

✦ Other Voices ✦

[*Acedia*, or] spiritual carelessness seems to me to underlie much contemporary unhappiness in Western culture. The word is no longer used not because the reality is obsolete but because we have stopped noticing it. We are too busy to be spiritually self-aware and our children grow up in a culture that suffers from collective *acedia*. *Acedia* has established itself so well that it is now part of modernity.

CHRISTOPHER JAMISON, *Finding Happiness: Monastic Steps for a Fulfilling Life (2008)*

Acedia is a soul-sickness, a loss of any connection with spiritual things. Practices mean nothing. Boredom is too weak a word. Perhaps aversion or repulsion regarding the spiritual dimensions of life and living better describe the effects of *acedia*.

MARY MARGARET FUNK, O.S.B., *Thoughts Matter: The Practice of the Spiritual Life (1998)*

The eye of the person afflicted with *acedia* stares at the doors continuously, and his intellect imagines people coming to visit. The door creaks and he jumps up; he hears a sound, and he leans out the window and does not leave it until he gets stiff from sitting there. When he reads, the one afflicted with *acedia* yawns a lot and readily drifts off to sleep; he rubs his eyes and stretches his arms; turning his eyes away from the book, he stares at the wall and again goes back to reading for awhile; leafing through the pages, he looks curiously for the end of texts, he counts the folios and calculates the number of gatherings. Later he closes the book and puts it under his head and falls asleep, but not a very deep sleep, for hunger then rouses his soul and has him show concern for his needs.

EVAGRIUS OF PONTUS (345 - 399), *Eight Thoughts 6.14-15*

There is grief that is useful, and there is grief that is destructive. The first sort consists in weeping over one's own faults and weeping over the weakness of one's neighbors, in order not to destroy one's purpose, and attach oneself to the perfect good. But there is also a grief that comes from the enemy, full of mockery, which some call *accidie*. This spirit must be cast out, mainly by prayer and psalmody.

SYNCLETICA 27 in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers (1975) translated by Benedicta Ward*

Aquinas describes [*acedia*] as our rational consent “in the dislike, horror and detestation of the divine good, on account of the flesh utterly prevailing over the spirit.” When sensible goods (the pleasures of this world) come to seem better than spiritual goods (friendship with God), the result is that we become “sorry to have to do something for God’s sake.” Rather than taking joy in the relationship with God that charity enables, we turn away from such a relationship. As Aquinas shows, if our participation in God’s goodness is only for this life, then our relationship with God...would be stunted from the outset. Why would God only love us and care for us for such a short time, and then assent to our utter annihilation? How could a friend or lover do that, and how could our love be nourished within such a context? With Paul, Aquinas answers that it could not: we would succumb to [*acedia*], toward which we often tend anyway.

MATTHEW LEVERING, *The Betrayal of Charity: The Sins that Sabotage Divine Love* (2011)

The sixth Deadly Sin is named by the Church *Acedia* or Sloth. In the world it calls itself Tolerance; but in hell it is called Despair. It is the accomplice of the other sins and their worst punishment. It is the sin which believes in nothing, cares for nothing, seeks to know nothing, interferes with nothing, enjoys nothing, loves nothing, hates nothing, finds purpose in nothing, lives for nothing, and only remains alive because there is nothing it would die for. We have known it far too well for many years. The only thing perhaps that we have not known about it is that it is mortal sin.

...[I]t is one of the favorite tricks of this Sin to dissemble itself under cover of a whiffling activity of body. We think that if we are busily rushing about and doing things, we cannot be suffering from Sloth. And besides, violent activity seems to offer an escape from the horrors of Sloth. So the other sins hasten to provide a cloak for Sloth.... But these are all disguises for the empty heart and the empty brain and the empty soul of *Acedia*.

DOROTHY L. SAYERS (1893 - 1957), *“The Other Six Deadly Sins”* (1941)

Not only can *acedia* and ordinary diligence exist very well together; it is even true that the senselessly exaggerated workaholicism of our age is directly traceable to *acedia*, which is a basic characteristic of the spiritual countenance of precisely this age in which we live.

JOSEF PIEPER (1904 - 1997), *Faith, Hope, Love* (1997)

When we settle down to work it’s easy to be unsettled. Consistent work is not distracting. Consistent work, our own work, is quiet, and it requires a quietness of spirit to accomplish. The desert fathers moved into the wilderness and lived simplified lives not in order to remove themselves from temptation, but to confront the twists and turns in their spirits that only became apparent when they refused to be distracted.

There's no easy way to be rid of the noonday demon [of *acedia*]. He is on the road with us, and with every decision to turn off the blaring distractions of our modern age and settle down to think and to work, to have an attentive conversation or to clean the bathroom, he will be there, asking, "Shouldn't you check Facebook or read your email?" It takes the work of the Spirit, and it also takes practice, to get into the habit of ignoring him, and get on with the business of doing the simple, monotonous, often unobserved, difficult, profoundly good work of living.

JANELLE AIJIAN, *"On the Road with the Noonday Demon," Scriptorium Daily blog (2013)*

One afflicted with this spiritual sorrow [*acedia*] is encouraged to persevere in prayer and meditation, precisely because "the more we think about spiritual goods, the more pleasing they become to us." Since the divine good is infinitely pleasing in itself, it offers the best hope of a cure for this disorder. Besieged by boredom and distraction, the mind should hold fast to the object of its contemplation, its loving gaze sustained by a confidence that joy and peace must eventually be restored.

MICHAEL L. RAPOSA, *Boredom and the Religious Imagination (1999)*

Once when Anthony was living in the desert his soul was troubled by *acedia* and irritation. He said to God, "Lord, I want to be made whole and my thoughts do not let me. What am I to do about this trouble, how shall I be cured?" After a while he got up and went outside. He saw someone like himself sitting down and working, then standing up to pray; then sitting down again to make a plait of palm leaves, and standing up again to pray. It was an angel of the Lord sent to correct Anthony and make him vigilant. He heard the voice of the angel saying, "Do this and you will be cured." When he heard it he was very glad and recovered his confidence. He did what the angel had done, and found the salvation he was seeking.

A P O T H E G M 7 . 1 *in The Desert Fathers: Sayings of the Early Christian Monks (2003)*
translated by Benedicta Ward

When I detect *acedia* beginning in myself, I do well to muster my resistance, even if it is only to let John Cassian remind me where I am headed if I do not. "From *acedia*," he writes, "[are born] idleness, somnolence, rudeness, restlessness, wandering about, instability of mind and body, chattering, [and] inquisitiveness." If I allow myself to reach this stage I will be a distracted tourist rather than a pilgrim, and am likely to turn away from the very things that might bring me to my senses.

KATHLEEN NORRIS, *Acedia & Me: A Marriage, Monks, and a Writer's Life (2008)*