example of a married couple that has moved from church to church several times over the last few years. These moves have all been explained by referencing some perceived personal offence at the previous location. The first step in the audit process is to try and discern the craving that is seeking fulfillment. In this example, the craving might be socialization with like-minded people, spiritual growth, finding a congregation where they can experience fellowship, or finding a church where they can exercise leadership and be involved as volunteers in the church's programming, among a host of others. Diagnosing and satisfying the right craving is often the most challenging part of this process. What is clear is that this couple appears to be in the habit of moving to another church when they feel they are being offended and they are feeling disjointed and disconnected from any

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[11] Duhigg, 71.

Christian community. Their habit loop looks like this; cue: perceived personal offence, craving: unknown, response: leaving the environment where offence was felt, reward: a season of peaceful relationships within a new community. The first thing they might attempt is to experiment by identifying their craving as "fellowship with like-minded people." If this is indeed the craving they are trying to satisfy they may not need to move from church to church to find fulfillment, for joining a club or volunteering at a charity would also furnish a satisfactory reward. If the craving is merely social, this new activity may provide contentment allowing them to satisfy the desire to worship God in a variety of church contexts. The process for assessing craving satisfaction is to attempt a new response and monitor levels of contentment. If this couple joined a book club and found a connection with others in the club, they may feel the craving for fellowship subside. If the craving remains, a new experiment is attempted. A second experiment this couple could undertake is to get involved in their new local church, make friends, and attempt to build relationships. Upon encountering the first sign of perceived offense, a new response is attempted in place of leaving for a new church. A first new response could be a conversation with the offending party to try to resolve the conflict. This conversation may clear-up the issue as a simple misunderstanding allowing the relationships to be preserved and continued participation at the same location. If this conversation uncovered an actual offence, a process of forgiveness and reconciliation to the offending party could be undertaken in place of leaving for a new location (if the appropriate circumstances are present for a reconciliation). The habit loop would then look like this; cue: perceived offence, craving: harmonious relationship in a church family, response: truthful conversation, forgiveness of offence, and reconciliation, reward: ongoing peaceful

relationships within the same church community.[12] These small experiments would continue until a substitution can be found that leaves one content, both with the satisfaction of the craving, and with the direction this new response is taking them.[13]

The Importance of Environment

There are elements of every environment that make existing behaviors inevitable. Behavioral change requires environmental change that makes the new behaviors and habits easy, obvious, and encouraged. The mantra for this concept offered by Chip and Dan Heath is, "what looks like a people problem is often a situation problem."[14] For example,

> Traffic engineers wanted you to drive in a predictable, orderly way, so they painted lane markers on the roads and installed stoplights and road signs. Grocery store managers wanted you to spend more time in their store, so they positioned the milk coolers all the way at the back. Your boss's boss wanted to encourage more collaboration among employees, so she approved an 'open floor plan' layout with no cubicles or dividers. The bank was tired of your leaving your ATM card in the machine, so now the machine forces you to remove it before you can claim your cash.[15]

We are surrounded by environmental cues that make a preferred behavior easy or unavoidable, and all other responses difficult and at times impossible. If an organization can give obvious environmental cues for desired responses and offer a desirable reward, they can make responses repeatable and habitual through small environmental changes.

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[12] For more on this specific habit, see the section on Forgiveness below, 124-125.

[13] Duhigg, 290-292.

[14] Chip Heath and Dan Heath, *Switch:How to Change Things When Change is Hard* (New York, NY: Currency, 2010), 17-18.

[15] Ibid., 183.

In order to diagnose environmental cues, organizations engage a design-oriented set of skills. During this phase of investigation, the designer is not an "intrepid anthropologist" immersing themselves in an alien culture, rather, they are collaborators with their clients trying to create a new artefact or environment. "It's not about 'us versus them' or even 'us on behalf of them.' For the design thinker, it has to be a 'us with them.'"[16] Tim Brown succinctly states the goal of this diagnosing stage as working to "translate observations into insights and insights into products and services that will improve lives."[17] This process involves three layers of observation.

The first layer is referred to as "empathy." Empathy in this process is the "effort to see the world through the eyes of others, understand the world through their experiences, and feel the world through their emotions."[18] The goal of this posture during the diagnosis phase is to gain insight into the confusing, frustrating, and disconnected habits the organization is trying to alter. In one simple experiment, a hospital approached IDEO[19] to redesign their processes. IDEO began by having one of their team members visit the emergency room as a patient and video-taped their experience. As the team member went through this process, they experienced first-hand the anxiety, frustration, confusion, and unfamiliarity the hospital's patients experienced every day. This simple act of empathy surfaced many opportunities for improvement that surveys or statistical

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[16] Tim Brown, *Change by Design: How Design Thinking Transforms Organizations and Inspires Innovation* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 2009). 58.

[17] Ibid., 49.

[18] Ibid., 50.

[19] IDEO is the design company where Tim Brown (author of *Change By Design*) is CEO. IDEO offers "design and consulting services" to companies around the world. For more information about IDEO see "IDEO at a Glance." IDEO, July 2019. https://www.ideo.com/about/ideo-at-a-glance

analysis never would have uncovered.[20] The second layer of understanding is cognitive.

The emergency room visit gave key insights into how patients might be thinking about

the care they are receiving, the questions they might be asking, and the way they might be

confused about navigating the unfamiliar terrain of the emergency room. These questions

help organizations surface what Brown refers to as "latent needs," or "needs that may be

acute but that people may not be able to articulate."[21] The final layer of empathy gives

insight into the emotions involved in the situation being observed. As the team member

experienced the emergency room, they felt the anxiety, frustration, and confusion that

patients experience. Feeling this range of emotions is different than seeing it on a survey

or reading about it in a report. In order to affect significant changes in the habits of

employees or clients, organizations must "find the feeling"[22] and be able to respond to it

effectively.[23] Making these change involves knowing what habit to target, what outcome

or behavior to elicit, and who to teach this new behavior to.[24]

Once an accurate understanding of the interaction between individuals and their

environment has been developed, a plan for change can be constructed and implemented.

Stephen Wendel offers three suggested approaches to constructing this plan. The first

option Wendel describes is called "cheating" (referred to as defaulting in other sources).

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[20] Brown, 50-53.

[21] Ibid., 52.

[22] Heath and Heath, 101-123. The Heaths use this phrase in reference to "motivating the elephant" to cooperate with the rider in implementing change. Although this section is not specifically about the path, their work regarding positive and negative emotions as motivation for change is relevant here as the negative emotions experienced by the team member in the emergency room motivated the team to improve patient experiece.

[23] Brown, 54-55.

[24] Stephen Wendel, *Designing for Behavior Change: Applying Psychology and Behavioral Economics* (Sebastopol, CA: O'Reilly Media Inc., 2014), 71-72.

This approach develops as many paths as possible to make the desired outcome the

default behavior, sometimes forcing users to actively choose an undesired or negative

action rather than trying to convince them to take a new one. Examples of this approach

include organ donor programs[25] or financial savings plans[26] where users have to "opt-

out" of the desired behavior rather than having to make the choice to opt-in. [27] Wendel's

second approach is to change a habit, which has been discussed at length in the previous

section on habit formation and habit change.[28] The third approach is to support a

conscious action. This third approach obviously requires the most effort by user and

organization alike. While this final approach is necessary in some instances, it is only to

be used when it is not feasible to "cheat" or to automate a habit.[29] When it comes to

making these desired actions come to completion, the environment or situation ("the

path" in the Heath's material) can be leveraged to increase motivation by reminding the

user of their desired change or rewarding/punishing choices, cue the user to act by asking

for the desired behavior, generate a feedback loop providing updates on behavior and

progress toward goals, remove competition by limiting distraction and choices, and

remove obstacles by ensuring that the user has the ability to complete the desired

response.[30]

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[25] Richard Thaler and Cass R. Sunstein, *Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth and Happiness* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2009), 179-181.

[26] Ibid., 110-111.

[27] Wendel, 49-57

[28] Ibid., 58-66.

[29] Ibid., 67-69.

[30] Ibid., 127 and 292.

One of the challenges an established church faces in implementing this process, is the "blindness" of existing church members. If the church was to adapt the IDEO emergency room experiment, it could send out members to visit other churches. These members would experience being a visitor to a new environment, feeling the emotions and experiencing the frustrations that first-time church visitors experience. This simple experiment could open the eyes of existing church members to the obstacles and gaps in their current practice and expose areas of their church environment that need to be changed.

A second application of the environmental aspect of habituation for the church is the design of the environment we gather in for worship. The current design features of protestant sanctuaries include a raised and central pulpit, a lower communion table (if a communion table is present at all), and seating in rows for the congregation that is arranged so that the music and sermon can be easily seen and heard.[31] While there are emerging trends in the design of worship space, the predominant effect of the design of our sanctuaries is that the congregation "tends to listen to worship" rather than being able to "do worship."[32] This trend toward passivity in worship feeds the inactivity and disengagement characteristic of acedia. In order to recover from acedia worship spaces will need to be reconfigured in order to call forth engagement in worship. This reconfiguration will need to be both physical and liturgical.[33] One example of a physical shift is to move the pulpit and table to a central location with the congregation gathered

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[31] Robert Webber, *Worship Old and New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 144.

[32] Ibid., 144.

[33] For the liturgical recommendations, see Worship, 125-133.

around them which allows for greater participation and engagement than "longitudinal

space."[34]

Keystone Habits

In *Switch,* the Heaths refer to a dynamic that calls leaders to "script the critical

moves,"[35] associated with change, while other literature uses the terminology of

"keystone habits."

> Keystone habits say that success doesn't depend on getting every single thing
> right, but instead relies on identifying a few key priorities and fashioning them
> into powerful levers… The habits that matter most are the ones that, when they
> start to shift, dislodge and remake other patterns.[36]

Examples of keystone habits are the role that exercise plays in the life of an individual[37]

or the effects that eating dinner together as a family has on various aspects of family

life.[38] This demonstrates that there are some habits that unlock change in the entire

system, effecting a change that is incongruent to the size of the habit itself. Successful

corporate change relies on correctly identifying and implementing keystone habits early

in the change process.

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[34] Webber, 145.

[35] Heath and Heath, 49-72.

[36] Duhigg, 100-101.

[37] James Clear, "Keystone Habits: The Simple Way to Improve Everything in Your Life,"
December 27, 2012, https://jamesclear.com/keystone-habits.

[38] Leonard Sweet, *From Tablet to Table: Where Community is Found and Identity is Formed*
(Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2014), 11-12. See also, Mirele Mann, "9 Scientifically Proven Reasons
to Eat Dinner Together as a Family: Families Who Eat Together Stay Together," Goodnet: Gateway to
Doing Good, May 5, 2016, https://www.goodnet.org/articles/9-scientifically-proven-reasons-to-eat-dinner-
as-family.

There are three principles to apply in diagnosing which habits can be leveraged as keystone habits. First, to diagnose keystone habits, look for interconnectedness and impact. This principle suggests that these habits are identifiable by their impact on the organization's effectiveness in reaching their mission and their interconnectedness to the various actions and processes within the organization. For example, eating together is a keystone habit for families as it "strengthens the social bonds within the family but also aligns a number of the habits and routines leading up to and following the mealtime."[39] The second principle is to keep the scope of the habit small and scalable. These habits must be focused enough to be repeatable and transferable across the entire organization.[40] Finally, use stories and rituals to reinforce the new habits.[41]

Habitus

Habitus is a "corporeal knowledge," and a "system of disposition," that we are trained in, socially and environmentally.[42] For our purposes habitus is a way of being that is reinforced by story, formed by the example of others, and by repetition.[43] Habitus is a complex term referring to "an orientation to the world that is carried in a way of life and oriented fundamentally toward action, toward tangible being-in-the-world."[44] Just as we

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[39] Daniel Denison and Levi Nieminen, "Habits as Change Levers," *People and Strategy 37*, no. 1 (2014): 27, ProQuest.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Alan Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 39.

[43] Ibid.*,* 39.

[44] Smith. *Imagining the Kingdom*, 84.

considered habit in the life of individuals, habitus is a social structure of practices that embody, express, and nurture a community's telos.[45] In the same way that the habits of an individual are made up of rewards pursued by actions in response to a cue, the habitus of a community is cultivated toward realization of internal good produced by engaging in specific practices.

Practices as Complex Habits

In MacIntyre's theory of virtue, the description of what constitutes a practice takes the individual understanding of habit and makes it corporate. MacIntyre describes a practice as,

> …any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved are systematically extended.[46]

From this description, MacIntyre goes on to describe the parameters of practices in their submission to the authority of the history of the practice, the other practitioners, and the institutions that support the practice.[47]

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[45] Kreider, 39-41, and Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 75-100. Krieder and Smith lay a practical and theoretical framework for applying habitus to the teaching practices, posture, and goals of the church. For the remedial section of this dissertation, habitus will be used conceptually for the network of practices that will constitute the reformation project the church must undertake. Specifically, the proposed habitus is made up of four practices that consist of individual habits. Krieder uses the example of table manners to illustrate the concept of habitus. Table manners are made up of a network of practices such as setting the table, serving the food, and eating the meal. Each of these practices are made up of individual habits. For example, the practice of eating the meal is made up of habits that include keeping elbows off the table, using specific utensils for specific courses, etc.

[46] MacIntyre, 187.

[47] Ibid., 190-203.

The context for practices to be coherent within the church is through the application of the principle of internal goods that MacIntyre includes in his definition of a practice. Jonathan R. Wilson makes this connection using the illustration of playing basketball. He says that one can play basketball for the purpose of exercise, skill development, and being part of a team (internal good), or for the purpose of receiving a college scholarship (external good). Continuing the illustration, the church can engage in evangelism for the purpose of attaining the unity of the faith or growing in maturity (internal goods) or for the purpose of gaining more church members (external good). In each case, the first purposes mentioned constitute the activity as a practice and the latter purposes do not.[48] From these illustrations, Wilson exhorts the church to recover their various activities as practices in the sense of MacIntyre's definition.

> Perhaps the most useful way for the church to use MacIntyre's proposal is to use the language of character, habituation, and disposition. This language emphasizes that our practices are best thought of, not as momentary exercises of the will, but as activities that pattern our life in discipleship to Jesus Christ. This patterning of our lives on the life of Jesus Christ creates in believers the character and the habits that are ordered toward our true telos.[49]

The Challenge of Automaticity

In contemporary thought, a habit is viewed as behavior that has been developed to become ingrained – almost involuntary – in response to specific circumstances or stimuli.[50] This unconscious nature of habit is taken as a given in our common understanding of habit and is the foundation for automaticity. Automaticity is a good and

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[48] Jonathan R. Wilson, *Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World: Lessons for the Church from MacIntyre's After Virtue* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1997), 62-63.

[49] Ibid., 64.

[50] Austin, *Aquinas on Virtue*, 24-25.

helpful element of natural habits when we are thinking of behaviors like brushing our teeth or driving a car. Automaticity is problematic, however, when we apply this principle to virtue and it is contrary to the theories of Aristotle and Aquinas.[51]

A closer look at Aristotle's description of habit and action retains human will and reason as necessary companions to action.[52] Aquinas speaks of human acts, which are determined by human will and guided by reason, in contrast with acts of a human, which are automatic and reflexive.[53] "As David M. Gallagher puts it, blinking (an act of a human) is different than winking (a human act)."[54] A contemporary concept that strengthens the case against automaticity is the "articulacy requirement."[55] This principle helps guard against automaticity and ignorance, requiring those who perform a virtuous act to be able to articulate why they acted this way before being deemed a virtuous person. This requirement is not without limitations but does provide a starting place for evaluating the nature of seemingly automatic virtuous acts.[56]

Is automaticity a "problem" though? In our current context, automaticity is seen as a limitation of our freedom, in part because automaticity eliminates conscious choice from every action. As the next section will illustrate however, freedom is better understood as the ability to embody the telos given to us by God. If virtuous habits are

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[51] Austin, *Aquinas on Virtue*, 24.

[52] Ibid., 9.

[53] Ibid., 26-27.

[54] Ibid., 26.

[55] Julia Annas, Darcia Narvaez, and Nancy E. Snow, eds., *Developing the Virtues: Integrating Perspectives* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 144.

[56] Ibid., 143-146.

actions made automatic toward the fulfillment of our telos they do not infringe on our freedom, they enhance our freedom. William James exhorts his readers to make as many things automatic as possible, as early as possible.

> The great thing, then, in all education, is to make our nervous system our ally instead of our enemy. It is to fund and capitalize our acquisitions, and live at ease upon the interest of the fund. For this we must make automatic and habitual, as early as possible, as many useful actions as we can, and guard against the growing into ways that are likely to be disadvantageous to us, as we should guard against the plague. The more of the details of our daily life we can hand over to the effortless custody of automatism, the more our higher powers of mind will be set free for their own proper work. There is no more miserable human being than the one in whom nothing is habitual but indecision, and for whom the lighting of every cigar, the drinking of every cup, the time of rising and going to bed every day, and the beginning of every bit of work, are subjects of express volitional deliberation. Full half the time of such a man goes into the deciding, or regretting, of matters which ought to be so ingrained in him as practically not to exist for his consciousness at all.[57]

In response to the articulacy requirement referenced above, recent studies have shown that even when subjects are neurologically incapable of premeditated choices, they automatically produce a rational story when asked about their actions.[58] Automation of good responses is not something to be feared or avoided as the rational, will-based choice is not lost by making a habit, it is merely pre-determined. Every month people make the choice to automate financial transactions like bill payments or contributions to charities. These financial decisions are rational, wise, and good. On the 6th month of the transaction, the movement of these funds to their pre-determined destination is still rational, wise, and good even though no conscious effort was made by the individual. In the same way, I urge the church to be intentional about the behaviors we make automatic

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[57] William James, *Habit* (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 1914), 54-55.

[58] Jonathan Gottschall, *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human* (New York, NY: Mariner Books, 2012), 95-99.

in our members by our habitus. We do not fear automaticity when an apple tree produces

apples each fall. It is reasonable that its branches are laden with apples. In the same way,

it is natural for a community of people that are to be known by their love, to express love

automatically, as if it comes naturally. N.T. Wright picks up on the theme of "natural"

appearances saying,

> Virtue… is what happens when someone has made a thousand small choices, requiring effort and concentration, to do something which is good and right but which doesn't 'come naturally'—and then, on the thousand and first time, when it really matters, they find that they do what's required 'automatically,' as we say… virtue is what happens when wise and courageous choices have become 'second nature.' Not 'first nature,' as though they happened 'naturally.' Rather, a kind of second-order level of 'naturalness.' Like an acquired taste, such choices and actions which started off being practiced with difficulty, ended up being, yes, 'second nature.'[59]

James points the way toward this goal by urging us at the outset of learning to make the

right behaviors automatic. In the remedy section of this work, we will name a few key

behaviors the church must automate in order to recover from acedia.

Given the strength of the association between habit and automaticity in our

culture, a choice will need to be made about the terminology used to articulate the nuance

of habit in relationship with virtue moving forward. One candidate for this language is

the metaphor of bearing fruit. In scripture, virtues like charity are presented as the

automatic result of a healthy, mature, cultivated relationship with God. Jesus uses fruity

imagery as a rhetorical device to illustrate this automaticity asking, "Do people pick

grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?" and providing the anticipated answer, "A

good tree cannot bear bad fruit…"[60]

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[59] Wright, *Virtue Reborn*, 9.

[60] Matthew 7:16-20.

Freedom

In the ancient monastic tradition, freedom was described as the ability to accomplish the good we are created to do. In this framework, human beings have been created good and are designed to live out of/into this goodness by engaging in the good works, healthy relationships, and life-giving practices revealed to them by God.[61] Under the influence of William of Ockham, the foundational understanding of freedom shifted from the ability to accomplish the good toward which we are oriented to by design, to a moral neutrality in which there is no intrinsic goodness in God's law, or any law for that matter.[62] Once this sense of intrinsic goodness is lost to neutrality, goodness or morality descends into simple legalism, or in other words, "what is permitted by the law becomes good."[63] "In the works of William of Ockham… there is no longer any connection between eternal life and what we are called to do. Every act becomes separate, atomized, and thus we lose the long-term purpose."[64] The "atomization' of action"[65] allows for a fundamental shift in the way we understand what freedom is and what the moral good is. For once our behavior is disconnected from an objective ultimate goal, we are free to choose what our new orientation is. This new orientation becomes a law for us and the good act is reduced to obedience to the newly chosen authority. Once we have granted ourselves the autonomy to select a law and authority, we are free to be indifferent to other

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[61] Nault, *The Noonday Devil,* 96.

[62] Ibid., 96-101.

[63] Ibid., 101.

[64] Ibid., 92.

[65] Ibid., 99.

laws or authorities we do not individually deem as good.[66] This new concept of freedom begins to pave the way for a deeper experience of indifference and acedia. Dennis Ford explores the concept of freedom and the indifference it creates, providing a brief history of the philosophical, religious, political, and cultural developments that have contributed to our current context.[67] He offers a helpful summary of the contemporary results of this expansion of freedom,

> The familiar history of freedom narrates a series of lessons in moral indifference. Stated summarily, these lessons include the following propositions: 1. Moral imperatives are voluntary; they cannot be legitimately imposed upon us by the state or by institutional religion. 2. Moral impulses are largely private in origin. … 3. Analogous to a free economy, a free moral economy permits the unrestrained pursuit of self-interest; through the device of the invisible hand of the political process, private vice is transformed into civic virtue. 4. The moral dictates inherent in reason, nature, and religion are illusory. Ethics has no ontological grounding and is dependent on the emotion and the will of individuals or groups. 5. Personal fulfillment requires freedom from the restraints of cultural norms and expectations. Freedom is a psychological, as well as a political, religious, and intellectual necessity. So stated, the ideas of indifference and endemic to the history of freedom are a ready defense against the inconveniences of the moral commitment, a rudimentary apologetic for moral inertia and sloth.[68]

When freedom is restored to the ability to become that which we have been created to become, it reorients us to its Christian meaning again. Not only does this ancient conception of freedom bring the biblical perspective of freedom to the fore, it ties

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[66] Nault, *The Noonday Devil*, 96-101.

[67] Dennis Ford, *Sins of Omission: A Primer on Moral Indifference* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990).

[68] Ibid., 83. See also Nault, *The Noonday Devil,* 96-105 for another summary for the impact of freedom as choice and its impact on the experience and understanding of acedia. In a more recent work, Ford uses the terminology of anxiety and depression to describe the impact of our current definition of freedom as choice and culture's inability to provide a meaningful narrative framework for one's life. Dennis Ford, *The Search for Meaning: A Short History* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2007), 7-17. R.J. Snell uses the phrase the "torpor of meaninglessness" to describe the place we find ourselves in culturally as a result of the freedom we have cultivated. Snell describes the posture we assume toward our contemporary culture as "bored sloth." R. J. Snell, *Acedia and its Discontents: Metaphysical Boredom in an Empire of Desire.* (Kettering, OH: Angelico Press, 2015), 59-61.

freedom to a teleological and virtuous framework; if we are truly free, then we can live toward our telos through the cultivation of virtue.

The Challenge of Works

Another challenge to utilizing these models of individual habits and corporate practices may be theological in nature, enquiring about the role of grace in this process of habit formation and virtue cultivation. When we discuss the cultivation of virtues and formation of habits in this way, some may question the proposed remedy as only a mechanistic model of behavior modification. However, the goal of this project is not to modify one's behavior, it is to rescue one from the vice of acedia. This rescue can only be accomplished as we live in response to, and in cooperation with, the grace of God. In this treatment of habit-formation, we have focused solely on the behavior of the individual and the support of the community, potentially leading some readers to assume that grace is unnecessary because it has been unmentioned. Some might say that the talk of habit formation is nothing more than a new legalism or works righteousness whereby we are creating a new list of "do's and don'ts" that will produce love by our efforts and discipline alone. Jennifer Herdt's "ethics as magic" is a helpful metaphor for the distinction between the grace and effort being adopted in this recovery project.

> Ethics as magic is of course a perverse distortion … and yet perhaps a revealing one. For one does encounter, woven throughout, the affirmation that God has chosen to act on the Church in the liturgy, in Word and sacrament, and that Christian ethics goes astray if it forgets this, just as it goes astray if it focuses so much on our responsibility to act that it forgets that in so doing we are responding to God's prior action in creating us and calling us into divine communion.[69]

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[69] Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells, eds., *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics* (Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 535.

While the focus on virtue cultivation and habit formation does call forth our participation, it paradoxically does not diminish the need for God's infusion of the theological virtues in the life of his people. Dallas Willard succinctly states, "Grace is opposed to earning, grace is not opposed to effort."[70] When God pours his love into our hearts by his spirit[71] this love compels us to respond.[72] As Paul says to the Ephesians, this response is to enter into a life of good works that God has prepared in advance for us to do.[73]

> For Paul, faith, hope and love are already given in Christ and by the Spirit, and it is possible to live by them. But you have to work at it … You have to develop, consciously and deliberately, the habits of heart, mind, soul, and strength that will sustain this life of faith, hope, and love. In other words, you have to practice the specifically Christian form of virtue.[74]

The work prescribed in this project is not about obtaining one's salvation from sin or getting to heaven after one dies. The remedial action prescribed is a recovery program from acedia. One of the unintended side-effects of salvation by grace is the fear that any effort or work oriented to our spiritual growth, or any structured discipline from a church or authority figure will become "works righteousness" or "legalism."[75] Virtue development and habit formation are not oriented toward earning God's favor or meriting acceptance. It is about participating in God's work in our lives and in our world. Just as Paul said about his and Apollos' work at Corinth, "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it,

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[70] Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (New York, NY: Harper One, 2006), 61.

[71] Romans 5:1-5.

[72] 2 Corinthians 5:14-15.

[73] Ephesians 2:10.

[74] Wright, *Virtue Reborn,* 119.

[75] Willard, *The Great Omission*, 61-62.

but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow."[76] This work is to be undertaken by the one who has grown acedic in their relationship with God and their experience of his love. This work is for the one who has been saved by his grace and has forsaken their first love, yet is drawn by his persistent lovingkindness to return to the works they did at first. This work is all grace.

> The theme of conversion, rooted in the transformative power of grace, sharply differentiates Christian virtue ethics from secular forms. Grace enables the sinner to turn away from sin and begin (or return to) friendship with God. Yet Grace does not simply erase all the previous years of deficient character formation. One can possess infused virtues—being properly ordered to God as one's final end—while continuing to struggle with the deeply ingrained imprint of defective required moral habits. Grace inclines the person not to choose to act in accord with vicious habits, but does not magically remove them.[77]

The practices, habits, and virtue called for in the remainder of this project will be built on the foundation of this paradox. Charity cannot be cultivated unless God pours out his love into our hearts by the Spirit.[78] The spiritual disciplines offered, and behaviors called forth, are all in response to this love. We love because he has loved us first,[79] but we must also acknowledge that God's love is only made complete as we love Him and one another.[80] This paradox is as old as the virtue conversation itself. Aristotle wrestled with this question using the language of "nature."

> In *The Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle asks whether virtue is natural to us; that is, is it part of our nature as human beings? The answer is yes and no. No, because we are not born with virtue, such that it will automatically develop, say, the way

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[76] 1 Corinthians 3:5-11.

[77] Timpe and Boyd, 410-411.

[78] Romans 5:5.

[79] 1 John 4:19.

[80] 1 John 4:15-19.

our bodies grow mature. But yes, because we have the capacity to acquire it—with proper upbringing, instruction, and practice—and acquiring it will perfect our nature. In this sense virtue is natural to us, so much so that when we are mature in our development of the virtues, they become, in Aristotle's familiar phrase, like second nature to us—yielding acts that accord with our nature, perfect it, and hence give us pleasure.[81]

Aquinas takes the concept of second nature a step further by developing his infused virtues alongside Aristotle's acquired virtues. The theological virtues find their source and telos in God and therefore do not observe the principle of the mean.

Given to us directly by God—in Aquinas's terms, 'infused' by the grace of the Holy Spirit—the theological virtues expand our natural capacities and inclinations and direct us to a supernatural end, an end above our nature, which we could not apprehend or achieve with our own natural power. Theological virtues therefore have a supernatural source corresponding to their supernatural end—God. Human flourishing is still the goal, but flourishing now includes not only this life and its relationships with other human beings, but also a life beyond this and a life lived even now in relationship with God.[82]

Aquinas names the three theological virtues (faith, hope, and love) "infused virtues." An infused virtue is a theological habit and act given to us directly by God. Aquinas arrives at this distinction logically when he articulates two good purposes (*teloi*) toward which humanity is oriented. In the case of the first telos, he is in agreement with Aristotle in naming happiness. This natural happiness is attained to by developing habits and virtues that he calls intellectual and moral. These habits can be achieved and developed according to man's natural and common power. But Aquinas goes on to name a second telos oriented toward "participation in the divine nature"[83] which requires virtue and habit that, since oriented toward the divine nature, are not attained to by human nature. Thus,

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[81] DeYoung, McClusky, and Van Dyke, 166.

[82] Ibid., 142.

[83] 2 Peter 1:4.

these virtues must be infused in our lives by God himself. The fact that these virtues are

infused does not negate habituation or increase. Rather, infused virtues rely upon our

action and discipline to strengthen these gifts of grace.[84] By our active participation in

these virtues, we re-train our appetites until virtuous behaviors become like "second

nature."[85] This participation in grace is difficult to articulate, but necessary to embrace.

The church has fallen into acedia in part due to a lack of participation in this mystery. N.

T. Wright uses the fruit of the Spirit as an illustration of this mysterious truth saying,

> Christian virtue, including the nine-fold fruit of the spirit, is both the gift of God and the result of the person of faith making conscious decisions to cultivate this way of life and these habits of heart and mind. In technical language, these things are both 'infused' and 'acquired,' though the way we 'acquire' them is itself, in that same language, 'infused.' We are here, as so often in theology, at the borders of language, because we are trying to talk at the same time about 'something God does' and 'something humans do' as if God were simply another character like ourselves, as though the interplay of God's work in our work could be imagined on the model of two people collaborating on a project. … It is sufficient to note that the varieties of spiritual fruit Paul names, like the Christian virtues, remain both the work of the Spirit and the result of conscious choice and work on the part of the person concerned.[86]

DeYoung uses a helpful illustration comparing the grace of infusion to antibiotic

medication. Although they are foreign to our bodies and given to us from an outside

source, they cannot be effective in treatment of infection or illness without being fully

metabolized by the body.

> Likewise, Grace, as a supernatural addition to the soul, fits human nature and helps it to become fully perfected beyond its own natural powers. As the antibiotic requires the metabolism of the body and its natural mechanisms to effect health, so too, divine infusion, which prompts and equips to us to achieve our ultimate end, nonetheless requires our own acts. Our moral perfection and the

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activity of loving God perfectly require, therefore, that grace enhance human nature.[87]

This exploration reminds us that charity is not only a gift of God's grace, but a virtue that shapes a distinctive way of life expressed through habitual actions and practices.[88] Summarizing the discussion of grace and effort in the cultivation of the theological virtues, Stanley Hauerwas writes,

> In the end, then, Christian virtue is not so much initiated action but response to a love relation with God in Christ. This is why it makes sense for the Christian Aquinas to say that true or complete virtue is fundamentally not our own achievement but is rather infused in us by God's grace, which saves us and enables us. … Too often the notion of infusion is taken to suggest a sudden acquisition of the virtues. Yet as Aquinas makes plain when he considers the relation between the theological virtues whereby 'Faith generates hope, and hope charity,' there is no reason to suppose that infusion comes all at once. Consequently, Aristotle's powerful account of how the virtues are acquired can continue to serve as a rich resource for displaying how training in the virtues might occur. Rather than rapidity of acquisition, or even the mode, 'infusion' points to the source from whence the theological virtues come, namely by a special act of God which brings us into relation with God, not only forming but utterly transforming our character. …The sign and substance of this infusion of the Christian virtues is always participation in the body of Christ. This involves our reception of the sacrament of baptism and Eucharist, but also includes immersion in the daily practices of the Christian church: prayer, worship, admonition, feeding the hungry, caring for the sick, etc. By these we are transformed over time to participate in God's life. So also we become full members in a city ordered to peace.[89]

The mysterious interplay between grace and practice sets the stage for the remedial work prescribed in the sixth chapter of this document. This remedial work rests on the foundation of the infused gift of charity and establishes an initial pattern for

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[87] DeYoung, McClusky, and Van Dyke, 166-167.

[88] Timpe and Boyd, 383-384.

[89] Stanley Hauerwas and Charles Pinches, *Christians among the Virtues: Theological Conversations with Ancient and Modern Authorities* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 68-69.

bearing the fruit of charity in one's individual and corporate life. The practices prescribed in this document are not works that secure our salvation, rather, they are the demands of love that acedia will cause us to resist. Just as our human friendships have habits and practices that sustain them and nurture them, so too does our friendship with God.

CHAPTER 5: THE ROLE OF STORY

Introduction

In Chapter 3 the virtue of a habit or behavior was determined by its relation to the telos of the one preforming the action. In this chapter the formation of one's telos and identity will be explored. The primary means of teleological formation is story. It is through the development of the story one is a part of, and the participation in this story, that one comes to understand and embody their telos. The church's recovery from acedia will require the re-narration of a biblical telos for the church, for individuals, and for the habits and practices that orients one's life toward telos.

In our modern churches, we have reduced the narrative of our faith to "metaphysical systems" and called for obedience to "abstract systems of morality" causing the church to suffer what H. Richard Neibhur calls "spiritual rickets."[1] Others go so far as to suggest that "religions commit suicide when they find their inspiration in dogmas."[2] Or, as Dr. Leonard Sweet says, "any attempt, on whatever end of the theological spectrum, to move Christianity toward a more propositional matrix rather than a relational mesh is a regressive, not a progressive, act."[3] As the following parable illustrates, story can do things that fact, proposition, and argument simply cannot.

> Truth, naked and cold, had been turned away from every door in the village. Her nakedness frightened the people. When Parable found her, she was huddled in a corner, shivering and hungry. Taking pity on her, Parable gathered her up and

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[1] Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones, eds., *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 23.

[2] Ibid., 23.

[3] Leonard Sweet, *Me and We: God's New Social Gospel* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2014), 10.

took her home. There, she dressed Truth in Story, warmed her and sent her out again. Clothed in Story, Truth knocked again at the villagers' doors and was readily welcomed into the people's houses. They invited her to eat at their table and warm herself by their fire.[4]

Alasdair MacIntyre's Narrative Teleology and Tradition

To set the stage for this return to narrative teleology, MacIntyre reminds us of the "Heroic societies" of the past. "In all those cultures, Greek, medieval, or Renaissance, where moral thinking and action is structured according to some version of the scheme that I have called classical, the chief means of moral education is the telling of stories."[5] For MacIntyre, these stories mattered because they framed the societal understanding of the good life, the status of all the characters in the culture, and the actions or responsibilities each had to achieving this good end.[6] These good or excellent actions are described as virtues and those that frustrate these ends are called vice.[7] "And this suggests an hypothesis: that generally to adopt a stance on the virtues will be to adopt a stance on the narrative character of human life."[8]

MacIntyre builds on this general narrative character by adding that "every particular view of the virtues is linked to some particular notion of the narrative structure or structures of human life."[9] He comes to this summary statement by contrasting

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[4] Robert Strauss, *Introducing Story-strategic Methods: Twelve Steps toward Effective Engagement* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017), 57.

[5] MacIntyre, 121.

[6] Ibid., 122.

[7] Ibid., 144.

[8] Ibid.

[9] MacIntyre, 174.

Aquinas's views on charity, forgiveness, and redemption,[10] with Aristotle's view that the good life is a certain kind of life to be lived.[11] Lutz provides a helpful synthesis at this point saying, "Thomism combines Aristotle's notion of the good life as an activity to be lived in this life with the Christian revelation that something better awaits. For Aquinas, the Christian lives the good life in this world as a sign and foretaste of the life that awaits all who are saved."[12]

The context for practices (and by extension virtue) to be coherent is within a narrative that locates one's life. MacIntyre illustrates this poignantly when he states, "I can only answer the question 'What am I to do' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?"[13] This story, of which humans are part actor and part author,[14] gives coherence to the end we are to pursue (telos),[15] and the role we play within it (identity).[16]

> The virtues therefore are to be understood as those dispositions which will not only sustain practices and enable us to achieve the goods internal to practices, but which will also sustain us in the relevant kind of quest for the good, by enabling us to overcome the harms, dangers, temptations, and distractions which we encounter, and which will furnish us with increasing self-knowledge and increasing knowledge of the good.[17]

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[10] Ibid., 174-175.

[11] Ibid., 175.

[12] Lutz, 116.

[13] MacIntyre, 216.

[14] Ibid., 215-216.

[15] Ibid., 215.

[16] Ibid., 216-217.

[17] MacIntyre, 219.

By locating one's identity in a narrative, teleological, communal story, MacIntyre offers his final objection to the fractured individualism of contemporary culture: moral tradition.[18] For MacIntyre tradition does not require us to abide by historic moral norms, rather, he calls for us to live in coherence to our moral and contextual starting point with all of its inherent advantages and debts.[19] These advantages and debts are not to be viewed as limitations, merely as essential elements in the narrative understanding of one's life and the necessary practices and virtues to living a good life.[20]

N.T. Wright assigns a similar role to scripture in the life of a follower of Jesus. In his "5 Act Model" of the authority of scripture,[21] Wright suggests that the story of God's relationship with his creation unfolds in the same way a play or movie does, in acts. In the scriptural narrative there are 5 acts (creation, the fall, Israel, Jesus, and the church) of which we are currently living in the fifth.[22] The main application of this model is that our life only has coherence and integrity if it is lived in faithfulness to the first four acts and moves us toward the consummation of the narrative described in the final act of scripture; resurrection, new creation, and eternal life in God's unmediated presence. Just as an actor must remain in character and play their part according to the tenor of the script,[23] and a musician is free to improvise within the rules that govern a piece of music,[24] the church is

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[18] Ibid*.,* 222.

[19] See Lutz, 125, and MacIntyre, 220-221.

[20] MacIntyre, 222-223.

[21] N. T. Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God: How to Read the Bible Today* (New York, NY: Harper One, 2011), 121-142.

[22] Ibid*.,* 122-123.

[23] N. T. Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of* God, 123.

[24] Ibid*.,* 127.

free to love the culture it lives among in faithful coherence and obedience to the narrative it is continuing to write. Wright refers to the New Testament as the "charter" for the church as it navigates this new cultural terrain, reminding us that our role is to tell the story of Jesus as the "climax of Israel's story and as the foundation of our own."[25] In the same way for MacIntyre, tradition shapes and forms moral coherence to give a culture a narrative structure to live within. From Wright's perspective, the narrative structure that gives life coherence is scripture.

A narrative framework is the foundation for establishing virtuous behavior of an individual within the life and context of their culture. Identity is the personal equivalent to the larger telos we participate in. In other words, just as the community we live within has a telos that is established and maintained by narrative, every individual has an identity that is established and maintained by their own story. Within the context of one's community, behavior is deemed virtuous if it enables one to embody their telos. The behavior of an individual is also connected to the concept and understanding of their personal identity as actions become habits, and habits become the building blocks for a storied identity.

The Role of Identity in Habit Re-formation

In the previous chapter, the focus was on the mechanics of forming and re-forming individual and corporate habits. In this section the focus will narrow to the role of identity in habit re-formation. Although there are three main motivations for changing

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[25] Ibid., 126.

a habit, linking behavior and actions to one's identity is the most powerful and sustainable source of habit change.

Many people begin the process of changing their habits by focusing on what they want to achieve. This leads to outcome-based habits.[26] Outcomes are a lagging measure of the effectiveness of our processes.[27] This lagging measure principle is helpful in diagnosing the health of our processes and making changes but is less helpful in sustaining the needed motivation to continue with hard, healthy habit transformation. This principle is incredibly important in relation to the habit change process in times of stress or weariness. If the focus is on an outcome that has yet to be achieved, under stress or fatigue the new, hard, unfamiliar routine is likely to be abandoned for an established one even with the understanding of its ineffectiveness or destructiveness. Sustained progress toward new outcomes or goals is dependent upon a deeper change.[28]

This outcome-based focus can motivate short-term specific behavior in an effective way. If, for instance, the goal is to lose five pounds, this focus can be very motivating to short term specific behavior changes until this goal is accomplished. There are, however, two significant areas of deficiency in this first layer of motivation. First, if the goal is not reached quickly, sustaining behavioral change can become difficult and will-power or self-discipline will wane. Second, good goals are not enough to produce

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[26] Clear, 31.

[27] Ibid., 18.

[28] Ibid., 32-33.

effective behavior. As James Clear says, winning teams and losing teams have the same goals.[29]

The second layer of focus is the layer of process or systems. Goals are what you want to achieve, process is how you begin to achieve them. Adopting a focus on process means committing to the behaviors and systems you develop with the understanding that small adaptations and improvements in these systems over time will achieve massive change.[30] These small behavioral adaptations have been referred to as the "compound interest" of habit formation.[31] To continue with the illustration from above, while an outcome-based focus can help someone lose five pounds (outcome), a focus on becoming healthier (process) can not only shed this same weight but also lower cholesterol, increase strength and stamina, and improve cardiovascular health. This focus is concerned with changing your actions and systems independent of what outcomes are achieved. If someone puts their focus on the process of habit change, they become content with doing the right things regardless of the results, or more accurately, enacting the desired response to the cue becomes the desired result. As the focus shifts to adopting a new process, these new systems or behaviors are celebrated as they are practiced and provide small wins in quick succession rather than waiting for large goals or outcomes to occur.[32]

The most powerful layer of habit formation occurs in one's identity.[33] The word identity has its etymological roots in the Latin word *identidem*, which means, "again and

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[29] Clear, 24-25.

[30] Ibid., 31.

[31] Ibid., 16.

[32] Ibid., 23-27.

[33] Clear, 31.

again, repeatedly, often, now and then, at intervals, ever and anon, continually,

constantly, habitually."[34] Our identity is literally, what we do repeatedly, over and over

again, habitually. The habits we have adopted function as evidence, supporting the

mental, emotional, and spiritual identity we have established. A similar pattern exists

whether we are discussing individuals, organizations, or societies. There are a set of

beliefs and assumptions that shape the system, an identity behind the habits. James Clear

articulates this understanding most succinctly,

> Your identity emerges out of your habits. You are not born with preset beliefs. Every belief, including those about yourself, is learned and conditioned through experience. More precisely, your habits are how you embody your identity. Whatever your identity is right now, you only believe it because you have proof of it. If you go to church every Sunday for twenty years, you have evidence that you are religious. … Each experience in life modifies your self-image, but it's unlikely you would consider yourself a soccer player because you kicked a ball once or an artist because you scribbled a picture. As you repeat these actions, however, the evidence accumulates and your self-image begins to change. The effect of one-off experiences tends to fade away while the effect of habits gets reinforced with time, which means your habits contribute the most evidence that shapes your identity. In this way, the process of building habits is actually the process of becoming yourself.[35]

The role of identity in habit formation is so critical because it can be used to create new

and healthy habits, but it also sustains and reinforces unhealthy habits.[36]

The deepest layer of habit change is the focus on identity. Once clarity is gained

about the nature of one's identity, and objectivity is exercised in deciding the way

forward, the process of experimenting with new responses to cues can begin.

> Your habits shape your identity, and your identity shapes your habits. The formation of all habits is a feedback loop, but it's important to let your values,

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[34] "identidem," *Numen: The Latin Lexicon* https://latinlexicon.org/definition.php?p1=1007610&p2=i. See also Clear, *Atomic Habits*, 36-37.

[35] Clear, 36-37.

[36] Ibid., 38-39.

principles, and identity drive the loop rather than your results. The focus should always be on becoming that type of person, not on getting a particular outcome."[37]

Watchman Nee illustrates the relationship between habit and identity in his book *The Normal Christian Life.* He shares a story of a Christian man travelling by train in a compartment with three other men. To pass the time, one of the men produces a deck of playing cards and invites the others to play. The Christian man declines the invitation to play by saying that he is unable to because he "has not brought his hands with him." When the three confused passengers enquired further, he explained that his hands belonged to Christ and he could not use Jesus' hands to play cards.[38] The individual in this story had thoroughly taken on a new identity that was fully supported and embodied in their habits. Clear introduces a two-step process of identity-based habit change: 1. Decide who you want to be, and 2. Prove it to yourself with small wins.[39] Clear says that many people know what they want to achieve, but they don't know where to start. Beginning with identity questions can help. Using the illustration of writing a book as the goal, he suggests asking questions like "what kind of person could write a book?" Once a few attributes have been listed – "consistent and reliable" for example – developing these attributes as a part of one's identity becomes the focus rather than the completion of the project.[40] The Heath's relate a story about a first-grade teacher who uses this focus with her students by telling them "they will be third-graders soon." She reinforced this new identity by addressing her students as scholars and giving them a clear, memorable

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[37] Clear, 40.

[38] Watchman Nee, *The Normal Christian Life* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1961), 65.

[39] Clear, 39.

[40] Clear.

definition of this new identity, "a scholar is someone who lives to learn and is good at it." Every time someone would visit their classroom, the teacher would ask the class to recite this definition. This new identity began to shape their behavior and attitudes toward being in school and learning by giving them a new identity to pursue.[41] Adopting a new identity and supporting that identity with new behaviors is sustainable indefinitely as the new behaviors build up the evidence to support and validate the progress made toward the goal of becoming a new kind of person. This process of experimentation generally requires all three levels of focus as an outcome needs to be defined and articulated (I want to lose ten pounds), a process is adhered to (I need to stop eating unhealthy snacks in the afternoon), and a new identity is mentally adopted (I am a healthy person) and supported by new evidence (a healthy person eats healthy food and avoids sugary snacks).

If the church is going to enter into a recovery program from acedia that is sustainable, it must address the question of identity. Often, the journey of faith is begun toward an outcome, "I want to be saved," or "I want to go to heaven when I die." But a process-based approach moves from this outcome to something like, "A Christian reads their Bible, prays, and goes to church every Sunday." The church must reclaim the narrative that individuals and congregations are the beloved children of God that bear his image and are designed to grow in unity and conformity to him. This can happen by helping people move from "I want to be saved," to "I am beloved." If this identity can be embraced and embodied, the process ("a beloved child is obedient to their Father") and outcomes ("I want to know God's will for my life") fall into place and the church can

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[41] Heath and Heath, 73-76.

guide individuals through a habitus that helps them build up evidence that supports this new identity.

The Role of Story in Identity Formation

> Somewhere along the way, we lost the art of storytelling. Even worse, we have lost the art of story casting—finding our identity in the Jesus story, along with how to understand, interpret, and find meaning and truth of Jesus in story. And we've lost the art of passing that storied identity along to others.[42]

"To be a person is to have a story."[43] As Leighton Ford summarizes, a narrative paradigm is organized around the following presuppositions: people are essentially storytellers, people make decisions on the basis of stories that are coherent and that "ring true" when tested against reality, and that the world is a set of stories we use to shape our view of ourselves and our reality.[44] Since culture has come to these realizations, Ford calls for the church to adopt a narrative posture for evangelism.[45] These presuppositions also frame the need for, and the shape of, a return to story in the formation of one's identity and telos in response to the challenge of acedia.

In his helpful work *Fire, Water, and Wind*, Norbert Haukenfrers makes the case for the church to return to narrative and story as the primary means of identity formation in Christ. Drawing from research in the fields of neuroscience and psychology, Haukenfrers argues that,

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[42] Leonard Sweet, *Giving Blood: A Fresh Paradigm for Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 36.

[43] William J. Bausch, *Storytelling: Imagination and Faith* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1984), 171.

[44] Leighton Ford, *The Power of Story: Rediscovering the Oldest, Most Natural Way to Reach People for Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1994), 76-77.

[45] Ibid., 77.

The narratives we develop and incorporate, shape our understanding of who we are. It is from this raw material of experiences that we construct a story that gives order or makes sense of our observations and experiences. These stories we craft are offering us a way of seeing and understanding life; healthy stories assist individuals in giving unity and purpose to one's life, unhealthy stories lead to despair and death.[46]

Robert Strauss says it even more strongly,

It has been said that not only are we made in the image of god, but we are also made in the image of the story we have heard and told. If a story is not told or if it dies, you and I may not remember who we are and why we are here. Accordingly, sustained transformation in an individual or society requires old stories be replaced with new ones.[47]

The formational aspect of story is essential for the church as the work of story replacement takes place in the teaching it offers and the relationships it develops. Annette Simmons writes about the power of story and gives helpful advice to leaders trying to affect lasting change in their organizations and the lives of the individuals they are trying to influence. She contends that story is essential in this leadership task. Her model of influence through story is especially helpful in the context of the church as the pastor is not normally with the members of their congregation when the majority of the choices or decisions are being made in their lives. Simmons suggests that an effective story is like "mental software that you supply so your listener can run it again later using new input specific to the situation."[48] For example, telling someone that they should love their neighbor as they love themselves is important, but not as effective as telling them a story

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[46] Norbert Haukenfrers, *Fire, Water, and Wind: God's Transformational Narrative: Learning from Narrative Psychology, Neuroscience, and Storytelling about Identity Formation.* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016), 7-8.

[47] Strauss, 63.

[48] Anette Simmons, *The Story Factor: Inspiration, Influence, and Pursuasion Through the Art of Storytelling* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2006), 41.

about a man who has been robbed and is helped by a stranger and an outcast.[49] Simmons

reminds us that the type of influence we are trying to access and the depth of change we

are hoping to see is much deeper than doing the things being prescribed, it is that they

would "pick up where you left off because they believe (the story)."[50]

Inadequate Stories Being Told in our Churches

With echoes of MacIntyre, and his concept of how narrative functions within a

community, Jonathan Gotschall reminds us of the problem of a broken story.

> Story continues to fulfill its ancient function of binding a society by reinforcing
> the ties of common culture. Story enculturates the youth. It defines the people. It
> tells us what is laudable and what is contemptible. It subtly and constantly
> encourages us to be decent instead of decadent. Story is the grease and glue of
> society: by encouraging us to behave well, story reduces social friction while
> uniting people around common values. ... Story— sacred and profane— is
> perhaps the main cohering force in human life. A society is composed of factious
> people with different personalities, goals, and agendas... Story is the counterforce
> to social disorder, the tendency of things to fall apart. Story is the center without
> which the rest cannot hold.[51]

The church finds in itself a group of loosely connected adherents suffering from a lack of

identity because of a story that is a greatly reduced and edited version of the most

powerful narrative ever revealed to mankind.

In his book, *The Insight Cure,* John Sharp outlines an eight-step process to help

clients unearth the source of their existing narrative and begin to build a new story to live

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[49] Parable of the Good Samaritan, Luke 10:25-37. Dr. Leonard Sweet, Lectures: Portland Seminary DMin Advance, September 2017. Dr. Sweet introduced the concept of answering a question using a story with the example of using the story of the healing of the paralyzed man in Mark 2:1-12 as a way to teach others about Jesus' understanding of intercession.

[50] Simmons, 3.

[51] Gottschall, 137-138.

with integrity.[52] While the church will not need all eight of Sharp's steps, the pattern

established in this work is useful for setting the stage for a call for a better narrative to be

reclaimed and proclaimed. In the first five steps in the process Sharp helps an individual

client process and evaluate the origin, development, and impact of their existing self-

narrative. In a church context, this step can be reduced to one prayerful process of

naming the incompleteness of the story we have been living by.

The primary version of the incomplete story told by our churches can be

summarized in what Scot McKnight calls "The Plan of Salvation" and "The Method of

Persuasion." These versions of the gospel revealed in scripture are reductions that tell

about God's creative, incarnate, and redemptive work in the cosmos focusing only on

how one individual can be saved. "The Plan of Salvation" is focused on the sin and sins

of individuals and how God offers redemption through the work of Jesus on the cross.

"The Method of Persuasion" reduces the gospel narrative even further, focusing only on

personal conversion and the forgiveness of confessed sin.[53] In these reduced gospel

stories Jesus's death and resurrection is presented as a "rescue mission" where the sinner

can be saved from eternal destruction.[54]

While these presentations of the Gospel were crafted with the intention of creating

an opportunity to elicit a confessing, repenting, converting experience, they have become

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[52] John Sharp, *The Insight Cure: Change Your Story, Transform Your Life* (New York, NY: Hay House Inc., 2018), xviii-xx.

[53] Scot McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 37-44. I do need to stress, as does McKnight, that these stories are not "wrong" or "evil," they are merely inadequate representations of the glory and scope of the narrative that scripture reveals.

[54] James Bryan Smith, *The Magnificent Story: Uncovering a Gospel of Beauty, Goodness, and Truth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 124-126.

an opportunity for the vice of acedia to take root, convincing its sufferers of the futility of resistance. The opportunities for acedia arise from this gospel because it begins with a propositional statement of negative identity ("you are a sinner"),[55] it equates conversion with salvation, it presents a one-time response ("ask for forgiveness"),[56] yet it offers no call for transformation and often distrusts the "works" that would participate in the new life we are given in Christ, reducing the gospel to justification.[57]

There is a growing body of literature calling for a return to a positive affirmation of God's creation, including the original identity conferred upon humanity as the basis for the overall narrative of scripture. This perspective affirms that the story of God and creation does not begin with a problem to be solved or an enemy to be vanquished, it begins in a garden with a good creation and an intimate relationship between God and the humans created to bear his image.[58] This bigger narrative begins at creation rather than the fall and encompasses all of the cosmos, not just individual human beings. This literature does not diminish the problem of evil, the depth of sin, or the need for redemption or justification.[59] Rather, it affirms these essential truths in the context of the goodness, beauty, and love of God.[60] Salvation then becomes a restoration and reconciliation more so than a pardon or transaction. This larger story does not down-play

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[55] Ibid., 26-30.

[56] Gordon T. Smith, *Transforming Conversion: Rethinking the Language and Contours of Christian Initiation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 5-7, 9-10.

[57] Willard, *The Great Omission*, 61-62.

[58] Haukenfrers, 76. See also Leonard Sweet, *The Well-Played Life: Why Pleasing God Doesn't Have to be Such Hard Work* (Bonita Springs, FL: Tyndale Momentum, 2014), 41-42.

[59] G. T. Smith, 22-26.

[60] J. B. Smith, 59-62.

the need for evangelism or conversion, it rather restores evangelism to its proper place of living and telling the story offering conversion as the necessary and good beginning to the life of faith.[61]

Conversion – a one-time response – also leads to acedia. The current version of the gospel story equates conversion with salvation, limiting the work of redemption and reconciliation to a single event of confession and absolution. Our enemy is an expert at challenging us precisely at this point.[62] The current pattern is that one receives forgiveness, goes out from the church trying not to sin, only to fail. They return to repent once more and the pattern repeats. Each time they sin and repent, evidence builds that suggests they are still sinners rather than saved. We must give our members a better narrative that is supported by ongoing responses/habits – not works so that they can be repeatedly converted – but habits that affirm their place among those "who are being saved" (1 Cor. 1:18). Habituation reinforces the truth of conversion through repeated and persistent behaviors. As we enact these new responses repeatedly and automatically, they give evidence[63] that the claim of the first one-time experience or encounter is indeed true and that one really is loved, forgiven, and worthy.

Finally, our current narrative gives no call to ongoing transformation and is suspicious of the patterns of engagement that would produce and sustain this growth in grace. Reducing salvation to the conversion experience leads to acedia, influencing its

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[61] G. T. Smith, 108-109, 188-189.

[62] There are several places in scripture where Satan comes to challenge the encounters we have with God, for example, "Did God really say you would die?" (Gen. 3) and "If you are the son of God" (Matt 4). When we leave salvation as a one-time encounter with God we leave ourselves open to these kinds of evil thoughts.

[63] Clear, 36-37.

victims to resist engagement, work, and effort toward maturity. This is not to doubt the sincerity of the convert, or the efficacy of justifying grace in the moment of initial trust in God. It is merely to insist that this is the beginning of a journey of faith, not a pre-paid ticket to a destination.[64] One essential task in the battle of acedia is to uncouple the language of conversion and salvation in such a way that retains the assurance of the existing story while expanding God's saving grace to include the impulse and call to "work out your salvation"[65] through loving obedience and disciplined practice.

A Better Narrative

The next step in Sharp's process is to build a new story. This new story is not make-believe or wishing for a better life. It is, rather, an honest and optimistic inventory of who one really is, what one's strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities are, and what values one is going to live by moving forward.[66] In the context of the church's battle against acedia, the need is not for a new story to be built, but for the Jesus narrative to be recovered and encountered. As Leighton Ford says, "Conversion is a collision of narratives. God's story touches my story and your story, and a collision takes place."[67] While we are not mining for a narrative that will bring the lost to Christ, we are trying to unearth the narrative that will unseat acedia through a collision with God's love.

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[64] G. T. Smith, 5-10 and 38-41.

[65] Phil. 2:12.

[66] Sharp, xx, and 149-173.

[67] Ford, 14.

To illustrate the type of narrative the church needs to recover in its struggle with acedia, the metaphor used by Henri Nouwen in *The Life of the Beloved*[68] may be instructive. In this little collection of letters, Nouwen writes to a friend and unpacks the extended metaphor of communion to teach his friend how to enter into his true identity as the beloved of God. He begins the journey with his friend by confronting the voices that fill his world shouting that he is "no good… ugly… worthless… despicable… unless you can demonstrate the opposite," or in short, unlovable.[69] To frame the journey back to wholeness and health, Nouwen names his friend as 'beloved,' a new identity that he already has, but must learn to take hold of.[70] To frame this new identity, he uses four words that "summarize his life as a priest"[71] and "as a human being."[72] These four words are taken, blessed, broken, and given.[73] At first glance, this may appear to be nothing more than a nice, inspiring, spiritualized metaphor for the Christian life. It would have been very easy for Nouwen to expound in vague mystical language, or dive into deep biblical exegesis. The power of this example is that he does not fall into the trap of

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[68] While we could use N.T. Wright's *Simply Christian,* James Bryan Smith's *The Magnificent Story,* Leonard Sweet and Frank Viola's, *Jesus: A Theography,* or Dallas Willard's *The Divine Conspiracy,* among many others, Nouwen's work is a helpful illustration of the power of an extended metaphor to frame the good news of grace and the telos of our lives in response to acedia. The need of an individual believer that cannot or will not respond to the demands and call of God's love is to enter into their new identity as the beloved of God. The larger narrative of kingdom, Christ-likeness, etc. is essential to our lives as Christ followers and is foundational in our conversion and salvation, but becoming the beloved of God is an essential story/metaphor here.

[69] Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World* (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992), 31.

[70] Ibid., 36-38, 43-45.

[71] Ibid., 48.

[72] Ibid., 49.

[73] Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved*, 48.

spiritual vagueness or selective biblical proof-texting, rather he unpacks each aspect of his four-fold metaphor in very practical and implementable actions that lead his friend into the experience and nurture of this new identity. For example, in the letter about being "taken," Nouwen begins by unpacking the nuances of the Christian understanding of being chosen. One such nuance that he clarifies for his friend is that "To be chosen does not mean that others are rejected."[74] He develops this principle by wrestling with the competitive environment we live in, finally concluding that God's choosing is radically different. "Instead of rejecting others as less valuable, it accepts others in their own uniqueness. It is not a competitive, but a compassionate choice."[75] Once the exploration of the metaphor has concluded, Nouwen embodies the metaphor in practices to be undertaken in order that the spiritual truth encountered in metaphor may be lived through practice and embodied as identity. One such practice is to seek out and spend time in places where the truth of our identity is proclaimed and affirmed which may include churches, synagogues, supportive relationships, and support groups.[76] Nouwen prescribes this practice because it puts flesh on the spiritual truth that, "The limited, sometimes broken, love of those who share our humanity can often point us to the truth of who we are: precious in God's eyes."[77]

Nouwen's example in *The Life of the Beloved* is profoundly powerful and tremendously effective in forming a new identity because it uses a familiar metaphor to

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[74] Ibid., 54.

[75] Ibid., 55.

[76] Ibid., 59-60.

[77] Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved*, 60.

illustrate a deep spiritual truth in concrete actionable responses. The metaphor of becoming bread for the world that is taken, blessed, broken, and given is not only presented as a spiritual reality, but a new way of life to be learned and lived. *The Life of the Beloved* sets a pattern and example for a narrative that could be used by a local church to awaken a congregation member from the slumber of acedia and restore them to loving God and neighbor fully and passionately.

Conclusion

The teleology presented thus far has established that the virtue of charity, and the union with God it pursues and incarnates, is the telos for all humanity. This telos is different than the traditional "revivalist" and contemporary "missional" teleology proclaimed by the North American church and may produce resistance among the leadership of the established church. A simple presentation of the current telos of the church may be that the church exists to bring more people to Jesus.[78] Theologically, one could make a good case for this evangelistic purpose. However, practically speaking this often amounts to convincing people to continue to participate in the programming of a specific local congregation. In many ways, our current expression of our telos, in spite of orthodox theology and faithful traditions, is to maintain the viability of the local congregation. The telos necessary to rescue sufferers of acedia must be larger than this. This chapter has provided a justification for the recovery of a larger narrative from Scripture, experience, and tradition that invites participation in the story God is telling. This participation is frustrated by acedia. Acedia rises up against this narrative telling its

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[78] G. T. Smith, 15-16.

victims that the story is not true and that the response God's love calls for will not bring

about the transformation and life it promises.

CHAPTER 6: CONSTRUCTING A REMEDY

Introduction

The problem of acedia will require new habits intentionally formed and nurtured in the lives of the individuals in a congregation and supported by the practices of the church as a whole. This habitus will consist of the keystone practice of stability, supported by the core practices of worship, discernment, and obedience. These practices will be implemented by a network of individual habits that establish these practices in the life of the community and produce the fruit of the internal goods pertinent to the telos of Christian charity.

This habitus can be thought of as a tree, rooted and established in rich soil, naturally producing healthy fruit. The soil in this imagery is representative of the grace of God which infuses the theological virtues in the life of a Christ follower. The roots of the tree represent the practice of stability which reaches down and out into the grace of God, drawing its resources into the tree while at the same time stabilizing the tree, allowing it to grow strong and healthy. Worship is the trunk of the tree, establishing the core (telos) of the plant and connecting the branches to the nourishing and anchoring root system. The branches of the tree represent discernment as the tree draws up the nutrients from the soil it stretches and reaches out in various directions to grasp for the sunlight and rain which it needs to grow and produce fruit. The fruit is the practice of obedience. The natural evidence that a tree is rooted in rich soil, has a strong and healthy trunk, and is drawing in the resources of the sun and rain, is that healthy fruit is produced.
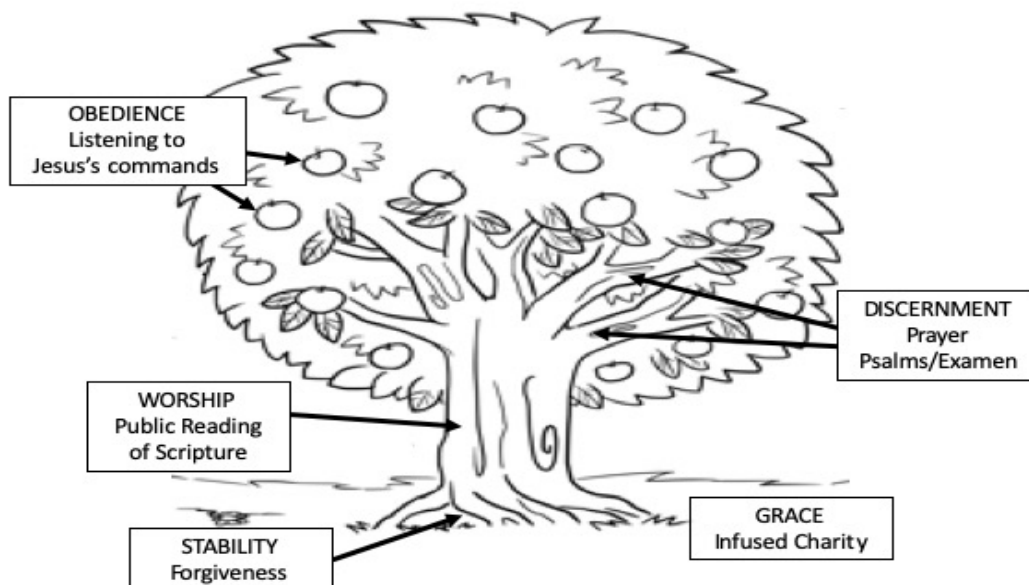
Image 1[1]

The practices that form the habitus being proposed have been selected because they provide a framework for the church to pursue the two concurrent aims of this exploration; a recovery from acedia and the cultivation of charity. The fruit-bearing tree illustrates the distinct and mutually supporting components of the habitus: the tree's growth down into the soil and up toward the sun is illustrative of the two desired outcomes. By embracing and implementing these practices, a local church can fight against the vice of acedia and cultivate the virtue of charity.

Each section of this proposed habitus will contain a brief introduction to the two-fold purpose of the practice, an introduction to the practice itself, an example of how the practice has been implemented in a non-monastic community, and the explanation of one

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[1] Tree image from www.pixabay.com. In this diagram the text in ALL CAPS is the practice being represented and the Regular font is the habit referenced in support of the practice, with the exception of the box marked GRACE in which the Regular Font specifies the action being described. In other words, the grace represented by the soil the tree grows in is the grace that infuses the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity.

key habit that must be formed in support of the practice including an example of a habit loop.

The Practice of Stability

The practice of stability is essential to the construction of the habitus because it creates the environment in which acedia can be defeated and charity can be enacted. The practice of stability is the most effective response to the thoughts of wandering and leaving that acedia commonly produces in its victims. In the face of these thoughts, a stable community with members that have committed themselves to the place and people God has brought them to provides the environment for the love of God and others to be cultivated. The biblical commands to love are built on the foundation of the practice of stability and the habits that support it.

In order to create an environment in which charity can be learned and acedia resisted, the practice of stability must be understood and embodied. Community is the context for the cultivation of the love that is charity.[2] The practice of stability is foundational to the habitus being established and therefore is designated the keystone practice.[3]

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[2] Wright, *Virtue Reborn*, 125.

[3] In the chapter on Habit the concept of "keystone habits" (66) was introduced. A keystone habit is one that enables and encourages other habits to be formed as it is learned and practiced. In this section we will expand the principle of keystone habits and apply it to a practice. In order for an effective remedy to acedia to be implemented, the practice of stability must be established as a keystone.

Introduction to the Practice of Stability

One of the negative thoughts produced by acedia in Evagrius's *Praktikos* is a "hatred for the place" that "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 of acedia adds to this thought that it is "not after all the place that is the basis of pleasing the Lord. God is to be adored everywhere."[4] Norris names this symptom of acedia a "thoroughly modern condition" and comments that we are conditioned by our individualistic culture to keep all options and choices open so that we can move to the new, better, and more favorable environment for our own flourishing. Acedia convinces us that any commitment that limits our ability to move or choose to be somewhere else limits one's freedom. In this state, the one suffering from acedia not only begins to seek a new setting, they become convinced that this desire for a new place is sanctioned by God. Once these thoughts have taken root, the acedic individual is convinced that "commitment is weakness and independence is strength."[5]

Evagrius on Stability as Perseverance

As a chief part of the remedy to the withdrawal and escapism of acedia, Evagrius says, "Perseverance is the cure for acedia, along with the execution of all tasks with great attention (and the fear of God)."[6] The perseverance Evagrius references is also known as *stabilitas loci*.[7] Evagrius encourages his monks to face squarely into all temptations,

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[4] Evagrius, *The Praktikos*, 19.

[5] Norris, 25.

[6] Evagrius, *Greek Ascetic Corpus*, 83-84.

[7] DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, 96.

especially acedia, saying succinctly that "Perseverance is the severing of acedia."[8] This

perseverance is a call to stay true to the commitments one has made to themselves, to

God, and to their fellow monks in persistence in prayer, work, and fellowship. Evagrius

recognizes that habituation can occur in a vicious direction if one is not diligent in this

fight.

> The time of temptation is not the time to leave one's cell, devising plausible pretexts. Rather, stand there firmly and be patient. Bravely take all that the demon brings upon you, but above all face up to the demon of acedia who is the most grievous of all and who on this account will effect the greatest purification of soul. Indeed to flee and to shun such conflicts schools the spirit in awkwardness, cowardice and fear.[9]

This vivid description, "schooling the spirit in awkwardness, cowardice, and fear" speaks

to the state of many souls as they wander from situation to situation in search of the ideal

environment to grow in faith and love. Evagrius offers a flurry of metaphors to describe

the pull of acedia away from commitment, work, and establishing oneself in a community

of faith, describing acedia as a cloud chased away by a wind, a feeble plant bent over by a

light breeze, and a dry twig in the desert that is easily carried away. He concludes this

section with an agricultural metaphor reminding his readers that just as a tree often

transplanted struggles to bear fruit, a monk that often wanders cannot cultivate virtue.[10]

The Benedictine Vow of Stability

What Evagrius calls perseverance, other traditions have termed "stability." The

practice of stability finds its fullest expression in the Rule of St. Benedict. In his Rule, St.

Benedict describes four types of monks, Cenobites (those who live under the authority of

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[8] Evagrius, *Greek Ascetic Corpus*, 64.

[9] Evagrius, *The Praktikos*, 24

[10] Evagrius, *Greek Ascetic Corpus*, 83-84.

an abbot), Anchorites or Hermits (those who have been fully trained and leave the communion for a solitary life contending with demons), Sarabites (those who are immature, untrained, and live in small groups following their own rules and desires), and Landlopers.[11] Landlopers are wandering monks for whom the grass is perpetually greener in other pastures. In his brief description of these monks, Benedict says they are never content, always wandering, and indulgent toward their own appetites. He does not even want to comment on their "wretched life," opting to move forward in his Rule in silence. [12] If we were to insert the term "church" for "cell" in this description, we are reminded of some who perpetually shop for a church family to attend to their perceived needs. In this description, as Jon Stock comments, "Benedict has no patience for 'church shoppers.'"[13]

St. Benedict crafted a Rule of life for the Cenobites who will populate the monastic communities that would come to bear his name. The process of admission is arduous, beginning with a two month stay among the "novices" to be shown the "hard and rugged ways through which we pass on to God."[14] Candidates who persist in pursuing admission to the community, endure two subsequent seasons of testing lasting six months and four months, with the Rule being repeated to them after each season for their continued consideration. After passing through these three seasons of testing and training, and having heard the Rule following each season, they are eligible to promise

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[11] Saint Benedict, trans, Rev. Boniface Verheyen, *The Holy Rule of St. Benedict* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1949), 5.

[12] Benedict. 5.

[13] Jon Stock, Tim Otto, and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *Inhabiting the Church: Biblical Wisdom for a New Monasticism* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2007), 88.

[14] Benedict. 69.

their commitment to the order.[15] This commitment is made "in the oratory, in the presence of all, before God and His saints, stability, the conversion of morals, and obedience, in order that, if he should ever do otherwise, he may know that he will be condemned by God 'Whom he mocketh.'"[16] The individual is now committed to this community for the remainder of their lives. The vow of stability in the monastic context has very few analogs today. Relationship stability is most commonly found within one's family, as Stock says, "this community is best understood as a family that shares a common likeness—the likeness of their Father."[17]

Benedict bids the individual to bind themselves to the community based on the wisdom that without roots, the love of God, maturity in the faith, and fruitfulness in God's service are stunted, if not impossible. Stock supports this principle,

> Stability without love gives birth to all forms of dysfunction—legalism, cannibalism, or the development of a mere husk of a community driven daily by an established bureaucracy but failing to produce an actual heartbeat. Love without stability, on the other hand, permeates our popular culture. It is an insatiable love that is driven by a consumerist spirituality that, like a vampire, selfishly consumes the other and moves on in search of further consumption. Such love is marked by its self-centred shallowness and is merely a shadow of agape. Monastic spirituality forces us to face up to the truth that if we are going to grow in agape, we must give ourselves to stability.[18]

The only place we are going to find the remedy for acedia is in stable relationships and stable communities. All too often the church is gripped in one of Stock's parodies of love

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[15] Benedict.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Stock, Otto, and Wilson-Hartgrove, 89.

[18] Ibid., 91-92.

and faithfulness. How then can we cultivate this challenging gift in a culture that resists commitments and prizes autonomy and mobility?

Initially, it will be easy to see the ideal form of stability as a call to commit oneself to a specific location for the rest of one's life. This type of stability may be available to some but is not realistic for many in our modern culture. The stability needed in our context is not a denominational loyalty, or a rigid adherence to one local church, or even to a particular pastoral leader, but echoing the principles Benedict develops, it is to the God that is present in this place and among this people he has planted us among.[19] Stability in the Benedictine sense is affirming of God's presence in the particularity of our lives.

> God's omnipotence and omnipresence may be attributes we can contemplate in the abstract realm of ideas, but the love of God is as particular as a Jewish man named Jesus who was born of a woman named Mary in a town called Bethlehem. We know what love looks like when we know it among a particular people in a given place. If the love of God and neighbour is our end goal, roots of love in stability are the means God has given for making progress in this life.[20]

Mobility in families, careers, and seasons of life makes geographical stability daunting if not impossible. But, as Terrence Kardong suggests, "We commit ourselves to a given community of people; whether we always live among them is not as important as if we are devoted to them as our primary community."[21]

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[19] Paul Wilkes, *Beyond the Walls: Monastic Wisdom for Everyday Life* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1999), 68.

[20] Jonathan Wilson Hartgrove, *The Wisdom of Stability: Rooting Faith in a Mobile Culture* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2010), 83-84.

[21] Terrence G. Kardong, *Conversation with Saint Benedict: The Rule in Today's World* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 76, ProQuest.

Staying with the metaphor of a family, when adult children move out of the home they grew up in and go to a new city for education and career pursuits, the commitments they have made to the rest of the nuclear family do not end. As the family continues to grow and disperse, there remains a bond of relational stability that requires a new set of practices and habits to be maintained and nurtured. This familiar familial dynamic illustrates well the difference between the terms enclosure and stability. Enclosure refers to a geographical and relational commitment in which the individual remains at the same place as well as among the same people. The concept of stability, as it is being called for here, is primarily focused on the relationships that constitute a local church and community.[22] What remains foundational in this geographic dispersion is the relational rootedness established in the years of dwelling among one another.

The church as family is a metaphor that has been diluted in recent days by consumeristic and individualistic commitments. One of the contributing factors to this commitment gap is the call the church has extended to her adherents. All too often the church has called congregants to short term investments, programmatic loyalty, or quick fix transforming opportunities. The call to stability is a call not to a program or "six Week Transformation," but to a recognition that God has brought me to this place to dwell with others and with him. Jonathan Wilson Hartgrove names this cultural dynamic well when he says, "Practicing stability has meant unlearning the habits of a culture that tells us the answer to our problems is always somewhere else."[23] The church has picked up many cultural habits, in this case, the habit of asking for minimal commitment yet

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[22] Esther De Waal, *Seeking God: The Way of St. Benedict* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1984), 57-58.

[23] Wilson Hartgrove, 40.

expecting radical transformation. The call to stability cannot be found on this path. The call to stability insists on full commitment, "and that commitment, so lacking in our relativistic, drip-dry, disposable, replaceable world, is what makes us whole—and in turn helps other find their bearings."[24]

The commitment to stability can seem artificial or forced by an age that sanctifies choice and options. However, as Hartgrove continues to make the case for stability as the only environment for the development of mature Christian love he tackles the sanctity of choice using a powerful picture illustrated by two similar metaphors. One of the consistent metaphors for this practice is of a garden, planted in a place that allows the seedling to both establish roots downward into the soil, but also growth upward bearing fruit. [25] This is a very helpful metaphor as it addresses a common myth of our culture, that to stay in one place is to become stagnant or miss opportunities for growth. Hartgrove introduces a second metaphor for the spirituality of stability, the metaphor of a ladder.[26] The metaphor of a ladder is helpful because without stability there is no possibility of upward movement or progress. Stability is a rootedness in the love of God that allows for the upward and outward growth of love for one's self and others.

These "roots of love"[27] allow for the key questions of one's life and identity to be explored in ways that will sustain them during seasons of geographical distance. Drawing on the metaphor of roots, De Waal comments, "Without roots we can neither discover

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[24] Wilkes, 71.

[25] Wilson Hartgrove, 50.

[26] Ibid., 51.

[27] Ibid., 81-84.

where we belong, nor can we grow. Without stability we cannot confront the basic

questions of life. Without stability we cannot know our true selves." [28] Thus far the

concept of identity development has been focused on the role of story in one's life. De

Waal reinforces the role of narrative by adding the role of environment. Often the thing

acedia calls an individual to flee from is themselves. The one assaulted by acedia is

tempted to believe that the forces keeping them from flourishing and becoming whole are

resident in their current environment and that the wise thing to do is flee. De Wall calls

for "silent courage, perseverance, patience, and suffering" that are required to "accept

myself, to know who I am, and not to run away from myself along any of those

numberless escape routes which always lie to hand." She contends that perseverance will

lead one to knowledge of themselves and the experience of new life in Christ.[29] If one

can commit to stability that finds God in their current situation and leads them to a deeper

knowledge of his love and that brings them to a fuller understanding of themselves, they

can then begin to experience and live in communion with others. Jean Vanier makes an

essential distinction between communion and fusion. In communion with one another we

are called to, and enabled to, become more fully our unique and diverse selves. In the

experience of what Vanier calls fusion, our identities become confused and the possibility

of true belonging is lost.[30] The nuanced understanding of belonging to one another is that

because of and through our union with Christ we do not become the same, but are better

because of our uniqueness, diversity, and difference. This conceptualization of

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[28] De Waal, 56.

[29] Ibid., 63-64.

[30] Jean Vanier, *From Brokenness to Community: The Wit Lectures, Harvard University Divinity School* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1992), 17.

community and belonging is reinforced in secular literature as well. Popular author Brene Brown writes that belonging is only being possible if I am allowed and encouraged to be myself. Any setting that requires me to "fit in" actually robs me of the opportunity of belonging.[31]

The problem with the ideal of everyone being their unique selves and having the room they need to grow is that conflict will naturally arise. For too long, the presence of conflict has been a cue to leave a church for a more peaceful or ideal situation. The counterintuitive truth is that it is only by learning to work through conflict that we can find the peace we are seeking. In addition, our approach to conflict ignores the truth that it is only in a stable, committed relationship that one can be vulnerable enough to truly work through conflict. Without commitment there is a persistent perceived "threat of abandonment."[32]

In his work on communities, Vanier articulates four typical types of conflict. Building on the distinction between communion and fusion, the first kind of conflict is the tension between "togetherness and independence" where participants wrestle with the call to set aside their own agendas and priorities and make decisions together. Communion calls forth a second type of conflict as participants are called to set aside competition in favor of making space for each other to exercise their gifts and abilities. Thirdly, the call to care for others and not only ourselves produces conflict as our needs and desires are confronted with the needs and desires of others. The last major arena of

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[31] Brene Brown, *Dare to Lead: Brave Work. Tough Conversations. Whole Hearts* (New York, NY: Random House, 2018), 107.

[32] Brian C. Taylor, *Spirituality for Everyday Living: An Adaptation of the Rule of St. Benedict* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1989), 17-18.

conflict Vanier notes is in keeping with Brown's description of belonging as the desire to be a part of the family or tribe tempts participants to set aside personal growth and uniqueness for the security and safety of being a part of the group. Vanier refers to this closed community as being a "pseudo-community" where the proximity and security of the individuals masks the lack of openness to personal becoming and growth.[33] These types of conflicts, and a variety of others, will arise among any group of people who make a commitment to stay in relationship with one another over an extended period of time. The challenge of stability is to keep the commitment one has made during these seasons. If the commitment to the context remains firm, almost all conflicts can be resolved, and relationships can be maintained.[34]

If acedia is to be overcome by love, the church must be able to create an environment in which love can be learned, nurtured, and shared. The only environment in which this can happen is a stable community.

Practicing Stability in the Local Church

While a life-long commitment to one place and one people may be fruitful in the context of the monastic life, is this practice viable in the life of a local congregation? Some authors contend that "stability in the sense of some geographical space is unattainable and irrelevant; stability in terms of some internal space, that we can carry around, is something attainable, though not necessarily without considerable hard work

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[33] Vanier, 31-32.

[34] This general principle must be tempered by the truth that there are times when safety or health may dictate the severing of a commitment to stability within a community.

and perseverance."[35] While there is value in an "internal stability" and personal

rootedness in Christ, this individualised and dislocated version of stability has not been

able to overcome the challenges of acedia in our churches. One way this monastic

practice can be translated into our current church context is through a model of

meaningful church membership.

The Church of the Saviour is one example of meaningful church membership and

small group commitment. The Church of the Saviour was planted in Washington D.C. in

1947 by Gordon and Mary Cosby. From the beginning, this congregation was established

on countercultural principles including a commitment to educating all members for

ministry, a commitment to smallness, and a focus on "Jesus-focused social activism."[36]

The practice that exemplified their commitment to stability however is their call to

church membership.

To become an active member in the Church of the Saviour one has to undertake a

rigorous program of education, preparation, and spiritual discipline. Rev. Cosby made no

apology for this rigor, understanding that,

> The refusal to grapple with the issue of entrance into the Christian Church is not
> tolerance; it is betrayal of the gospel which we preach. No one claims that seeking
> to ensure integrity of membership is not fraught with danger and difficulty, but
> the answer does not lie in skirting the problem. The profound meanings of
> membership need to be rethought. … If the church is to move toward integrity of
> membership, a framework must be provided prior to membership in which the
> Christian faith may be explored with seriousness. Within this framework a person
> must have the opportunity to know deep person-to-person relationships. He must
> have opportunity in a community of acceptance and love to see himself, to let go

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[35] De Waal, 61

[36] Jeff Bailey, "The Journey Inward, Outward, and Forward: The Radical Vision of the Church of the Savior," *Cutting Edge* (Fall 2001), https://firstlutheranlodi.files.wordpress.com/2013/01/radical-journey-church-of-the-savior.pdf, 3.

> his false saviours that he may come to know the real Saviour. For the Church of the Saviour this framework is the School of Christian Living…[37]

In the School of Christian Living, the potential member is introduced to the fundamentals of following Jesus and being a part of his church in a series of six core courses required for all members. Following the completion of the courses, those who would like to pursue membership in the church prepare a short essay which outlines their relationship with Jesus, their current spiritual practices, areas of their life that need growth or maturity, and the ways they are serving the church. This paper is presented to the leaders of the church and if accepted the candidate is assigned a sponsor who will serve as a spiritual director. The candidate and sponsor meet weekly to study, pray, and work through an assigned syllabus consisting of material to be read, the commitment to the church which is to be memorized, and the disciplines the candidate will commit themselves to. Once the season of sponsorship, learning, and evaluating is completed, the approved candidate comes to commit themselves to the church through membership.[38] This commitment is to practice the following;

> We covenant with Christ and one another to:
> Meet God daily in a set time of prayer
> Let God confront us daily through the scriptures
> Grow in love for the brotherhood and all people, remembering the command,
> 'Love one another as I have loved you'
> Worship weekly—normally with our church
> Be a vital contributing member of one of the groups
> Give proportionally, beginning at a tithe of our incomes
> Confess and ask the help of our fellowship should we fail in these expressions of devotion.[39]

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[37] Elizabeth O'Connor, *Call to Commitment: The Story of the Church of the Saviour, Washington D.C.* (New York, NY: Harper and Row Publishers, 1963), 25.

[38] Ibid., 25-31.

[39] O'Connor, *Call to Commitment*, 34.

The membership covenant is formalized in a Sunday morning service where the

candidate pledges their solidarity and covenant with their church community signifying

that,

> One has become a part of a people with whom the whole of life is bound—a fellowship where all the members are necessary to one another as the eye is to the hand, and as close as, and more intimate than, the members of a family. This is what will mark the church of Christ as different. This is what a spiritually starved world will wonder at: 'see how they love one another.'[40]

The commitment made to the church as a community, to the disciplines that form its

habitus, and to the work of the small groups called to a specific mission is the

fundamental embodiment of stability in the Church of the Saviour. The language used in

this commitment is intentionally strong and the preparation is purposefully arduous. They

have implemented a systematic program of walking with new members as they count the

cost of discipleship. This preparation is essential to the formation of the church as the

body of Christ and paves the way for the stability of the church. While this commitment

is extremely stable, it is not static.

> This means that we do not leave because we have wanderlust or need a change, or because the job opportunities are better in another city, or because the demands become too great, or because things have not turned out as we had hoped. The call to leave this fellowship has to be the call of the Lord confirmed in the heart of his people. As there was once a reception service, there is now a departure service—a farewell of a community to a brother (sic) who is called of God to do a work of God in another place.[41]

The Church of the Saviour seems to have found an effective balance between a firm

commitment to stability while maintaining an openness to the new things God may call

their members to pursue in His name. This balance is not only maintained by the

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[40] Ibid., 32-33.

[41] O'Connor, *Call to Commitment*, 40.

communal practice of discerning new direction described above, but also in the annual membership renewal ritual that all members participate in. Just as their initial commitment was proceeded by a season of preparation, each annual renewal rite also includes a season of reflection and prayerful self-examination. During the annual renewal service, each member recommits themselves to the disciplines and work required by the church.[42]

The high degree of commitment called for by the Church of the Saviour is an important example of how the practice of stability is a remedy for acedia because it is within this context that love can be learned and charity can be cultivated.

The final component in the Church of the Saviour's focus on cultivating love is a deeper and growing practice of their core disciplines, namely prayer, studying scripture, and connected and supportive relationships within the church.[43]

The Church of the Saviour has affirmed in teaching and in practice the essential nature of commitment to a local community. Through the preparation and discipline involved in this radical commitment the church creates an environment where relationships are founded on Jesus and his call to each individual member. As individuals commit themselves to Christ and his church they find a people and place to experience his love in a way that transforms them and their community. The ongoing commitment to this people and these disciplines constitutes a place where transforming love is cultivated and practiced. The Church of the Saviour is a contemporary example of how stability can

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[42] Ibid., 37-38.

[43] Ibid., 99-100.

be implemented and maintained in a North American local church context through the

development and implementation of a meaningful commitment to church membership.

Forgiveness Supports the Practice of Stability

The role of forgiveness in the practice of stability cannot be overstated. There was

a time when the ability to remain in community or choose the people we lived among was

largely determined by geography. However, with the availability of travel and the cultural

value of mobility and choice, we are no longer limited by our place of birth, or the

community our parents chose to settle in; our ability to remain in community is

determined by our ability to forgive. As Vanier says, "forgiveness is at the heart of

community."

> When I say that forgiveness is at the heart of community, I do not mean we have
> to learn to say simply, 'You're a nuisance but I forgive you.' it means discovering
> that I too am in part of the cause for your being a nuisance, because I have
> dominated you, hurt you, brought fear up in you or because I haven't listened to
> you, or was not open to you. Forgiveness is not just saying, 'I forgive you because
> you slammed the door.' It's also: 'I'm working on changing myself, because I
> have hurt you.' We're all wounded people, and so consciously or unconsciously
> we can and do hurt each other. At the heart of a caring community is forgiveness,
> one to another. This is a principle of growth. We are forgiving each other because
> we yearn to grow and to become like Jesus.[44]

This is not to say that forgiveness is easy, automatic, or can always lead to reconciliation.

It simply acknowledges that without a learned, habitual, intentional practice of

forgiveness, stable communities cannot be established or sustained. Echoing Vanier's

metaphor, De Waal says that forgiveness is at the heart of community because it is only

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[44] Vanier, 39-40.

through the difficult and transforming act of forgiving someone that freedom can be found, personal growth can take place, and wounds can be healed.[45]

The challenge for the church is not affirming the central role forgiveness has in the life of the Christ follower, for this is firmly established in the parables,[46] teaching,[47] and example[48] of Jesus. The challenge for the church is to make the practice of forgiveness tangible, intentional, and habitual. As Lewis Smedes reminds us, "Forgiving, when you come down to it, is an art, a practical art, maybe the most neglected of all the healing arts. It is the art of healing inner wounds inflicted by other people's wrongs."[49]

It may seem odd to speak of forgiveness as habit and community building because we typically emphasize it as the case-by-case choice of the harmed individual. If forgiveness is going to be marshalled in our battle against acedia however, the choice must be made to make forgiveness a habit. L. Gregory Jones speaks of forgiveness as a practice in service of stable communities when he writes,

> It may help to begin by recognizing that forgiveness is not simply a one-time action or an isolated feeling or thought. Rather, the Christian practice of forgiveness involves us in a whole way of life, a way that is shaped by an ever-deepening friendship with God and with other people. The practice of forgiveness is not only, or even primarily, a way of dealing with guilt. Instead, its central goal is to reconcile, to restore communion—with God, with one another, and with the whole creation. The practice of forgiveness calls us willingly to do things with and for one another so that communion can be restored. Forgiveness works through our ongoing willingness to give up certain claims against one another, to give the truth when we assess our relationships with one another, and to give gifts of ourselves by making innovative gestures that offer a future not bound by the

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[45] De Waal, 133.

[46] Matthew 18:23-35.

[47] Matthew 18:21-22 and Luke 17:3-5.

[48] Luke 23:34.

[49] Lewis B. Smedes, *The Art of Forgiving: When You Need to Forgive and Don't Know How* (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1996), xii-xiii

past. Being forgiven requires an ongoing willingness to honor a new claim that has been made on us, to speak with a new truthfulness, and to live in a new way with one another.[50]

In this summary, Jones draws our attention to key characteristics of forgiveness as a practice. First, forgiveness is an ongoing, repeated, habitual act. Throughout this project it has been asserted that the spiritual behaviors and virtues are crafted and learned in the same way all other skills and habits are formed. Jones asserts the same of forgiveness, calling for individuals to apprentice themselves in the craft of forgiveness, and that as we do so, even forgiveness can become habitual.[51]

Secondly, the practice of forgiveness is not about releasing guilt, forgetting the offence, or restoring the relationship to what it was before the offence occurred. Forgiveness in this context is about being reconciled to God, the community, and one another after an offence has occurred. This may mean a return to close, personal relationships, or it may mean safe and appropriate distance in a relationship because the relationship is now different than before. Whatever it may mean for the interpersonal interaction between the offender and offended moving forward, the practice of forgiveness moves through the following basic "three stages of forgiving … We rediscover the humanity of the person who hurt us. We surrender our right to get even. We revise our feelings toward the person we forgive."[52] As we learn these difficult and

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[50] Dorothy C. Bass, ed., *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for Searching People* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Inc. Publishers, 1997), 134-135.

[51] Ibid., 145.

[52] Smedes, 5-6.

painful processes, we must also "unlearn" the habits of thought, emotion, and interaction that our culture teaches us and calls us to claim as our right and privilege. [53]

The final aspect of Jones' summary that is essential to stability in community is the response of the forgiven to "honor the new claim that has been made on us."[54] The practice of forgiveness is not a one-way-street or an isolated expression of grace. The practice of forgiveness is a life-long pursuit of reconciliation with one's self, others, and with the God who has forgiven us. It is easy to focus only on the response of the victim when speaking of forgiveness, however, when we are speaking of the role of forgiveness in restoring loving communities, the role of the offender is just as critical. The victim needs the help and support of the community to learn new patterns of thought and response to offence, and the offender needs the help and support of the community to learn to live in a way in which they are free from the need and drive to offend.

The practice of forgiveness cultivates love in our lives and relationships.[55] God calls us to forgive others because we have been forgiven,[56] and that by our forgiveness we too will experience his grace.[57] Forgiveness is a loving, creating, redeeming act that transforms offences, injuries, and relationships. It can "create a new beginning out of past

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[53] Bass, 143.

[54] Ibid., 134-135.

[55] Proverbs 17:9.

[56] Colossians 3:13.

[57] Matthew 6:14-15 and Luke 6:36-38.

pain."[58] For a community to sustain stability, it will depend on this redeeming, re-creating habit of forgiveness.

The Habit of Forgiveness

A common example of a habit loop of forgiveness is;

Cue: I feel offended by someone at my local church

Craving: A peaceful environment to worship in with harmonious relationships

Response: Leave the existing church environment where I have been offended

Reward: Experience relief from awkward or hurt feelings during worship because of distance from offender

In many of our local churches, this habit loop is played out over and over again as people move from community to community searching for comfort and fellowship at their place of worship. The primary problem with this behavior is that peace and harmony only last until there is the perception of a new offence or a difficult relationship. Using the habit replacement model, a new habit loop must be constructed that can satisfy this ongoing craving. One example of a new habit loop could look like this;

Cue: I feel offended by someone at my local church

Craving: A peaceful environment to worship in with harmonious relationships

Response: Work through the steps of forgiveness within the community, seeking reconciliation of the situation

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[58] Bruce Buursma, "In the World of Human Error, Forgiveness is Divine, Theologian Says," *Chicago Tribune,* October 19, 1985, https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1985-10-19-8503110533-story.html.

Reward: A sustainable sense of peace and maturing relationships within the context of one's local church.

The Practice of Worship

The practice of worship is necessary for the cultivation of the virtue of charity because "the practices of Christian worship train our love … habituating us as citizens of the kingdom of God."[59] Worship has a mutually supportive relationship with stability because Christian worship requires time and consistency to accomplish its formational work. Stability relies upon worship to sustain the church by gathering her members together before God in the formational habits of song and scripture, praise and prayer, Word and Table. The habits and structure that constitute Christian worship coincidentally cultivate charity through Spirit empowered, God revealing narrative, and fight against acedia through acts of penitence and presence. The practice of worship is essential to the cultivation of charity because corporate worship is the primary means available to the local church for the purpose of re-storying the members of its congregation,[60] thus restoring their telos. Using the example of corporate confession as an example, in a weekly act of penitence and repentance the church is brought face-to-face with their sin and the grace and holiness of God. Following the act of confession, a declaration is made that God has indeed heard the cry for mercy and has responded by administering his grace.[61] In this one example, worship counters the thoughts of acedia by bringing the

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[59] Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 25.

[60] Ibid., 91-94.

[61] Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 106-110.

church to face her sin and assuring her that the God acedia says is distant and aloof has

indeed been present and attentive.

A Brief Introduction to the Practice of Worship

Corporate worship is the central activity and gathering of the church. This

gathering's potential antidote against the vice of acedia is its shape and structure, which

can be formational in allowing these primary habits to reform one's loves in virtuous

ways.

James K. A. Smith calls the church to return to a vibrant liturgy as the means of

formation and restoration. Smith's work draws the church and its members into a long-

term project of learning, practicing, and entering the story of God through worship. Smith

claims that "Christian worship rehabituates our loves because it embeds us in—and

embeds in us—a different orienting Story, the story of God in Christ reconciling the

world to himself."[62] Or as N. T. Wright says, worship "expresses and in turn reinforces

the faith, hope, and love which are themselves the key Christian virtues … worship is

central, basic, and in the best sense habit-forming."[63]

In *Desiring the Kingdom*, Smith develops the idea of competing liturgies and their

impact on our lives. He first points us to the liturgy of the culture around us, through

which we are discipled in the love of self and the practices of consumerism and

materialism.[64] Smith calls the church to return to worship's historic liturgical practices

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[62] Ibid., 106.

[63] Wright. *Virtue Reborn*, 194.

[64] Smith. *Desiring the Kingdom*, 75-129 and *You Are What You Love*, 27-55.

that have the power to re-form our hearts and return our love to the love of God and

neighbor. While his description of liturgy and historic practices are accurate and inspiring

not every church will adopt a formal liturgical style of worship. Smith's message is that

as we reclaim the understanding of the way our lives and loves are de-formed by the

liturgies of our culture, we can begin the process of re-forming a habitus that can restore

those entrapped in acedia and habituate them into the life of a beloved child of God.[65] The

focus of this recovery is the narrative arc of Christian worship and the basic habits that

support it.[66]

The narrative arc of Christian worship is the basic, fundamental structure of a

gathering of individuals that constitutes it as both Christian and worship. It is specific

enough to be recognizable and flexible enough to accommodate a wide range of worship

styles. The basic elements of the narrative arc of Christian worship are gathering,

listening, communing, and sending.[67] In this basic structure, the story of God and God's

people is the engine of the gathering and that God is the primary instigator and actor.[68] In

the gathering, the congregation is reminded that God is the one that has convened the

meeting, drawn us together, and set apart this time and space for a specific encounter. As

the congregation listens to the Word, God speaks as scripture is read and the Spirit is at

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[65] Smith. *Desiring the Kingdom*, 85-88 and *Imagining the Kingdom*, 186-189

[66] Smith. *You Are What You Love*, 83-103 and *Desiring the Kingdom*, 155-214.

[67] Smith. *You Are What You Love*, 96-99. See also Robert Webber's summary of these four movements as "assembling the people, Scripture readings and preaching, breaking bread and pouring wine along with prayers of thanksgiving, and sending the people forth. … One can study the history of worship from the early church to the present and discover, without exception, that Sunday worship has always been characterized by these four acts." Robert E. Webber, *Worship Old and New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 150.

[68] Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 96-97. See also Webber, 153-161.

work in the lives of those who hear.[69] Once the congregation has heard from God, Christ's presence and sacrifice are remembered in the communing movement of the service as the sacrament is received with thanksgiving.[70] In the sending, God's people are blessed and dispersed as salt and light in the world.[71]

There are other elements that can, and should, be incorporated into this basic structure but these are open to the influence of content, structure, style, and tradition.[72] Christian worship is a unique kind of gathering, characterized by a specific shape, and designed for a particular purpose. The reason this gathering is essential to the recovery from acedia is that Christian worship is the most effective method available to the church today for the re-storying of its members.

Practicing Worship in the Local Church

The practice of worship in a local church context is a complex and contextual undertaking. One example of a church that has undertaken the project of constructing a habitus of worship is Oak Hills church. *Renovation of the Church* is the story of the journey this community of faith made from being a typical protestant, evangelical church oriented to growth as evidenced by weekend worship service attendance, to a community oriented to the telos of spiritual formation in Christ and participation in the Kingdom of

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[69] Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 97-98. See also Webber, 163-172.

[70] Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 98. See also Webber, 173-189.

[71] Smith, *You Are What You*, 98-99. See also Webber, 191-194.

[72] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 155-214. See also Webber, 149-152.

God.[73] In this journey, the worship gathering that was once organized around the preferences of the people the church was trying to attract became a gathering organized around rehearsing the story of God and inviting the church to "root the smaller story of our lives into the larger story of God's ongoing redemption of humanity and this universe."[74]

The leadership of Oak Hills embarked on a project to recover their worship gatherings from the preference driven approach they had designed to attract seekers and speak to their felt needs. They began to restructure their gatherings according to the fourfold structure listed above and to prioritize the content over the style.[75] During this transition they had several parishioners express concern and disappointment that the worship services were no longer oriented to their preferences and perceived needs, resulting in some leaving Oak Hills for other local churches.[76] Co-Pastors and authors Mike Leuken and Kent Carlson are candid in their account of this transition about the sorrow and pain of the loss of numbers during the changes. However, they also bear witness to the transformation of lives (including their own) that has occurred as members of their church become more like Christ.

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[73] Kent Carlson and Mike Leuken, *Renovating the Church: What Happens When a Seeker Church Discovers Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove, IN: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 37-51.

[74] Ibid., 149.

[75] Ibid., 153-158.

[76] Ibid., 153-154.

The Habit of the Public Reading of Scripture

The public reading of scripture is largely disappearing from many evangelical churches as a central feature of worship. When scripture is read it is often presented as the subject or inspiration for the sermon. This development has created the sense that the singing, praying, and gathering practices of the gathered community constitute the worship of the church and the proclamation of the Word constitutes the teaching of the church,[77] reducing the purpose of scripture in this context to "the giving of information, instruction, or exhortation."[78] This misunderstanding is in need of correction in order for the practice of worship to be able to help the congregation recover from acedia.

The purpose of the public reading of scripture is to enact[79] the story of scripture among God's people in such a way that the story in the text becomes the story of their lives.

> Over time, when worship confronts us with the canonical range of Scripture, coupled with its proclamation and elucidation in the sermon, we begin to absorb the story as a moral or ethical compass—not because it discloses to us abstract, ahistorical moral axioms, but because it narrates the telos of creation, the shape of the kingdom we're looking for, thus filling in the telos of our own action. We begin to absorb the plot of the story, begin to see ourselves as characters within it; the habits and practices of its heroes function as exemplars, providing guidance as we are trained in virtue, becoming a people with a disposition to 'the good' as it's envisioned in the story. Because we are storytelling animals, imbibing the story of Scripture is the primary way that our desire gets aimed at the kingdom.[80]

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[77] Webber, 169-170.

[78] Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 132.

[79] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 195.

[80] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 196.

Jim Fodor picks up on these themes and articulates the power of scripture saying, "Through the liturgical reading of Scripture, Christians become educated, schooled, and trained into a new way of seeing and being. Reading is the pivotal rite of dislocation—of re-orientation by dislocation, if you will—whereby one's identity becomes radically transposed."[81] The public reading of scripture, week after week, forms the story of God in our hearts and minds and rescues our identity from the cultural narratives we are surrounded by. This happens through the act of hearing the story, in part because when scripture is read aloud it is "enacted"[82] and embodied for us and to us. Fodor argues that the modern understanding of reading as extracting information from text on a page through one's eyes is a mistaken understanding of the power and process of reading. Rather, reading is a bodily, social, communal engagement with a text[83] that is

> unavoidably bodily and communal in character; it is at once ethically formative and identity-constituting, which means that reading is a practice made intelligible only with regard to a larger form of life. Reading is never simply a cognitive decoding of written signs, a logical assessment of linguistic content, or following an argument; … it is incarnational. Reading 'enfleshes' the Word; reading gives human form to the Word in space and time. Part of what it means for Christians to read, then, involves a life-long apprenticeship, the peculiar habits, gestures, and practices of which constitute Christian experience. Learning to read Christianly means conforming oneself to and being united with the ceaseless, gracious act of God's utterance, which is God's very own self-offering Word in Jesus Christ.[84]

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[81] Hauerwas and Wells, 162.

[82] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 195.

[83] Hauerwas and Wells, 163.

[84] Hauerwas and Wells, 168.

While there are many questions of style and congregational variations posed in response to Fodor's article,[85] the intentional and habitual reading of scripture in corporate worship remains an integral means of proclaiming the story of God that re-forms our identity in Christ.

Restoring the public reading of scripture will naturally mean that the rituals that currently occupy this place will be shortened and become less prominent. This may cause a sense of loss, confusion, or even anger in some members of our congregations. Leuken and Carlson address this experience, having made this transition in their local context saying,

> Is our worship centered on God and his story, or on my devotion and authentic praise? Obviously, we hope both aspects are present in our worship, but in a culture that is clearly oriented around the insatiable demands of the self, we must make certain that our worship begins with and is built around the story of God. Worship is primarily about what God has done and is doing through Christ.[86]

The work of recovering the habit of reading scripture publicly will be difficult, but necessary. Eugene Peterson beautifully illustrates the transformation that is necessary in this endeavor using the metaphor of "turning eyes into ears."[87] If the church is going to recover from acedia it must recover the reading and hearing of the Word of God.

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[85] Ibid., 544. In this afterward, Jennifer Herdt poses a list of questions to the article Fodor wrote for the Companion, including "Who may read the Gospel? Who may preach? How is gendered language used in relation to God? If the Gospel is retold by a lay storyteller instead of by a presiding clergy member, or if individual congregation members bring their own Bible and follow along with the readings as opposed to simply listening, are these insignificant differences?"

[86] Carlson and Leuken, 158.

[87] Eugene Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 87-105.

Introducing the Public Reading of Scripture

The public reading of scripture will be a new habit to introduce in corporate worship for many churches. As such, it will need to be implemented and enacted by those with the responsibility to organize and conduct the worship gathering. In the beginning, this new behavior will be foreign and may produce growing pains, however, with the proper education, encouragement, and persistence scripture can be restored to a place of prominence and power in the life of a congregation.

Cue: the church gathered for worship,

Craving: desire for the church to participate in, and be spiritually formed by the proclamation and rehearsal of the story of God.

Response: scripture proclaimed in reading and preaching the narrative of scripture over time.

Reward: a renewed identity and understanding the world around me formed through God's Word.

The Practice of Discernment

The practice of discernment is essential to the habitus that resists acedia and forms charity because through it we learn to hear God's voice and consistently recognize the thoughts of Evagrius's demons. One of the greatest challenges in the battle against acedia is the multiple symptoms it produces, and the wisdom required to apply the correct remedial action. The practice of discernment nurtures the relational skills and spiritual discipline to clearly hear God's voice and understand his will for us.

A Brief Introduction to the Practice of Discernment

There are many definitions and descriptions of discernment in the literature. For example, Frank Rogers Jr. says that "Discernment is the intentional practice by which a community or individual seeks, recognizes and intentionally takes part in the activity of God in concrete situations."[88] Brian O'Leary's description is also helpful,

> Discernment may be defined as a conscious experience of God's grace drawing one to a course of action or exposing the influence that a projected course of action will have on one's relationship to God in Christ. It is not, therefore, some kind of generalized awareness of God or of his presence, but an insertion into a process—the process of finding and owning the will of God or, in other words, of Christian decision making.[89]

David Lonsdale draws out discernment's practice by using the illustration of two paths that lie before us. One path leads to the abundant life God calls us to by his grace while the other pathway is dehumanizing and leads to death. The ability to choose between these paths in one's day-to-day circumstances and walk the path that leads to life is his picture of discernment.[90]

These statements all point us to the same reality: that we have many choices to make and many voices seeking to influence us in one direction or another. Discernment is the acknowledgement that one of these persistent voices is God's and that we can learn to hear his voice clearly among the others. Like the foundational understanding of stability, discernment relies upon the spiritual understanding that God is present with us and that

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[88] Bass, 107.

[89] Brian O'Leary, "Discernment and Decision Making," *Review for Religious* 51 (Jan-Feb. 1992): 56, http://cdm.slu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/rfr/id/339. See also Paul Wilkes, *Beyond the Walls: Monastic Wisdom for Everyday Life* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1999), 111.

[90] David Lonsdale, *Listening to the Music of the Spirit: The Art of Discernment* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1992), 51.

our current place and pathway is the best place and pathway to encounter him and

experience his love. Discernment includes a second, complimentary assertion that there

are "real and accessible ways … to know the will of God for our lives."[91] These real and

accessible ways must be established in the church that hopes to recover from acedia and

cultivate charity.

> Testing our thoughts is, according to Evagrius, the starting point for discernment,
>
> We must take care to recognize the different types of demons and take note of the circumstances of their coming. We shall know these from our thoughts (which we shall know from the objects) we ought to consider which of the demons are less frequent in their assaults, which are the more vexatious, which are the ones which yield the field more readily and which the more resistant. Finally we should note which are the ones which make sudden raids and snatch off the spirit to blasphemy. Now it is essential to understand these matters so that when these various evil thoughts set their own proper forces to work we are in a position to address effective words against them, that is to say, those words which correctly characterize the one present. And we must do this before they drive us out of our own state of mind. In this manner we shall make ready progress, by the grace of God. We shall pack them off chafing with chagrin and marveling at our perspicacity.[92]

In response to the eight demons and their thoughts, Evagrius developed a catalogue of

scriptures to use to combat these evil thoughts and preserve the monk by their use. John

Eudes Bamberger articulates the purpose of this catalogue well saying,

> A demon presents an evil thought to us and we have the power to put a stop to it. If we do not, but instead allow it to persist, it will lead us into evil action. *Talking Back's* arsenal of biblical verses provides a means for preventing a demonically inspired first movement from developing into a full-fledged passion and thus into sin… But the goal of the Evagrian monk is not simply to avoid evil deeds; remarkably, he seeks not to experience the first movements that incite to sin at

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[91] Wilkes, 114.

[92] Evagrius, *The Praktikos*, 28.

all… The biblical verses he provides in this book are designed, as he puts it, to 'cut off' their corresponding thoughts.[93]

Once one becomes adept at recognizing the particular way acedia assaults them as an individual, the passages that address that tactic can be meditated upon and committed to memory for increased effectiveness in their personal battle with acedia. For instance,

Against the soul's thoughts that have been set in motion by listlessness (acedia) and want to abandon the holy path of the illustrious ones and its dwelling place: 'For you need endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. For yet 'in a very little while the one who is coming will come and will not delay; but my righteous one will live by faith. My soul takes no pleasure in anyone who shrinks back.' (Heb. 10:36-38).[94]

A second component to the Evagrian prescription to combat acedia is the gift of tears. Lost in our contemporary sensibility is a sense of godly sorrow for the state of lostness and sin we are in before the grace of God is encountered. In *Praktikos,* Evagrius gives the vivid metaphor of "dividing the soul in two" as the appropriate and effective response to meeting with acedia.[95] The practice of being confronted with the gravity of one's sin and the overwhelming grace of God is used to bring the victim of acedia face-to-face with the love of God that has redeemed them and rescued them from a place where they could not rescue themselves. As Evagrius says,

Pray first for the gift of tears so that by means of sorrow you may soften your native rudeness. Then having confessed your sins to the Lord you will obtain pardon for them. Pray with tears and your request will find a hearing. Nothing so gratifies the Lord as supplication offered in the midst of tears. Though fountains of tears flow during your prayers do not begin to consider yourself better than

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[93] Evagrius, trans. David Brakke, *Talking Back (Antirrhetikos): A Monastic Handbook for Combatting Demons* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 26. One thing to note, in Brakke's translation, chapter 6 is called "Against the thoughts of the Demon of Listlessness." Dysinger translates listlessness as acedia in his translation located here, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/07_Antirrhet/00a_start.htm. It is clear from the symptoms addressed in chapter 6, that acedia is in view.

[94] Evagrius, *Talking Back*, 145.

[95] Evagrius, *The Praktikos*, 23.

others. For your prayers have merely obtained the help you need to confess your sins with readiness and to conciliate the favor of the Lord.[96]

One model that can be practiced to experience the godly sorrow and tears Evagrius is calling for is found in the exercises of St. Ignatius. In his spiritual exercises, Ignatius gives rules and practices to help followers of Jesus develop spiritual discernment. One key component of Ignatius' exercises echoes what Evagrius calls testing our thoughts; it is the identification and response to desolations and consolations. In Ignatius's teaching he describes consolations and desolations as follows,

> I call it consolation when the soul is aroused by an interior movement which causes it to be inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord, and consequently can love no created thing on the face of the earth for its own sake, but only in the creator of all things. It is likewise consolation when one sheds tears inspired by love of the Lord, whether it be sorrow for sins or because of the passion of Christ our Lord, or for any other reason that is directly connected to His service and praise. Finally, I call consolation and increase of faith, hope and charity … inspiring it with peace and quiet in Christ our Lord.
> I call desolation all that is … darkness of the soul, turmoil of the mind, inclination to low and earthly things, restlessness resulting from many disturbances and temptations which lead to a loss of faith, loss of hope, and loss of love. It is also desolation when a soul finds itself completely apathetic, tepid, sad, and separated as it were, from its Creator and Lord.[97]

This outline of consolations and desolations, and the accompanying habits that can discern between them, are invaluable to the practice of discernment as a remedy to acedia as they act as a guide to understanding the correct response to our impulses and desires. There are times when the proper response to acedia is to rest and be still, while at other times, the symptoms may call for work and discipline. Ignatian practices of discerning

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[96] Ibid., 36.

[97] Ignatius of Loyola, trans. Anthony Motola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: St. Ignatius' Profound Precepts of Mystical Theology* (New York, NY: Image Books, 1964), 129-130.

consolations and desolations give the church a practical pattern of gaining clarity and understanding into these complex and perplexing patterns.

A specific example of the discernment process outlined by Ignatius is found in the Second Exercise of Week One. In this prayer pattern, the individual is confronted with the gravity of their sin and led to an experience of godly sorrow and tears.

> The Second Exercise
> This is a meditation on sin…
> I shall here beg for an ever increasing and intense sorrow and tears for my sin.
> The first point is the review of my sins. I shall recall to mind all the sins of my life, looking at them year by year, and period by period.
> The second point is to weigh my sins, considering the loathsomeness and malice that every mortal sin committed has in itself, even though it were not forbidden.
> The third point is to consider who I am and abase myself by these examples:
> 1. What am I in comparison to all men?
> 2. What are men in comparison with the angels and saints in heaven?
> 3. What is all creation in comparison with God? Then myself alone, what can I be?
> 4. Let me consider all my own corruption and foulness of body.
> 5. Let me see myself as a sore and an abscess from whence have come forth so many sins, so many evils, and the most vile poison.
> The fourth point is now to consider who God is against whom I have sinned, recalling His attributes and comparing them to their contraries in me: His wisdom to my ignorance; His omnipotence to my weakness; His justice with my iniquity, His goodness with my sinfulness.
> The fifth point is to be struck with amazement and filled with a growing emotion as I consider how creatures have suffered me to live, and have sustained me in life.
> I will end this meditation with a colloquy directing my thoughts to God's mercy. I will give thanks to Him for having granted me life until now, and I will resolve with the help of His grace to amend my life for the future.[98]

As much as this practice may run contrary to our modern sensibility and emphasis on seeker sensitivity, for the one assailed by acedia it can be a first step to shedding light on the lies of the enemy in order to fully receive the grace and love God is offering.

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[98] Ignatius, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, 56-57.

Practicing Discernment in the Local Church

The model developed by Ruth Haley Barton in *Pursuing God's Will Together* is a good practice to begin with as it introduces Christian discernment to a group with the intention of leading it to consistent obedience to God's will.

Barton's model of discernment begins with the assertion that discerning groups are made up of discerning individuals. This may seem like an obvious foundation, but Barton rightly points out that many church leaders want to skip this essential work and move right into a model that will magically fix their current church situation. Rather than falling into this trap, Barton dedicates a significant portion of this book to the spiritual formation of each individual in the decision-making group as the essential preparatory work for becoming a discerning church.[99]

The first step in becoming a community that practices discernment is cultivating individuals that know how to hear and obey God's will. To this end, Barton outlines a basic series of spiritual disciplines that groups can collect into an agreed upon rule of life they will support one another in following. These practices include silence, solitude, engaging with the Scriptures, prayer, self-examination, and self-knowledge.[100] Added to these basic spiritual disciplines, Barton calls leadership groups that desire to know how to discern God's will together to commit to five foundational beliefs. They are: a commitment to the trinitarian nature of the practice of discernment, the need to cultivate the good grace and desire for discernment, a deep belief in the goodness of God, the

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[99] Ruth Haley Barton, *Pursuing God's Will Together: A Discernment Practice for Leadership Groups* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 37-38.

[100] Barton, 38-46.

realization that love is the highest calling to be pursued, and a commitment to be obedient to God's will once it has been clearly understood.[101] Once these individual practices and commitments are established in the lives of the participants, the focus on the communal practice of discernment can begin.

The preparation for community discernment continues as the small group of leaders who have been learning to discern God's will for themselves as individuals come together to begin to discern God's will for their community. For Barton, the cornerstone of this foundation is a commitment to the understanding that spiritual leadership is fundamentally different than secular leadership. As a spiritual community, the church is not trying to be effective or build high-functioning teams, nor does the church gather around a mission, plan, or goal. Rather, the church gathers around the person of Christ in order to know his voice, be obedient to his will, and become like him.[102] Pursing this end requires a process of clarifying values, committing to a common practice, and entering into covenantal community with one another.[103] Once this has been established, the practice of group discernment can begin.

Group discernment has four movements. The first movement is focused on preparation and includes gathering the necessary information for making a wise decision, clarifying the questions to be discerned, and affirming the values and principles of the group.[104] The second movement outlines a series of prayer practices designed to bring the

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[101] Ibid., 53-56.

[102] Barton, 76-77.

[103] Ibid., 80.

[104] Ibid., 173-186.

group to a place of humility and unity before God and each other.[105] In the third

movement, the group begins to listen to one another and to God through a series of

practices including silence, observing inner dynamics of consolation and desolation, and

seeking inner confirmation of decisions being made.[106] The final movement of this

discernment process is the implementation of the decision the group has made, including

communication and execution of the plans.[107] The main point of this process is that

spiritual leadership is not about getting people to follow our leadership, "it is about

putting ourselves and guiding the group into a position to be led by Christ, who is the true

head of the church."[108]

    If the church is going to develop a friendship with God, it must first be able to

discern his voice corporately and equip the members to hear his voice individually.

Barton's model effectively outlines an individual spiritual practice of discernment and

makes it practical and communal. In many Christian traditions there is no agreed upon

pattern or practice of corporate discernment. Without this commonly understood practice

the community lacks a consistent method of hearing, understanding, and ultimately

obeying God's will.

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[105] Ibid., 187-200.

[106] Ibid., 201-222.

[107] Ibid., 225-227.

[108] Ibid., 189.

The Habit of Perseverance in Prayer

One of the key strategies for overcoming the vice of acedia is persistence in prayer. During the seasons in our lives when acedia besets us, one of the most difficult things to do is pray. There are several reasons for this, including distraction, perceived distance from God, and weariness. In these seasons, Evagrius prescribes simple persistence and endurance.[109] St. Ignatius gives similar advice to those undertaking his exercises; however, he follows his exhortation to persistence with a call to increase one's energy and discipline in core disciplines that lead to recovery from desolation (of which acedia is one form). These core disciplines include prayer, meditation, self-examination, and penance.[110] The habitual practice of prayer and self-examination that will be essential to the church's recovery from acedia will combine fixed-hour prayer (the daily office or praying the hours) and the prayer of examen.

Fixed-hour Prayer:
While Barton prescribes several types of prayer in her discernment model, if the church is going to recover from acedia it will need to begin by recovering a specific pattern of prayer modeled in the monastery. Monastic prayer has consistently centered on fixed-hour prayer centered on the Psalms. Praying the Psalms in this manner gives one a new language, posture, and resources to draw on in times of difficulty, sorrow, and distress.

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[109] Gabriel Bunge, *Despondency: The Spiritual Tecahing of Evagrius Ponticus on Acedia* (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2012), 91-92.

[110] Timothy M. Gallagher, *The Discernment of Spirits: An Ignatian Guide to Everyday Living* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2005), 85.

One of the controlling metaphors for praying the Psalms at fixed hours is the imagery of a school or gymnasium,[111] where we learn the language and rhythms of a prayerful life. Norris summarizes the liturgy of the hours as follows,

> At dawn, lauds reminds us of our need to renew, remember, and recommit our lives to their proper purpose… Noon prayer is a time to briefly rest from our labors, and take stock as we prepare for the demands of the afternoon. As sunset approaches, vespers is a surrendering of contention, a willingness to surrender the day, and let God bring on the quiet, brooding darkness in which dreams will wrestle with and nurture our souls. Every night compline invites us to be like the farmer of the Gospel parable, to admit to the limitations of our consciousness, and submit to the realm of God.[112]

This habitual form of prayer schools us in many profound ways, and trains us in the rhythms and rigors of being a friend of God. However, in our battle with acedia, praying the Psalms at fixed hours comes to our aid in four specific ways.

First, praying the Psalms at fixed hours teaches us the language of prayer in a season where words may be hard to find. The place we learn this new language is in the Psalms. The Psalms are the "great and sprawling university that Hebrews and Christians have attended to learn to answer God, to learn to pray. The Psalms were the prayer book of Israel; they were the prayer book of Jesus; they are the prayer book of the church."[113] Continuing in his description of the Psalms as a school of language, Peterson says,

> I need a language that is large enough to maintain continuities, supple enough to express nuances across a lifetime that brackets child and adult experiences, and courageous enough to explore all the countries of sin and salvation, mercy and grace, creation and covenant, anxiety and trust, unbelief and faith that comprise the continental human condition. The Psalms are this large, supple and

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[111] Eugene Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration of Vocational Holiness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 105.

[112] Norris, 193.

[113] Peterson, *Working the Angles*, 50.

courageous language. …If we insist on being self-taught in prayer, our prayers, however eloquent, will be meagre.[114]

Second, praying the Psalms at fixed hours binds us to a greater community at a time when we feel dislocated and searching for the right place to be. "The Psalms are a practical school for life with God, teaching language by immersion and inviting us into the lived reality of a community's story."[115] Hartgrove continues, "The God we learn to talk to in the Psalms is our God, binding us to a placed people. Singing their songs, we are invited to practice a craft that makes us into a community in the place where we are."[116] Norris bears witness to the communal aspect of fixed hour praying, even when she could not actively pray herself.

> I believed in the reality of God's providence and love, even when I did not sense its presence in my own life. And I could appreciate as never before the gift of Christian community… If I could not pray, I know that the Benedictines were praying. Throughout the world, in whatever time zone, all day long, every day, they were expressing and honoring the utter stability of God's love.[117]

Third, praying the Psalms at fixed hours transforms our concept of time when acedia has come to distort it. Chittister summarizes this distortion of time due to a lack of prayer in a way that is thoroughly in keeping with the descriptions of Evagrius. In a state of prayerlessness one can lose sight of even the most basic commitments of vocation and family, becoming too weary and discouraged to engage in the very work that would provide the context and resources to be whole: prayer.[118] Benedict's call to prayer at

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[114] Ibid., 56-57.

[115] Wilson-Hartgrove, 66.

[116] Ibid., 68.

[117] Norris, 237.

[118] Joan Chittister, *Wisdom Distilled From the Daily: Living the Rule of St. Benedict Today* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row Publishers, 1990), 29-30.

regular intervals of the day serves as a reminder that God has placed us in the location

and circumstances we are in to grow in his love and experience the grace of his presence.

As acedia seeks to strip time of meaning, "Benedictine spirituality… fills time with an

awareness of the presence of God."[119] Hartgrove picks up on the theme of time and

prayer, tying our practice of praying the Psalms and our submission to a daily rhythm to

the prayer and praise of all creation saying,

> It is the great rhythm of the prayer of the Office which becomes the rhythm of one's own person. The divine Office for Benedictines is the Opus Dei—the work of God—that is all of creation's true work. The trees of the fields clap their hands, deep calls out to deep, and even stones are poised to cry out in praise to the Creator. … When Benedictines sing the Psalter and pray the prayers of the church on a fixed schedule, it is their privilege to devote their whole lives to the work for which every creature was made. The rhythm of their life together serves as an invitation to those of us outside the monastery: come and see how life with God reorders our relationship with time.
> But this invitation comes at a time in human history when we are at odds with Father Time. For many of us in contemporary society, technology enables our desire to transcend the limitations of a twenty-four-hour day. We eschew any rhythm of life in hopes of doing everything at once.[120]

Finally, praying the Psalms at fixed hours anchors our soul in God when we are in

a storm of despair, spiritual crisis, and loss of hope. Terry Waite, an Anglican envoy who

was kidnapped and held hostage for four years, bears witness to the role of fixed hour

prayer in even the most desperate and extreme situations. Waite went to Beirut to

negotiate the release of hostages and found himself betrayed, taken captive, and

imprisoned alone in a basement. He spent the next four years chained to a wall,

interrogated and beaten, and completely alone. He speaks of the initial fixation of being

released immanently and the disappointment and despair that can set in when that doesn't

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[119] Ibid., 30.

[120] Wilson-Hartgrove, 70.

happen.[121] When he describes his solitary confinement, Waite attributes his emotional and

mental survival to the prayers he learned as a child in the Anglican Church. In an

interview with the Anglican Communion News Service, Waite describes the anchoring

effect of these prayers as follows,

> As a boy in church, sitting in the quire - Sunday by Sunday - I thought often I was
> bored, he said. Often the sermons meant nothing to me. They seemed to float over
> my head. I didn't think I was learning anything but, years later in captivity, the
> language came back. I had no books, no prayer book, but I could remember the
> services of the church: they were there. They were stored in my memory, and I
> could draw on them. He said he did not engage in extemporaneous prayer in the
> dark solitude of his hostage life, fearing that in doing so he would 'give voice to
> depression and despair,' so he resolved to stick with his memorised collects.
> Those prayers and the services of the church, he said in an interview, also gave
> him the opportunity to be in community even during his more than three years of
> strict isolation. It was a great comfort for him, he said, to feel part of the
> worldwide cycle of prayer that Anglicans were saying with him each day of his
> captivity.[122]

Norris describes a similar experience in the desperate times of her life. During a season of

crisis in her marriage and in her husband's physical/emotional health, Norris recounts the

following experience while on her way to visit her husband in the psychiatric hospital.

> Unaccountably consoled, I was grateful that without my willing it, or being aware
> of how it had happened, the liturgy of the hours I had prayed was having its
> desired effect. The words were now a part of me, and when I most needed them,
> the rhythms of my walking had stirred them up, to erode my anxiety and self-pity,
> and remind me that blessings may be found in all things.[123]

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[121] Sheridan Voysey, "Terry Waite: Faith Held Hostage," *Open House Interviews,* April 24, 2013, https://hope1032.com.au/stories/open-house/2013/terry-waite-break-my-body-bend-my-mind-but-my-soul-is-not-yours-to-possess/.

[122] Dan Webster, "Terry Waite Urges Church to be a Voice for Peace," *Anglican Communion News Service,* May 8, 2003, https://www.anglicannews.org/news/2003/05/terry-waite-urges-church-to-be-a-voice-for-peace.aspx.

[123] Norris, 90.

A final example comes from the experience of Jonah in the belly of the whale. Peterson notes that his desperate prayer is in the form and vocabulary of a Psalm. Peterson wonders at Jonah's prayer noting that it is not what we would expect; an extemporaneous cry for help. Peterson concludes that Jonah was thoroughly schooled in the Psalms, and that through this education "He was capable of prayer that was adequate to the largeness of the God with whom he was dealing."[124]

In the church's battle against acedia, the recommended habitus must include a process of learning to pray in this school, in the gymnasium of the Psalms. To this end, a starting point is three primary hours of prayer; morning, mid-day, and evening. These hours will rely on the Psalms for their content and will be paired with the Ignatian practice of the Examen as outlined below.

The Prayer of Examen:
In Evagruis's teaching, the monks were instructed to test their thoughts as a means to overcome the assaults of the many demons that would come against them. The most effective method of bringing this ancient imperative to bear on our current context, marshalling this practice against the demon of acedia, is through the Ignatian practice of the prayer of Examen.

The prayer of Examen is a series of reflection questions one works through with God three times each day. In the morning, the form of the Examen focuses one's heart and mind on a specific grace one is seeking to experience, or a sin/vice one is trying to overcome. At mid-day and evening there is a pause for a prayer of Examen where one reviews the events and interactions of the day thus far, evaluating the progress or lack

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[124] Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant*, 101-102.

thereof toward the goals explored in the morning Examen. Progress and failings are noted and grace is sought as one continues to walk through their day.[125]

The Examen follows a five-step process intended to lead one into God's presence, facilitate a dialogue and lead one into the rest of the day, knowing God's presence is with them and experiencing the joy that this presence brings. While there may be a variety of ways of articulating the five steps, the general arrangement is as follows:

> Transition: I become aware of the love with which God looks upon me as I begin this examen.
> Step One: Gratitude. I note the gifts that God's love has given me this day, and I give thanks for them.
> Step Two: Petition. I ask God for an insight and a strength that will make this examen a work of grace, fruitful beyond my human capacity alone.
> Step Three: Review. With my God, I review the day. I look for the stirrings in my heart and the thoughts that God has given me this day. I also look for those that have not been of God. I review my choices in response to both, and through the day in general.
> Step Four: Forgiveness. I ask for the healing touch of the forgiving God who, with love and respect for me, removes my heart's burdens.
> Step Five: Renewal. I look to the following day and, with God, plan concretely how to live it in accord with God's loving desire for my life.
> Transition: Aware of God's presence with me, I prayerfully conclude the examen.[126]

During this habitual pause for prayerful reflection a variety of thoughts, emotions, and memories may arise. The goal of this discipline is to learn to understand the source and meaning of these and to draw upon God's resources to respond with wisdom and courage. Understanding and anticipating these varied experiences, Ignatius gives some rules for understanding and responding to "consolations and desolations."[127] In the

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[125] Larry Warner, *Journey With Jesus: Discovering the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 29-31.

[126] Timothy M. Gallagher, *The Examen Prayer: Ignatian Wisdom for our Lives Today* (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2006), 25.

[127] Ignatius of Loyola, 129-130.

"Rules of Discernment" that follow his general description of consolations and desolations, Ignatius instructs those practicing his exercises: never make changes or decisions when experiencing desolation (rule 5), persist in the resolutions one has made and increase in prayer, meditation etc. in desolation (rule 6), rely on the grace of the Lord even in His perceived absence (rule 7), and continue in patience endurance in the activities listed in rule 6 as a way to resist temptations during desolation (rule 8).[128] These rules not only agree with the admonitions of Evagrius, they give practical resources to those who would endure and overcome acedia in our current context.

Journaling:

There is one final habit that, when coupled with the prayer of examen, solidifies one's intention and helps quantify one's progress in the faith: the habit of journaling. Timothy M. Gallagher suggests that "writing our interior experience helps us to understand that experience itself more deeply. Such writing may assist us in discovering patterns in our experience that we may not perceive in the day, but emerge with clarity over time.[129] Larry Warner gets a little more specific with his directions on journaling, suggesting that the failures and feelings that emerge in the daily process of praying the examen should be captured in writing at each session. These movements are then charted, and comparisons made to help patterns and trends emerge.[130] Warner goes on to suggest that a journal is an excellent place to record consolations and desolations.

> Ignatius tells us that prior consolations are a great resource during times of desolation, and journaling can help you to recall precious consolations. As you journal through times of desolation, God can bring insight that can enable you to

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[128] Ibid., 130.

[129] Gallagher, 133.

[130] Warner, 31.

escape the despair and discouragement desolation can bring and will help stir the embers of faith, hope and love that remain in your heart.[131]

The role of writing in the formation of habits is being shown to have transforming power. In his research into habits and habit formation, Duhigg cites a study in which participants struggling with obesity lose twice as much weight as their peers based primarily on the use of a food journal.[132] Just as keeping a food journal can be a formational habit in one's health and lifestyle, keeping a prayer journal can be a means of transformation and growth in one's spiritual life.

The Habit of Perseverance in Prayer

For most lay people outside the monastic tradition, praying the Psalms at fixed hours will not be a matter of replacing their current prayer rhythms or routines, rather, it will be a process of establishing a new habit. This new habit will be solidified by keeping a simple journal that records one's interaction with God through the Psalms and reflection upon God's presence with them throughout the day as they are led through the prayer of Examen.

Developing this habit will require an individual to identify the morning, mid-day, and evening cues to start and support the daily rhythm, remembering that the cue must be obvious, and the intended response must be possible. The following example will illustrate a habit loop for a morning prayer habit.

Cue: brew first cup of coffee after waking up

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[131] Ibid., 34.

[132] Duhigg, 120-121. Duhigg cites a second study of patients recovering from orthopedic surgery. Those who wrote out their goals and their specifc plans for exercise were walking twice as fast as others and were getting up unassisted three times as fast. (p 141-144).

Craving: encounter with God and an understanding of his will

Response: sit in the same area of your home every morning (a comfortable armchair),

pray through the morning office, and reflect on the Examen questions in a journal (the

prayer book, journal, and pen are kept on the table adjacent to the armchair)

Reward: an encounter with God and an awareness of his leading and guidance.

The Practice of Obedience

The final practice in the construction of the habitus is obedience. Obedience is the

natural fruit and embodiment of the love that characterizes charity. In the biblical section

of this dissertation, the scriptural command to love was explored and framed in the

context of the virtue of charity. If one is participating in a stable community, and life is

being re-oriented to God through worship and learning to hear God's voice through

discernment, the natural final step in the progression is to walk in obedience to the things

they have heard God say. This is vital in the battle against acedia as this practice moves

the sufferer to action rather than disengagement and idleness. The action produced by the

practice of obedience also counteracts the dutiful work discussed in the biblical section

above, as it roots response and activity in loving submission to the voice of God heard in

discernment.

A Brief Introduction to the Practice of Obedience

In chapter 2 we learned that the natural expression of love for Jesus is to obey his

commands. In this fundamental level of understanding there is common agreement: the

words and commands of Jesus are to be obeyed. The challenge in overcoming acedia,

however, is not in our understanding of, or agreement with, this principle. The challenge

in overcoming acedia is practical and behavioral embodiment of this principle. The one who claims to love Christ must be one who behaviorally loves their neighbor, tangibly cares for the poor, and consistently prays for their enemy.[133]

One of the most simple, beautiful, and practical articulations of Christian obedience is found in the Rule of St. Benedict. The first words of his prologue contain the call to obedience.

> Listen, O my son, to the precepts of thy master, and incline the ear of thy heart, and cheerfully receive and faithfully execute the admonitions of thy loving Father, that by the toil of obedience thou mayest return to Him from whom by the sloth of disobedience thou hast gone away. … To thee, therefore, my speech is now directed, who, giving up thine own will, takest up the strong and most excellent arms of obedience, to do battle for Christ the Lord, the true King.[134]

In this poetic opening statement, Benedict states that the rescue from the sloth of disobedience is humble obedience. The spirituality Benedict describes in his Rule and nurtures in his communities is one in which the presence of Christ is recognized in tangible ways within the local community one commits themselves to in their vows. If Christ is truly present in others, they are to be obeyed in the requests and commands they give. Joan Chittister succinctly describes this understanding of obedience as simply, "the ability to hear the voice of God in one another."[135] Chittister goes on to describe the role of spiritual mentors, guides and directors in our lives as "living, breathing, loving vessels of the best in the spiritual life," comparing these vessels to the source of correction, a compass when we have lost our direction, and the source of sight when we lose our

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[133] These commands of Christ are merely three examples of the commands Jesus gives. For an example of a catalogue of Jesus' commands, see Appendix B.

[134] Benedict, *The Holy Rule*, 2.

[135] Chittister, *The Rule of St. Benedict*, 68.

way.[136] The obedience that Benedict calls for and expects in his communities cannot be observed reluctantly or with grumbling. As Chittister says, it is different than mere compliance, describing those who go through the motions begrudgingly as "a lump of cement around the neck" of their communities concluding that "real obedience depends on wanting to listen to the voice of God in the human community, not wanting to be forced to do what we refuse to grow from."[137]

> Obedience, then, is being alert to what's happening around us and responding to this voice from heaven as Christ would. When we hear God's voice, we respond in obedience with hearts full of love. Obedience is laying aside my plans, my desires, my life for God and for others… Obedience isn't denying ourselves in a spirit of martyrdom. True obedience, healthy obedience, comes when we place God in the center of our lives to help us balance our needs with those of others.[138]

This balance is learned and expressed in Benedict's conception of humility which reminds us that God is the center and source of life, gifts, and power. This understanding of humility is at the heart of obedience as "we cannot listen or respond if we believe we're the center of life. We cannot listen or respond if we believe that our way is the only way."[139]

Benedict believed in humility so strongly that he articulates twelve steps to develop and live in humility. The first three are worth mentioning as they articulate a firm foundation for not only humility, but all of life in Christ. First, accept that God is present in my life and live from that awareness. Second, make doing God's will my prime

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[136] Ibid., 70-71.

[137] Ibid., 72-73.

[138] Jane Tomaine, *St. Benedict's Toolbox: The Nuts and Bolts of Everday Benedictine Living* (London, UK: Morehouse Publishing, 2005), 65-66.

[139] Tomaine, 67-68.

directive. Third, recognize that I am not always in control and that I am to listen to and

obey those who are.[140] Again, Chittister offers a helpful summary, comparing the

principles of humility to a ladder she says,

> Rungs one and two call for contemplative consciousness. Rung three brings us
> face to face with our struggle for power. It makes us face an authority outside of
> ourselves. But once I am able to do that, then there is now no end to how high I
> might rise, how deep I might grow.[141]

The call to loving obedience is not just a Benedictine Rule or Christian obligation

to the church or scripture. As Jane Tomaine says, "If obedience is characterized by

listening and responding in love, then obedience needs to be a part of any healthy, caring

relationship or community where we strive to be honest and open and can even disagree

with one another."[142] The obedience Jesus calls forth, and Benedict articulates in his

Rule, works in close partnership with the stability and discernment described above. It is,

in many ways, the practical outworking of these first two practices in our habitus. If we

are in a stable community in which we are learning to hear God's voice and understand

his will through discernment, obedience is the only logical response.

The practice of obedience makes this logical response a natural and habitual

response. As Okholm says, "The sign of love is obedience, whether I am observing the

rules of my family life, or being a good steward of God's resources, or of working

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[140] Ibid., 68.

[141] Chittister, *The Rule of St. Benedict*, 85.

[142] Tomaine, 63.

faithfully as an employee."[143] The ultimate goal of this habituation is that loving

obedience becomes a natural, desired response to God and others.[144]

Practice of Obedience in a Local Church

It is clear how St. Benedict and others in the monastic tradition intended

obedience to be practiced in the monasteries under their guidance, but how can we begin

to incorporate this necessary practice in our local church settings?

One example of how the call to Christian obedience can be lived out in a non-

monastic context is the commitment of a Benedictine Oblate. An oblate is most simply

understood as someone who has made "an offering of themselves"[145] to become an

associate member of a monastery, committing themselves to practice Benedictine

spirituality in their lives and to work and live as laypeople. The process of becoming an

oblate may take several months or even a year depending on the requirements of the local

monastery. Once the candidate is ready to be received, they commit themselves to three

promises and five duties for the remainder of their lives. These duties and promises are as

follows,

Duties of an Oblate
- Pray daily the Liturgy of the Hours. Morning and evening prayer are included in the *Liturgy of the Hours for Benedictine Oblates* book.
- Read from the *Rule of St. Benedict* each day.
- Practice *lectio divina* each day. This meditative reading from the Scripture or other religious writings expands the oblate's love, knowledge and appreciation of the spiritual way of life.

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[143] Dennis Okholm, *Monk Habits for Everyday People: Benedictine Spirituality for Protestants* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), 68

[144] De Waal, 50.

[145] Sheri Hostetler, "Benedictine Oblates: Becoming a Modern Monk," *Interesting Thing of the Day,* March 9, 2019, https://itotd.com/articles/7803/benedictine-oblates/.

- Participate frequently in the sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation. (Oblates who are not Roman Catholic should be faithful to their denominational beliefs of church and prayer.)
- Be attentive to God's presence in ordinary, daily life.

Promises of an Oblate
- Stability of Heart - This promise expresses the oblate's commitment to a particular monastic community. Stability of heart reaffirms the basic promise of conversion made at baptism.
- Fidelity to the Spirit of Monastic Life - This promise expresses a commitment to live a life of spirituality, piety and balance.
- Obedience to the Will of God - This is a promise to grow in discernment of God's will through prayer, spiritual direction and faithfulness to one's religious traditions. Obedience is not a series of acts grudgingly done, but the response of a willing heart in service to God.[146]

As an example of obedience to be emulated in our local church context, there are three aspects of the oblate's commitment to be considered. First, the oblate commits themselves to live under the Rule of St. Benedict. While the adherence of the oblate will obviously look different than a resident monk, the submission of one's life to a written rule is a significant act of obedience. The five duties listed above outline the core of an oblate's adherence to The Rule but allows for the entirety of the Rule to be adapted to one's location and circumstances. Second, the oblate commits themselves to obedience to Christ. As the oblate grows in their ability to hear God's voice their ability to hear and obey will also grow. The daily duties in prayer and scripture bring them into contact with God's written and relational word and invite them to participate in his will for their lives. These daily disciplines are fertile ground for hearing God's voice and walking in obedience to it. And finally, the oblate commits themselves to obedience to others. Benedict's understanding of humility, submission, and obedience produced a willingness

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[146] "Duties and Promises" Saint Menaird Archabbey, 2019, https://www.saintmeinrad.org/oblates/becoming-an-oblate/duties-and-promises/.

to listen to one another in obedience. This aspect of Benedictine spirituality takes Christ's example of humble service and Paul's call to consider one another better than ourselves[147] seriously. Serving one another in humble obedience is a practice that oblates commit themselves to as an expression of submission to God in love.

Although the oblate's commitment is rooted in Benedictine theology and community, it is helpful to consider that every faith community ought to call their members to this level of commitment and develop a particular rule of life under Christ. Every community has a "rule" they observe, a set of written or unwritten expectations it places on every member. The example of the Benedictine Oblate challenges our churches to intentionally craft a rule of life for the members of their community and create a supportive environment in which it can be obeyed.

The Habit of Listening in Support of the Practice of Obedience

A habit that must be cultivated in service of obedience and authentic relationships is the lost art of listening. While there are many facets to the practice of obedience (obedience to God, to superiors, to one another, etc.), the beginning of habitual obedience is found in listening and acting. Basic, habitual listening and acting is an essential undertaking in the recovery from the habits of acedia: idleness, weariness, and sloth. As De Wall says of the opening words to Benedict's Rule,

> The very first word of the Rule is 'listen.' From the start the disciple's goal is to hear keenly and sensitively that Word of God which is not only message but event and encounter. This is the start of a life-long process of learning, and the whole of the monastery is set out as a school of the Lord's service, a place and a structure

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[147] Phil. 2: 1-4.

to encourage the dialogue of Master and disciple, in which the ability to listen is fundamental.[148]

The pattern Benedict establishes at the outset of his Rule is listen to the master and respond. The habit being prescribed in this section follows this simple pattern, listen and execute.

The first habitual level of listening that must be cultivated is listening to the commands of Christ and walking in faithful obedience to them. One challenge in cultivating this habit, however, is that the church is largely ignorant of these commands and is therefore unable to begin to enact them. Commenting on the command Jesus gives to his disciples to love one another as he has loved them,[149] Jerome H. Smith suggests that

> John is countering the problem of antinomianism, a heresy very much still with us, that lessens our obligation to obey God since we are saved by grace alone. This tendency is so much a part of evangelical thinking, that I fail to find a single work devoted to a serious, exhaustive study of the commands of Christ.[150]

Commenting on a similar phenomenon, Dallas Willard observes that non-discipleship is the elephant in the church and that the elephant is fed on, and sustained by, "the absence of effectual programs of training that enable his people to do what Jesus said in a regular and efficient manner."[151] He proposes a thought exercise where the reader imagines driving by a church that has advertised classes in forgiving our enemies or blessing those who curse us, or any number of other commands of Christ. He invites us to think of our internal response of surprise or doubt toward the church that claims to be able to teach its

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[148] De Waal, 42.

[149] John 13: 34.

[150] J. H. Smith, 1490. For an example of what such a list may look like, see Appendix B

[151] Willard, *Divine Conspiracy*, 313.

members to do these things on a consistent basis.[152] Before laying the foundation for his

proposed "curriculum for Christlikeness,"[153] he concludes that "there now is lacking a

serious and expectant intention to bring Jesus' people into obedience and abundance

through training."[154] It is into this gap that Benedict's conception of listening and

obedience may become an effective tool of habit formation as it requires both "love and

cerebral ascent" turning listening "into a living response."[155]

At the risk of over-simplification, the habit being prescribed is to listen to Christ's

commands and actively pursue them through simple acts of obedience. For example, if

one was reading in Matthew's Gospel and came across Jesus's command to love one's

enemies and pray for those who persecute you,[156] the response that must be habituated is

to actively begin to pray for those who have injured us, angered us, or those individuals

we would naturally want to avoid. The pattern many are currently trapped in is to

intellectually agree with the commands of Christ but fail to enact them or incorporate

them into their daily living. As we consider this process of hearing and doing,[157] it

quickly becomes apparent that coming to the place of obedience to all of Jesus's

commands will take a lifetime of habituation. However, the call of Christ is clear that this

is indeed our task. Equally clear is the resistance constructed by our existing vicious

habits and the evil thoughts of acedia. Initially these points of resistance will need to be

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[152] Ibid., 313-314.

[153] Ibid., 315-373.

[154] Ibid., 315.

[155] De Waal, 42-43.

[156] Matthew 5:43-47.

[157] James 1:21-25.

actively resisted and new responses consciously cultivated over time until Christlike responses become our new habits.

The Habit of Listening to the Commands of Jesus

Cue: Encounter a clear command of Christ in scripture

Craving: Faithfulness

Response: Conscious choice to embody an obedient behavioral response

Reward: Peace with God, with one's self, and contentment at the end of the day.

Conclusion

The church in North America is suffering from many complex and seemingly unrelated symptoms, seen in a lack of congregational engagement, member migration, spiritual apathy, lack of mission or purpose, declining attendance and participation in programming, a core group of long-standing volunteers that are weary and disheartened, dutiful and frustrated volunteer ministry leaders, and a survival mentality that leads to an internal focus. This list of challenges is familiar to many church leaders and attempts to address them has produced an abundance of materials aimed at treating each symptom separately.

This exploration of acedia has named the vice as the root cause of these complex challenges, contending that acedia is frustrating the work, growth, and mission of the church by robbing her members of the love of God and others they were designed to embody. The way forward in the fight against acedia is to reeducate the church about this strong foe, to accurately diagnose the symptoms it produces, and to cultivate the virtue of charity which rescues the victims of acedia from its attacks.

The battle against the forgotten vice of acedia begins by naming and describing acedia, identifying the primary ways it is attacking the local church and exploring the way scripture portrays its effects. The task of naming and describing acedia begins in the ancient monastic traditions of the church. The goal of this work is to articulate the ancient monastic traditions in a way that resonates with the biblical portrayal of one's relationship with God and the current situation of the church. This treatment of the monastic and biblical material has shown that the symptoms of acedia are truly timeless and current in the church's experience today. Acedia has always tempted its victims to wander from one community to the next looking for the best place to have one's needs met, for example. This phenomenon is one of the chief challenges in our current context and is articulated clearly in the ancient teaching found in the monastic traditions and biblical text.

The prescription for the vice of acedia begins by describing the teleological, teachable, and habitual nature of virtue. From the basic foundation of virtues and vices, a framework for combatting the vice of acedia and cultivating the virtue of charity has been constructed. The principle components of this framework include a narrative approach to understanding telos and identity, a working understanding of habit and habit formation, and a practical introduction to the practices and habits that can rescue from acedia and cultivate friendship with God.

To help the church recover from the vice of acedia and return to a lifelong friendship with God, the practices of stability, worship, discernment, and obedience will need to be cultivated individually and corporately. In the prescription offered above, one initial habit has been explored and used as an example of the process to be undertaken by

an individual or local church. The pattern this illustrates is to be applied to the many

habits that support and nurture each practice. The practice of stability, for example, must

be built on the habitual engagement of forgiveness. However, this practice requires many

other habits like truth telling in love, bearing one another's burdens, and placing one

another's needs above our own desires. Forming these habits will follow the same

process of habituation as is illustrated by the key habits in each section. The main point

of these illustrations is to develop a life that will defeat the vice of acedia and cultivate

the virtue of charity in pursuit of the telos of friendship with God. It is this process of

habituation which will rescue the church from the paradoxical and paralyzing symptoms

of acedia.

APPENDIX A:

RE-FORMING CORPORATE HABITS

This Appendix is provided as a model for shaping and reforming corporate habits. This corporate change model is not aimed specifically at the cultivation of charity, rather it serves as an example of how the habit change model for individuals may be applied in a corporate setting and adapted for implementation in a church context.

In their book *Switch*, Chip and Dan Heath offer a metaphor for corporate habit transformation that is invaluable to facilitating the transformation of individuals described above in a corporate setting. Their framework is built on a premise developed by Jonathan Haidt in *The Happiness Hypothesis*.

In *The Happiness Hypothesis*, Haidt develops a metaphor for the two primary thinking or processing centers of the human brain, reason and emotion. Haidt's metaphor is that reason functions in our lives as a rider, or driver, and that emotion is the large animal upon which the rider sits.

> In sum, the rider is an advisor or servant; not a king, president, or charioteer with a firm grip on the reins … it is conscious, controlled thought. The elephant, in contrast, is everything else. The elephant includes the gut feelings, visceral reactions, emotions and intuitions that comprise much to the automatic system. The elephant and the rider each have their own intelligence, and when they work together well they enable the unique brilliance of human beings.[1]

This basic, two-part framework is augmented by the Heath brothers by adding a third component which they call the path. The path is the situation, environment, and culture that the rider and elephant are trying to navigate. This includes obstacles,

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[1] Jonathan Haidt, *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2006), 17.

opportunities, and everything that makes up the surroundings and situations involved in the discussion.[2]

The mantra that frames the change necessary within the rider is, "What looks like resistance is often a lack of clarity."[3] The Heaths give many examples of how the rider is prone to spinning their wheels, over-analyzing data, numbers, probabilities, and potential strategies that if uninterrupted leave the rider paralyzed and unable to make a decision. The key to starting the change process is clarity. The rider will want to know all of the possibilities and will try to search for the most logical course of action. To get a rider moving, they do not need all of the answers, or all of the information, or all of the data, they just need the first, critical moves and the destination they are heading toward. "Scripting the critical moves"[4] and "painting a destination post card"[5] are fundamental practices for moving the rider in the right direction.

The second essential element of the change framework is to Motivate the Elephant.[6] One of the obvious and most helpful images in this metaphor is the difference in power between the rider and the elephant. The rider cannot move the elephant by brute force and cannot sustain movement in a direction the elephant is reluctant to travel for long. A cooperative elephant can carry a rider in any direction for a sustained and productive journey.

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[2] Heath and Heath, 18.

[3] Ibid., 17.

[4] Ibid., 49-72.

[5] Ibid., 73-100.

[6] Ibid., 17.

All too often organizations consider change a "rider problem." They analyze the data, come up with a clear strategy, and yet are frustrated when people are reluctant to come along for the ride, or work toward the goal. Every successful change plan is not only understandable by the rider but is motivating to the elephant.[7] In order to sustain habit transformation in individuals, the identity of the individual must be aligned to the desired outcome and be created by new responses to existing cues. When dealing with groups of individuals, a group identity, cause, mission, or mandate must be equally inspiring if lasting change is to be implemented.[8]

Finally, there are elements of every environment that make existing behaviors inevitable. If one wants to effect behavioral change, one must implement environmental change that makes the new behaviors and habits easy, obvious, and encouraged. The mantra for this section of the Heath's model is, "what looks like a people problem is often a situation problem … when you shape the Path, you make change more likely, no matter what's happening with the Rider and Elephant."[9] For organizations this means diagnosing these environmental cues, making undesired responses difficult or impossible and desired behaviors easy, rewarded, and repeatable.

While this model is perfectly suited to organizational change in a corporate or secular environment, for application in the context of the church it will need a new narrative framework. The story of Balaam and his Donkey found in Numbers 22, which recasts the main characters as the prophet, the donkey, and the commission, is appropriate

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[7] Heath and Heath, 112-113.

[8] Ibid., 153-154.

[9] Ibid., 17-18.

for the community of faith. The reason for this adaptation is that in the context of the local church each aspect of the journey the people are on is infused with the leading of God through the Holy Spirit. When the rider is listening to the Holy Spirit, and not only the statistics, information, or context, they become the prophet. When the elephant is informed by the Spirit of God as well as their conscience, intuition, and emotion they parallel the donkey. And, when the path the organization is called to walk is not based on the vision or desire of a charismatic leader but the divine call of God for his people, it becomes a commission.

The Narrative

The account of Balaam and Balak in Numbers is about a king, worried about the future of his kingdom. A nomadic people have been moving through the land destroying the nations in their path. The one named "the devastator"[10] is worried that this people will "lick up everything around us, as an ox licks up the grass of the field."[11] Balak calls for the prophet Balaam to come and curse the Israelites so they cannot destroy the devastator's kingdom. Balaam is portrayed as desiring the benefits offered by Balak, and so, convinces God to let him go under the condition that he will only say what God tells him to. On the way to Balak, Balaam's donkey stops 3 times to avoid an angel that the Lord sent to kill him on the way. The third time the donkey stops, she speaks to Balaam

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[10] "Balak (parsha)," Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, last modified June 2, 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Balak_(parsha)&oldid=899886013. Balak means "the devastator" in Hebrew.

[11] Numbers 22:4. This interesting imagery seems to suggest that the Israelites have a reputation for thorough destruction as when an ox grazes it pulls the grass out by the roots using its tongue rather than using its teeth to cut the grass leaving the roots intact to grow back. For more on this, see Dr. Moshe Raanan, "How does an Ox Eat?" *Shabbat-B'Shabbato – Parshat Balak,* No 1479, June 22, 2013, http://www.zomet.org.il/eng/?CategoryID=160&ArticleID=7727.

and his eyes are opened to see the divine messenger. The angel repeats the divine constraint to speak only what God declares. Balaam arrives to meet Balak and brings 3 oracles of blessing rather than the desired curse.

The Prophet

The challenge the prophet has is that he can only say what God has commanded. The role of the prophet is unique in this way, they not only need accurate information regarding the situation they find themselves in, but they also need clarity regarding the word of the Lord for the people. During seasons of change or challenges in the church this kind of clarity is of utmost importance. Far too often decisions are left to common sense or cultural wisdom when God's will for his people may be different or even contrary to human understanding. This unique kind of clarity is different than the information the rider needs and is distinct from knowledge or wisdom in the ways we commonly conceive of these traits. Hearing, understanding, and declaring God's will for his people in a given situation is the heart of prophecy and is essential in seasons of change within a community of faith.

In the story of Balaam, the prophet's intentions, just as our own at times, can be difficult to fully understand. In the 22nd chapter of Numbers, Balaam is portrayed as a reluctant, yet faithful prophet. He does bring the blessing that God declares in spite of Balak's disappointment and opposition. In contrast, 2 Peter 2: 14-16 sheds a different light on the legacy of Balaam's trip to meet with Balak, saying that he taught Balak to have his people intermarry with the Israelites and entice them to idol worship.[12] Hearing

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[12] See also Numbers 31:16 and Revelations 2:14-15.

God's voice clearly and faithfully for his people is a daunting and humbling undertaking. It is the role that God has consistently called prophets and priests to fill and he has provided his Spirit and his anointing for the task. However, there are times when all are tempted, like Balaam, to speak on behalf of God in a self-serving, self-benefiting, or even cursing way to the people God desires to bless. In these times of mixed motives, we all need a donkey. We all need the one that will constrain us again to speak only what God has instructed. May we all heed the wisdom and correction of our donkeys.

> We ride with Balaam on the donkey, and so we learn as we go along how to shed our recurrent collective tendency to interpret the Bible, whether consciously or unconsciously, to serve our own narrow interests, and how instead to think more expansively in terms of God's overarching love for Israel, for the church, and for the world.[13]

In the life of the church, especially during times of pressure or transition, the role of the prophet is essential. Every member of the church has the responsibility to participate in the life and ministry of the church as they learn to follow Christ more and more each day. There will be times when we, like Balaam, may seek to gain from the situation God leads us to, which is when we all need a donkey.

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[13] Jacqueline Lapsley, "Am I Able to Say Just Anything? Learning Faithful Exegesis from Balaam," *Interpretation* 60, no. 1 (January 2006): 31, ProQuest.

Switch model[14]	Church adaptation
Follow the Bright Spots	Follow the light, Jesus
• find out what is working and clone it	• find out what God wants and be obedient
Script the Critical Moves	Take the First Step of Obedience
• think in terms of specific behaviors	• concrete steps in response to God's call
Point to the Destination	Declare God's Message
• clearly name the destination and benefits	• bear witness to the call of God

The Donkey

"You know, in some cultures, donkeys are revered as the smartest of animals, especially us talking ones."[15] In ancient literature, the donkey has two distinct characterizations. In Greek texts the donkey is portrayed as stubborn, slow, and lower class in comparison to more noble animals like the horse or ox. "The writings of Homer, Aesop and Apuleius, for example, have been instrumental in representations of donkeys as servile, stubborn and stupid,"[16] shaping attitudes and understanding in the West ever since.

The Biblical portrayal of the donkey, however, is of a humble, faithful, loyal beast of burden.[17] This positive association begins with the Jewish traditions around the

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[14] Heath and Heath, 259. Heath's Switch model statements from summary chart on 259. Used in all three sections here and below.

[15] Rabbi Phillip Rice, "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to Curse the Children of Israel," *RJ Blog,* July 5, 2014, https://reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/balak/funny-thing-happened-way-curse-children-israel.

[16] Jill Bough, "The Mirror Has Two Faces: Contradictory Reflections of Donkeys in Western Literature from Lucius to Balthazar," *Animals* 1, no.1 (December 14, 2010): 57. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4552212/.

[17] Leonard Sweet, "You Can Trust Your Donkey," *Preach the Story*, April 9, 2017, https://preachthestory.com/can-trust-donkey/.

creation story. Jewish tradition suggests that the mouth of Balaam's donkey was created

by God on the eve of the first sabbath along with nine other miraculous items. These

items are viewed as "problematic" in some of the Jewish traditions because God's

creation is orderly and functions according to the laws and principles he established. A

talking donkey is clearly functioning outside of this established order and natural law.

> In order to solve this metaphysical problem, the Mishnah claims that these supernatural items were created for this very purpose during the six days of creation. They were created during this in-between time, right before creation ended at the end of the sixth day. These items are therefore part of God's ultimate plan and they are not in essence 'supernatural.'[18]

This creation connection is strengthened when we consider that there are only 2

animals in all of scripture that are able to speak, Balaam's donkey and the serpent in the

Garden of Eden. These two accounts are viewed by some commentators as

complimentary as both accounts feature the themes of blessing and cursing, vision and

understanding, and obedience or disobedience to God.[19] It is worth noting that in the case

of the serpent, the talking animal was used to lead people away from God's will and

suffer from a curse while Balaam's donkey was used to constrain Balaam to follow God's

will and bring a blessing.

Another positive biblical association is that the donkey often serves as a

"vehicle"[20] of redemption. There are several passages in scripture where a donkey is

associated with redemption including the role of the donkey in carrying Moses' family to

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[18] Dr. Joshua Kulp, "Avot. Chapter 5, Mishnah 6," 2019, Fuchsberg Jerusalem Center for Conservative Judaism, http://learn.conservativeyeshiva.org/avoth-chapter-five-mishnah-six/.

[19] Kenneth C. Way, *Donkeys in the Biblical World: Ceremony and Symbol* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns Inc., 2011), 188n97.

[20] Ibid., 187.

Egypt,[21] carrying the wood and knife for Abraham on his journey to sacrifice Isaac,[22] and ultimately carrying the messiah into Jerusalem.[23]

First, in the story of Moses returning to Egypt, the text is careful to tell us that Moses places his family on the back of the donkey as he travels to speak with Pharaoh about God's people. Just as in the account of Balaam, both kings would like to subdue the children of Israel but are unable to because of God's blessing.

In the account of Abraham travelling to sacrifice Isaac, the literary structure of the passage directly mirrors the Balaam account as in both instances, they rise early in the morning, take two servants with them,[24] and travel to a location determined by God. Connecting these accounts even more closely, both Abraham and Balaam are encountered by a divine messenger that alters their intended course of action.[25]

As we consider possible connections with Jesus' life and ministry, it is worth noting that both Moses and Joseph placed their families on a donkey on their journey to Egypt.[26] Also, just as Abraham placed the implements of the sacrifice on the back of the Donkey to journey to the mountain where his son would be slain, so to Jesus would be borne up to Jerusalem as the ultimate sacrifice on the back of a donkey. Some Jewish

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[21] Exodus 4:20.

[22] Genesis 22:3.

[23] Matthew 21:1-9.

[24] In Matthew 21:1-9, Jesus also sends 2 servants to retrieve the donkey for the triumphal entry.

[25] Amos Frisch, "The Story of Balaam's She-Ass (Numbers 22:21-35): A New Literary Insight," *Hebrew Studies* 56 (2015): 103-13, ProQuest.

[26] Sweet, "You Can Trust Your Donkey."

traditions hold that the donkey that served Abraham, Moses, Balaam and Jesus are one and the same animal.[27]

While Haidt sees himself as a rider on the back of an elephant, I contend that the elephant is better characterized as a donkey for those of us who are called by Christ to follow his example. The donkey after all is not only more humble, loyal, and effectively embodies the role of emotions in the individual, but also conveys the added dimension of discernment. In an article in the New Yorker magazine, Clifton Baron describes the donkey as "a creature of divine and silent perception, of feeling as deep as eternity... And yes, there is something in us each, a thing of divine and silent perception, of feeling as deep as eternity… we can tune ourselves ever more keenly to that something."[28] In the Balaam narrative, the donkey not only follows the directions of her rider, she "over-rides" her rider in the face of danger. Yes, an elephant can be scared by danger and know enough not to run off a cliff, but only a donkey has discernment. She alone can discern the presence of the Lord's angel. She alone can alert the prophet to the presence he cannot see on his own. In our lives, our "inner donkey" has a wisdom of her own that we often mistrust, dismiss, and even abuse just as is illustrated in Balaam's journey to meet with Balak.

The story of Balaam "is about the folly of a human ego self-destructively preoccupied with its own agenda instead of discerning God's. It is about being (1) rerouted, (2) squeezed, and finally, (3) stopped until you get your eyes opened and see

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[27] Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, "Moshiach's Donkey," adapted by Yanki Tauber, https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/2743/jewish/Moshiachs-Donkey.htm

[28] Clifton Baron, "The Donkey Will Know: Remembering Leonard Michaels," *The New Yorker,* May 10, 2013, https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/the-donkey-will-know-remembering-leonard-michaels.

what's really going on."[29] In each of our lives we will be faced with the same opportunity, go our own way or follow God's will. God will counsel us through his word, in prayer, and even by speaking to our inner donkey, but we always have the option of going our own way, speaking our own words and choosing our own paths.

Switch Model	Church Adaptation
Find the Feeling	Hear the voice of God
• make people feel something	• practice corporate discernment
Shrink the Change	Simple Obedience
• Break down the change into small steps	• God gives us step by step guidance
Grow Your People	Embrace New Identity
• Cultivate a sense of identity	• Cultivate telos through story

The Commission

The Heath's use of the pathway terminology is very helpful in capturing the role of the environment and circumstances of an organization and their impact on the individuals that need to enact necessary changes. For a spiritual community, however, the metaphor of a commission is more helpful as it retains the necessary components of the path while adding the spiritual elements of call and conviction.

The commission of God is the consistent trigger for corporate direction change, decision making, and momentum building. In secular organizations, it is the leader's job to have a vision, articulate a mission, and rally the employees and stakeholders to pursue the goal. Among the people of God, however, this instigating and shaping work comes

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[29] Lawrence Kushner, "Balaam's Talking Ass," *RJ Blog*, June 25, 2007, https://reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/balak/balaam's-talking-ass.

from the head of the church, not the appointed leader. For example, God calls Abraham,[30] God speaks to Moses,[31] God speaks through the Isaiah,[32] Jeremiah,[33] and the other prophets. In the New Testament Jesus commissions his disciples, Peter, Paul, Phillip, and the church. In every one of these examples, the role of the "leaders" is to pursue the call God gives them, in the environment they find themselves in, among the people He has brought them to.[34]

Switch Model	Church Adaptation
Tweak the Environment	Tweak the Environment
• change the situation	• make environmental changes in the church
Build Habits	Cultivate Virtue
• look for ways to build habits	• practices and habits that move toward telos
Rally the Herd	Worship, Prayer, Fellowship
• behavior is contagious	• gather for corporate practices and encouragement

In summary, in order to bring about corporate change in a church context, the rider must not only gain the clarity they need, but the prophet must be able to hear God's voice clearly. The elephant must not only be motivated, but the donkey must be tuned in to the Spirit of God throughout the journey. Finally, the leaders of the organization must

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[30] Genesis 12:1-4.

[31] Exodus 3:14-22.

[32] Isaiah 6:8-13.

[33] Jeremiah 1:1-19.

[34] For more on the posture of a Christian leader as responsive to God's call and guidance, see the "first follower" metaphor presented here: Derek Sivers, "How to Start a Movement," *TED Talk*, February 2010, https://www.ted.com/talks/derek_sivers_how_to_start_a_movement?language=en. Also, Leonard Sweet, *I am a Follower: The Way the Truth and the Life of Following Jesus* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2012), 3-14.

not only shape the pathway by changing the environment and building habits, they must

also implement the practices and habits that cultivate virtue.

APPENDIX B:

THE COMMANDS OF CHRIST

The material in this Appendix is intended to serve as a resource to churches and individuals seeking to take the call to obedience seriously[1] and to intentionally cultivate the habit of obeying Jesus's commands.[2] Commenting on 1 John 2:3-6, Jerome H. Smith develops a list of commands that has been adapted for use here. [3] For the purposes of cultivating obedience, the list of Jesus's commands has been separated into three categories; general commands, implied commands, and specific commands.[4]

General Commands

A General command is a command that all Christ followers are expected to obey in all times and circumstances. ex: Matt. 7:12 "do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets."

Matthew

4:17, 19- repent for the kingdom is near. 5:16- let your light shine. 5:22- against murder, anger, speaking against a brother or sister. 5:24- leave gift at altar and be reconciled. 5:28- against lust. 5:32- against divorce. 5:34- against swearing oaths. 5:37-

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[1] 1 John 2:3–6.

[2] For more on the general practice of bringing congregation members into full discipleship and obedience to Christ see Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* 233-251. Also, Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God*, 295-373.

[3] J. H. Smith, 1490–1492.

[4] Thank you Dwight Oliver for the way our discussions of these ideas has shaped the format of this appendix and my understanding of following Jesus.

let yes be yes, simple speech. 5:39- turn the other cheek. 5:42- give to those who ask. 5:44- love your enemies. 5:48- be perfect as heavenly father. 6:1- against practicing righteousness to be seen by others. 6:3- secrecy in giving. 6:6-8- secrecy and simplicity in prayer. 6:17-18- secrecy in fasting. 6:19- against storing treasures on earth. 6:20- treasure in heaven. 6:25-34- against worry. 6:33- seek first the kingdom. 7:1-5- against judging others. 7:6- against casting pearls before swine. 7:7-11- ask, seek, knock. 7:12- golden rule. 7:13-14- enter through narrow gate. 7:15-20- watch for false prophets. 10:28, 31- don't be afraid. 11:28-29- come to me weary and burdened, take my yoke. 16:24-25- take up cross. 18:21-22- forgive 7x70. 19:6- against divorce. 20:25-27- serve one another. 22:37- Love the Lord your God. 22:39- Love your neighbor as yourself. 23:8-12- against hypocrisy, call to humility. 24:4, 42-44, 25:13- keep watch. 28:19-20- make disciples.

Mark

1:15- repent for the kingdom is near. 8:34- take up cross. 9:35- humble service. 10:9, 11-12- against divorce. 10:41-45- humble service. 11:22-24- have faith in prayer. 11:25- forgive. 12:17- give to Caesar what is Caesar's. 12:30- Love the Lord your God. 12:31- Love your neighbor as yourself. 13:5, 33-37- keep watch. 16:15- go into world and preach

Luke

6:27- love enemies. 6:28- bless those who curse you. 6:30- give to those who ask. 6:32-35- love enemies. 6:37-38- do not judge. 11:9- ask, seek knock. 12:4-7- don't be afraid. 12:22-29- do not worry. 12:32-33- do not be afraid. 12:35-40- be ready. 16:18-

against divorce. 17:3-4- correct brother and forgive. 18:1- fervent in prayer. 21:34-36- be ready.

John

3:3- be born again. 13:34- love one another. 14:15- obey my commands. 15:4- remain in me. 15:9- remain in my love. 15:12- love each other as I have loved you.

1 Corinthians

11:23-25- do this in remembrance of me.

Implied Command

These passages are open to interpretation as to whether Jesus is giving a command for all disciples in all times, a specific command in a specific situation, or commenting on a specific issue limited to the context of the text. ex: Matt. 6:16 "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do…" Is Jesus commanding all followers to fast, or is this a command for the disciples he is addressing in this text, or is Jesus giving instructions for their practice if they should choose to fast?

Matthew

6:2- giving to the poor. 6:5- prayer. 6:14- forgiveness. 6:16- fasting. 9:38- ask the Lord of the harvest to send workers. 10:38- take up your cross. 10:42- anyone who gives a cup of cold water. 18:3-10- become like a child. 18:15-17- go show your brother his fault. 19:14- let children come to me. 19:17- obey the commandments. 21:21- have faith,

pray. 22:21- give to Caesar what is Caesar's. 25:34-36- feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick.

Mark

1:17- follow me, fishers of men. 2:20- fasting. 10:15- become like a child.

Luke

5:35- fasting. 6:46-49- obedience to Jesus's commands. 10:37- be compassionate and merciful, good Samaritan. 11:28- blessed are the obedient. 12:15-21- against storing up wealth, greed. 18:15-17- let children come to Jesus, become like a child.

John

4:24- worship in spirit and truth. 7:24- don't judge by appearances.

Specific Command

The final category is for passages containing a command to a specific person at a specific place and time. They do not constitute a timeless command for all Christ followers. Ex: Matt. 19: 21 "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor…" This command is not for all of Jesus's disciples; rather it is specifically for the "rich young ruler" and is not applied to everyone's relationship with God (ex: Jesus does not tell Zacchaeus to sell all his possessions). The references below are not exhaustive but illustrative of commands that may be misunderstood as general or implied commands.

Matthew

8:22- follow me, let the dead bury the dead.

Mark

5:19- go home and tell your family what God has done for you.

Luke

10:3-12- commands to the twelve as they are sent out.

John

21:15- feed my lambs.

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