

## A Word for Sheepdogs

“REMEMBER YOUR BAPTISM” is a phrase we hear frequently, but like most mantras it is largely devoid of meaning. Simply recalling that we were once baptized may be helpful, but it’s not particularly useful. In contrast, the catechism reminds us that being baptized with water finds ongoing application in the daily drowning of the sinful nature by contrition and repentance and the corresponding daily emerging of the new man by faith.

Lucas Woodford believes this daily drowning and rising is a tool for pastoral care. He offers pastors an important resource in fleshing out how “baptismal therapy” can be used concretely and practically in helping souls wrestling with sin and burdened by hurt. Rich in theology as well as immensely practical, his essay shows how physicians of souls can apply spiritual treatment tailored to the specific ailments of suffering people.

Accurate diagnosis is essential for effective treatment. Pastor Woodford suggests we look to the ancients to find our stethoscope to probe the depths of the soul. He explores the tradition of the cardinal (“root”) sins and Christian virtue in a refreshing, Christ-centered way that plows important new ground for the care of souls in our troubled age and paves the way toward the development of a genuinely Lutheran virtue ethics. Finally, in a remarkable first-person narrative of baptismal therapy he unmasks the prevailing temptation of our time — Acedia — and shows how genuine virtue is habituated not by appealing to the anemic power of the human will, but through baptismal union with Christ renewed each day. “I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me and the life I live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.” (Gal. 2:20)

– *Dr. H. L. Senkbeil*



# Vice, Virtue, and Baptismal Therapy in the Care of Souls

*Pastor Lucas V. Woodford*

## Introduction

Today, as ever, the precious souls of God remain engaged in a vicious spiritual battle with the unseen evil enemy. In both body and soul they are subject to the spiritual terrors and behavioral filth that result from the onslaught of the old evil and demonic foe. But the devil is not our singular adversary. We are also at the same time under the pernicious affronts of the world, along with the malevolent passions of our own sinful flesh that rage within us.

Together, this unholy trio of the devil, the world and the sinful flesh deceive and mislead fallen sinners “into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice.”<sup>1</sup> Although these things regularly attack Christians, we pray, particularly in the sixth petition of the Lord’s Prayer, that we may finally overcome them and win the victory. Yet, overcoming them is more than simply exerting an ever-increasing amount of willpower to tame disor-

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<sup>1</sup> This expression comes from the explanation of the Sixth Petition of the Lord’s Prayer in Luther’s Small Catechism.

dered passions and desires, and singularly strive towards the virtuous life.

True, it can be said that the Christian life is certainly habituated toward goodness and cultivating virtue, but it is a misguided notion to assume an optimistic view of our human willpower. The total depravity of mankind has ensured that “every inclination of man is evil from childhood” (Gen. 8:21). Therefore rooting a moral theology (or any theology) in the potential capacity of fallen man, rather than in the accomplished work and virtue of Jesus Christ, is only to point away from Jesus and lead mankind astray. In fact, for a sinner to go it alone, to try harder, do more, and be better, by invoking the likes of his fallen and broken willpower, is only to invite more false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice, all the while remaining in sin and its defiling effects. In fact, going it alone is to fall into the trap of Satan, who delights in our isolation and arrogance.

But this is why the Lord of the Church has seen fit to send pastors into our very midst. Pastors are sent to care for and tend to the precious blood-bought souls of God. Their role is imperative in delivering a clean conscience, the forgiveness of sins, the purifying heat and light of Christ’s holiness, and His holy habitation of body and soul to the sinners of our time. In fact, it’s precisely because the Heavenly Father desires that these things be delivered to all people that He created the Office of the Ministry.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, while delivering the holy *habitation* of Christ’s Word and Sacraments, pastors are also called to nurture a corresponding holy *habitation* among those in their care. Namely, their task is to help sinners daily habituate themselves to their Baptism, where, as the Small Catechism says, “the old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.”<sup>3</sup>

2 “So that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted.” AC, V. *The Book of Concord*. Kolb and Wengert. (Fortress Press, Minneapolis), 2000, p.41, § 1.  
3 SC, Baptism, Fourth part.

Pastors are right to utilize this baptismal habituation in their care of souls. Baptism forgives, cleanses, and strengthens the believer, but it also frees the believer for daily virtuous living, drenching them in the virtues of Christ and the fruit of His Holy Spirit. Of course, good pastoral care will help believers see that goodness and virtue is not wrought from within their own willpower. Rather, pastors are to teach that true goodness and virtue come from outside of the repentant and flow from the virtue and works of Christ, that are baptismally imparted to the regenerate, and are active within the penitent through Christ’s Holy Spirit, who is at work daily bringing about the fruit of faith in virtuous good works (Gal. 5:22-23).<sup>4</sup>

The power of Baptism is far greater than most Christians tend to perceive, far more penetrating than most Christians appear to recognize, and far more comforting than most seem to realize. Unfortunately, it appears regular pastoral care that utilizes the penitent’s baptismal identity and the new life that daily emerges from the baptismal washing of new birth in the Holy Spirit is far too often minimized or marginalized. Reclaiming Baptism’s prominence in the care of souls is one decided aim of this essay.

Therefore, when it comes to the extraordinary care of souls, a chief task of the pastor is to provide what is here being presented as “baptismal therapy.” Time and again a pastor will bring troubled souls back to their Baptism and deliver to them the victory of Christ over sin, death, and the devil. For a sinner to overcome “false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice” he must be brought into the presence and holiness of our Lord Jesus Christ, and be kept in habitual proximity to Him, for it is Jesus who has already won the victory and overcome these great afflictions.<sup>5</sup> Baptism, of course, unites us to Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:3-5) and His victory. What is more, the life, death and resurrection of

4 “[W]hen people are born again through the Spirit of God and set free from the law (that is, liberated from its driving powers and driven by the Spirit of Christ), they live according to the unchanging will of God, as comprehended in the law, and do everything, insofar as they are reborn, from a free and merry spirit. Works of this kind are not, properly speaking, works of the law, but works and fruits of the Spirit, or, as Paul calls them, ‘the law of the mind,’ and ‘the law of Christ.’ For such people are ‘no longer under laws but under grace,’ as St. Paul says in Romans 8 [7:23, 6:14].” FC, SD, Article VI, Concerning the Third Use of the Law, 17.

5 For a specific perspective on how the holiness of God is used in the care of souls, see Woodford, “Holy God, Holy Things, Holy People: Pastoral Care in Proximity to God’s Holiness.” SEELSORGER: A Journal for the Contemporary Cure of Souls, Vol. 1, No. 1, August 2015, 105-135.

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our Lord Jesus Christ not only atoned for the sin of the world, but by it Jesus brought true faith, hope and other great love and virtue to fulfill the law on our behalf, and then through Holy Baptism, imparts these glorious gifts to us for daily living. These gifts of Christ — true faith, hope and other great love and virtue — are the counter “to false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice.” Troubled souls have access to tremendous relief and an active remedy in Baptism. Pastors, then, are called to the task of artfully enacting and skillfully applying the grace, mercy and peace so readily available in and through Holy Baptism.

Therefore a pastor is about the business of bringing every last man, woman, and child into the absolute truth, virtue and cleansing holiness of Jesus Christ and His purifying means of grace. But given the utter complexities of the human soul, the ordinary and extraordinary care of souls is more intricate and delicate than a onetime announcement of forgiveness or a onetime declaration of belief at conversion. Care of troubled souls, in particular, requires careful attention. In fact it requires a pastor learning the diagnostic skills to compassionately, theologically and astutely peer into the great afflictions, dangerous passions and deadly desires of the soul.<sup>6</sup> To treat “false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice” pastors must be theologically astute enough to deliver right belief, not merely know it.<sup>7</sup> In other words, they must be able to know sin, its peculiarities and its absurdities. They must be able to enact God’s Word in a way that allows them to exhort, counsel, teach, pray, soothe, bless, forgive and encourage, all with faithful care and counsel of the troubled soul. A pastor must be able to know what it is to be human from the vantage point of the Creator, and subsequently care for God’s human creatures so intimately and deftly as to deliver Christ Himself to their wounds, heartaches, sins, and uncleanness, all to restore their humanity as God created.

For the purposes of this paper, “false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice” will be explored through a thoughtful examination of the classic deadly vices and cardinal virtues, in order to see how they provide a deeper look into the passions of the soul. In so doing, this study will demonstrate the profound usefulness of the vices and virtues as a diagnostic tool for pastors to utilize in identifying the various symptoms and corresponding overarching maladies of troubled souls. Most notably, this will also aid pastors in discerning how best to formally apply the curative remedy of “baptismal therapy,” and assist in forming a corresponding spiritual care plan that habituates troubled souls to their Baptism.

Insights from this exploration will also provide brief considerations of 1) how the virtues of Christ are in fact applied to the sinner who has been baptized into Christ, rather than trying to conjure them up from one’s own willpower; 2) what the virtuous (or ethical) life of the baptized will look like as it flows from Christ in action within repentant souls; and 3) provide suggestions of further study and critique regarding current developing attempts toward a Lutheran virtue ethics.<sup>8</sup>

## Soul Care

To give care to troubled souls, pastors must be willing and able to understand the complicated nature of fallen human beings. To be sure, souls are often a complex paradox of emotions, thoughts, desires and being. Sin has a way of wreaking havoc on a soul in ways that are invisible to our eyes and confusing to our ears. Pastors must be able to see into the caverns of hurt, the fissures of selfishness, and cavities of insecurity to diagnose the malady, and by God’s grace and holy Word, adequately apply the holy means of grace as a remedy for the dysfunction, disease, and death that comes from sin. No simple task!

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6 For specific diagnostic and usable pastoral care tools for practical, specific, and detailed pastoral care, see again, Woodford, “Holy God, Holy Things, Holy People.” However, the diagnostic charts and prescription assessment protocols from that essay have been adapted and provided in the appendix of this essay as practical examples for pastors to use. See **Appendix: Pastoral Methods of Extraordinary Care.**

7 “The theologian seeks to grasp and then articulate the central message of the gospel in such a way that the gospel becomes the norm by which all the various messages are judged worthy or unworthy of belief. The theologian seeks to unravel and shed light on the intricate web of beliefs — both conscious and unconscious — that shape our vision of the world and, thus, our desires and ultimately our actions. A chief task of the theologian is to peer beneath the surface and identify the mistaken beliefs that give rise to misplaced affections and subsequent erring ethics.” Gerald Hiestand and Todd Wilson, *The Pastoral Theologian: Resurrecting an Ancient Vision*, (Zondervan, Grand Rapids) 2015, p. 55.

8 Joel D. Biermann’s book, *A Case For Character: Toward a Lutheran Virtue Ethics*. (Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2014), is the most recent attempt at developing a Lutheran virtues ethic. However, though noble and intriguing, Biermann falls woefully short of treating the place of the Gospel in ethical and character formation. Therefore he misses the utterly profound contribution that Lutheran theology has to make in the ethics conversation. Though this point is somewhat tangential to this paper, the important overlap comes in the study of vice, virtue, and Baptism’s role of not only treating troubled souls, but also creating Christians who practice virtue (which, baptismally speaking, really ought to be seen as a redundant statement).

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Modern psychology has attempted to unravel the complexity of our humanness, offering multiple explanations and observations through various personality theories, with some being more successful than others.<sup>9</sup> But, by and large, they are not the first to observe the utter intricacies and fragilities of the human soul. The biblical sages of old have long given us reflections on our created humanness and have pointed us to the great depths of our being as children of the Heavenly Father. (Consider the Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, or Song of Solomon). Likewise, the Small Catechism summarily reminds us of all the capacities that God has endowed upon us, notably, “that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason, and all my senses, and still takes care of them.”<sup>10</sup> One of the ways, of course, that God still takes care of His multifaceted human creatures is through pastors.

Without question, modern psychology has provided those interested pastors with various diagnostic tools to utilize in their care of souls, which can certainly amplify the wisdom of the biblical sages.<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, the secular bent of modern psychology can often leave pastors wanting, and perhaps rightfully so. We cannot expect the observations about our humanness given from a point of view that lacks the awareness and consideration of the Creator of our humanness to satisfy the Christian spiritual care of souls. That’s why it’s necessary to recognize both the benefits and the limitations of modern psychology in pastoral care.

Yet, we are not left without a complete picture of the human soul. Christian sages from the Early Church made amazing observations about the human soul that provide tremendous benefit for pastors in their care of souls today. Perhaps even more notable than the discoveries of modern psychologists, are the observations and diagnoses of the human soul done by the fourth century

Christian thinkers known as the Desert Fathers. Opting for the ascetic life of solitude and meditation, these men withdrew from the larger society to live a hermit’s life of prayer and simplicity. Amazingly, however, the simplicity of their life actually revealed the complexity of the human soul. Their own struggles of the humble life of prayer and poverty allowed them to peer into the depths and fragility of the human soul with all of its disordered passions and longings, along with all of its hopes and dreams. In so doing, they identified passions and discerned desires that were deemed common to all humans, and noted the tendencies for how they become disordered, which, then, inevitably led to false belief, despair and other great shame and vice.

### The Desert Fathers

The most well-known Desert Father is probably Evagrius of Pontus, whose most famous work, *The Monk: A Treatise on the Practical Life*, provides brilliant insight into the soul with his observations on the “*logismoi*” λογισμοί — the wicked thoughts — that he also often called “demons” because they so fiercely assaulted the soul. In short, “Evagrius is the first to speak systematically about a doctrine of eight thoughts of wickedness,” which he would deem as the source from which of all other sins emanate.<sup>12</sup> A consideration of these “wicked thoughts” provides rich insight into the plight of fallen souls, and offers present day seelsorgers new diagnostic tools for the care of souls.

To be sure, what Evagrius and his contemporaries observed about the human soul could certainly be considered psychological in nature, though that was obviously not their aim. Their intent was to recognize the great detail and agility that is required to treat the spiritual maladies of the soul, even amid the simplest of lives. The summary categories of these “wicked thoughts” or vices developed by Evagrius and his contemporaries eventually came to be called the

9 The theories are many and varied: Freudian Psychoanalysis, Ego-Psychology, Behavior Modification, Rational Emotive Therapy, Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy, Adlerian and Reality Therapies, Solution Based Therapies, Person Centered Therapy, Gestalt Therapy, Family Therapy, and Jungian Therapy, just for starters.

10 *Luther’s Small Catechism*, explanation of The First Article of the Apostles’ Creed.

11 Although some remain skeptical about the viability of Christian psychology, there has been much progress by Christian counselors and therapists to provide faithful integration of psychology and theology for the overall wellbeing and health of their clients. “Christian counseling is more complex than other forms of counseling because our goals are multifaceted. Whereas the behaviorist can focus on symptom reduction and the psychoanalyst on ego strength, Christian counselors are concerned with spiritual growth as well as mental health.” Mark R. McMinn, *Psychology*,

*Theology, and Spirituality in Christian Counseling*. (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1996), p.33. See also, “After Christian scholars have discerned the advantages of secular models with which they have interacted in the critical evaluation phase, they need to develop new and different theories to incorporate these insights. They need to propose new hypotheses and theories for scholarly examination, ones which bear the imprint of the Christian presuppositions. We would contend that good ‘integrators’ must not only review research, but do research as well.” Stanton L. Jones & Richard E. Butman, *Modern Psychotherapies: A Christian Appraisal*. (InterVarsity: Downers Grove, 1991), p. 22.

12 Jean-Charles Nault, *The Noonday Devil: Acedia, The Unnamed Evil of Our Times*, tr. by Michael J. Miller, (Ignatius Press: San Francisco, 2013) p. 24.

“deadly sins.” This list includes: *gluttony, lust, greed, anger, envy, sloth* and *vainglory/pride*.

Similarly, in order to more adequately understand these disordered passions, one needs to become familiar with their so-called opposites. These, of course, we know as the “cardinal virtues.” This list includes: *wisdom, justice, courage, and temperance*, to which three theological virtues are added, namely, *faith, hope* and *love*. Study of both the vices and virtues will provide contemplative pastors rich insight into the passions of the soul, most notably, what happens to the soul when it becomes disordered, as well as the repose and restfulness that occurs when the passions are in harmony with one another.

Vice and virtue were not new to human thought. The ancient philosophers like Plato and Aristotle had much to say about them. However, Desert Fathers like Evagrius and John Cassian (and even much later, Gregory the Great), would provide an exploration of them from the Creator’s perspective and, in so doing, affirm how adept and agile pastors must be in the care of souls. The classification system and diagnostic process that they developed are tremendous assets for the contemporary pastor looking to increase and advance his skills in the care of souls. They provide pastors the opportunity to catch a glimpse into the dark depths of the human soul and more ably diagnose sin and its corresponding behaviors, as well as recognize its vast contaminating and defiling effects. But most beneficial will be how this aids pastors in determining how best to enact and direct the proper and specific holy remedy upon these troubled souls, while also providing direction for how best to exhort and drench these souls in the virtuous life that flows from the accompanying baptismal therapy.

Therefore, in order for pastors to deliver the precious souls of God from

“false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice,” pastors do well to understand the intricacies of disordered desires and deadly passions. Likewise, they need to be familiar with the diagnostic nature of the pastoral craft, be skilled at it, and be ready to go into the trenches of daily living with the tools of the trade and the confidence of the Holy Spirit. A pastor’s ultimate aim, of course, is to give quality spiritual care amid the utter complexities of the human soul, in order to deliver a good conscience, the purifying and cleansing holiness of Jesus Christ, and the virtuous and fruitful life that comes from being baptismally united to Jesus Christ.

### **Toward the Health of the Soul: Baptism and its Benefits**

The lack of health in the souls of today is quite evident by the massive number of self-help books, life coaches, and spiritual gurus claiming to have the answer to life’s complex problems and spiritual afflictions. It is evidence that the devil, the world, and the sinful flesh readily work against us, disordering our lives, and disrupting the health of our soul. To understand and see into one’s soul is an honored and hallowed office. Pastors have no small calling. Thus, when he has an apt understanding of what’s at the core of any particular malady, and repentance has been acknowledged by the troubled soul (distinguishing sins committed by the individual from sins received at the hands of others), a pastor can deftly prescribe a holy remedy, and compassionately treat the soul with the holiness of God and His Word.

However, it should be noted that often times there is the presence and guilt of sins committed, as well as the suffering and sense of injustice from sins received. When this is the case, pastoral care will need to skillfully identify and treat both respective sins — one committed as the perpetrator, while the other received as the victim — and therein offer the proper remedy for both. It will

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not do to lump them all together and expect complete healing to be received or achieved. In fact, more injury can come by doing so. For example, should a man be the victim of verbal abuse and in his woundedness retaliate in a sinful manner, it will not do to ignore the man's wound, along with his ultimate source of anger and disordered passion. Both sins received and sins committed need attention and treatment.

That's why pastoral care is not for the faint of heart. No mere generic remedy, extraordinary pastoral care requires specific and particular enactment of the means of grace upon the specific affliction being endured by the troubled soul. This means that appropriate and intentional enactment of God's holiness and Word be done through the likes of prayer, blessing, encouragement, absolution, exhortation, or the Sacraments (Baptism and the Lord's Supper), depending on what the malady and brokenness of a sinner may require. The art is to bring broken souls into the healing and health of Jesus Christ. Central to delivering this healing and health is for a pastor to recognize the shining remedies that might be most helpful to an ailing soul. For the purposes of this paper, the holy remedy of the aforementioned "baptismal therapy" is going to be provided as a powerful and versatile antidote to sin's defiling, contaminating and disparaging effects, of which pastors will want to make regular use in their extraordinary care of souls.

To be clear, Baptism is obviously not the only remedy. But it is a powerful and yet oft overlooked remedy and approach to the care of souls. Even so, as already noted, other curative treatments like absolution, the Lord's Supper, prayer, blessing, and exhortation can certainly be used in tandem with baptismal therapy. However, this paper aims to develop the fullness of what baptismal therapy includes.

Therefore a brief introduction to it is

offered here through Luther's explanation of Baptism in his Large Catechism. (The concluding section of this essay will develop it more completely.) Luther's words provide a nice summary basis for this therapy. Especially notice how Luther here masterfully brings the care of souls, Baptism, vice, and virtue all together under one roof:

Thus a Christian life is nothing else than a daily baptism, begun once and continuing ever after. For we must keep at it without ceasing, always purging whatever pertains to the old Adam, so that whatever belongs to the new creature may come forth. What is the old creature? It is what is born in us from Adam, irascible, spiteful, envious, unchaste, greedy, lazy, proud—yes—and unbelieving; it is beset with all vices and by nature has nothing good in it. Now, when we enter Christ's kingdom, this corruption must daily decrease so that the longer we live the more gentle, patient, and meek we become, and the more we break away from greed, hatred, envy, and pride. This is the right use of baptism among Christians...

What is repentance but an earnest attack on the old creature and an entering into a new life? If you live in repentance, therefore, you are walking in baptism, which not only announces this new life but also produces, begins, and exercises it. In baptism we are given the grace, Spirit, and strength to suppress the old creature so that the new may come forth and grow strong. Therefore Baptism remains forever. (LC, 66-68, 75-76)

The life of the baptized is the life in Christ. The art of pastoral care is to habituate troubled souls to their Baptism, particularly in extraordinary care sessions and in any personal spiritual care plans a pastor may create for someone.

It's especially important to recognize that the removal of sin and the termination of vice or a deadly desire is only the first part of this therapy. That is, Baptism also daily habituates one to the virtues of Christ. Said another way, being united to Christ means one is united to all of Christ, His life, His death, and His resurrection (Romans 6). Yet, to be clear, the point of habituating someone to the virtues of Christ is most emphatically *not* for the mere adoration, imitation, or emulation of those virtues. Rather it is to recognize and believe that in baptismal union with Christ, our Lord gives His virtues to us by divine imputation for our very own possession. Accordingly, baptismal therapy provides troubled souls a sacred pardon, peace and purification from sin and any malady afflicting them, while it also imparts the virtues of Christ to their person, even as He is also at the same time at work in their regenerate soul. Thus, where there is pardon and peace in Baptism there is also virtue, good works and every delightful fruit of the Spirit present and at work in the life of the regenerate (Gal. 5:22-23).

In contrast, the classic moral approach to desiring virtue would tell the troubled soul to battle his vice by treating it with the opposite virtue, and to seek goodness by cultivating his personal virtues and mastering his vices. But that is to teach a troubled soul to look within himself; to do more, try harder, be better, and aspire to grow in goodness by sheer might of will. This folly denies the biblical truth that a troubled soul — and any soul for that matter — is in fact weak, corrupt and depraved, that he is utterly inclined toward evil, and incapable of conquering sin, vice, and deadly desire. Putting it bluntly, it is a lie straight from hell that humans in and of ourselves can truly attain goodness.

Here is where a corrective for those presenting an anemic Lutheran virtue ethics can be seen. Advocating for moral character and the virtuous life is a noble thing. But to be Lutheran about it is to do

so from the strength and power of the Gospel to shape character and life rather than the classic approach of personal discipline, modeling and habituation toward virtue and away from vice. The difference comes in the habituation to Christ and His virtues, rather than to the classic set of virtues themselves that do not include the dying and rising with Christ present in Holy Baptism.

However, let the reader understand. Teaching moral character and discipline, being intentionally motivated toward goodness, and practicing virtue are certainly noble and right. Virtues are truly majestic and beautiful. But that's because they mirror the majesty and beauty of the One who is truly good and holy, and the One who is the way, the truth and the life (Mark 10:18; John 14:6). However, aspiring to them and practicing them apart from the only One who is good — apart from Christ — is not Christian. It is simply legalism cloaked in graceless and misguided sincerity, and moral determinism wrapped in misplaced optimism. For Lutherans, the ability to be moral, practice virtues, or build character all flow from the Gospel of Christ. Therefore, why not make the Gospel, as applied in the daily dying and rising with Christ in Baptism, central to any development of ethics or case for character? Much more could be said, but that will have to be developed in another paper. The essential point for a Lutheran virtue ethics is that Baptism unites us to Christ and His virtues, and can be used to bring health and healing to troubled souls.

## **Dangerous Passions and Deadly Sins: Identifying false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice.**

When one considers the powerful pull and drive of the “seven deadly sins,” it becomes very telling why so few people (if any), can actually put all of these sins into check by their own willpower alone. A better and necessary alternative to putting these sins in check, as was just

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explored, is through the shed blood of Jesus and the corresponding virtuous life that He imparts to us through our union with Him in Holy Baptism. Nonetheless, this list of sins and their impact upon the soul is entirely helpful for pastors to utilize and explore when giving care to troubled souls. In short, by becoming familiar with these “deadly passions” and “deadly sins,” and how they can become so disordered, pastors will discover effective and profound opportunities to offer specific diagnoses and proper corresponding remedies. They also afford the opportunity to give pastoral warnings and exhortations about what these sins will lead to if left unchecked and untreated. Though an extensive detailed analysis of each particular sin may be helpful, space only allows for a brief overview of these seven deadly sins and their corresponding disordered passions.<sup>13</sup>

### **1) Gluttony**

The obvious question is why is the overeating of food considered a deadly sin? This question is amplified when there is not necessarily much by way of overt biblical prohibitions against it. In fact, the biblical writers often encourage us to enjoy food as much as they might prohibit it. The word “gluttony” itself does not even appear in the English Standard Version translation of the Bible, though “glutton” can be found some seven times. True, the apostle Paul does tell us to use restraint when it comes to our bodies (1 Cor. 6:15-20). But is that the basis for gluttony being considered such a deadly sin? A few citations will perhaps give some clarity.

Prov. 23:20-21(ESV): *20Be not among drunkards or among gluttonous eaters of meat, 21for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and slumber will clothe them with rags.*

Prov. 28:7 *The one who keeps the law is a son with understanding, but a companion of gluttons shames his father.*

<sup>13</sup> For this analysis I’m indebted to, among others, the recent and very fine work of Dennis Okholm, in his deeply insightful book, *Dangerous Passions, Deadly Sins*, from which much is gratefully borrowed. (Brazos, Grand Rapids, 2014).

Prov. 23:1-3 *1When you sit down to eat with a ruler, observe carefully what is before you, 2and put a knife to your throat if you are given to appetite. 3Do not desire his delicacies, for they are deceptive food.*

These are some blunt declarations. Overeating is not viewed kindly, but can it really be damning to overeat? Perhaps we need to think more broadly about eating itself, considering more than just the act of overeating. After all, eating is associated with much of the biblical narrative, none more significant than the Passover and the Lord’s Supper. In fact, Jesus himself even describes heaven in terms of a great wedding banquet.

So how then can eating be so deadly? We need look no further than Adam and Eve. By their eating of the forbidden fruit, they brought sin and death into the world. It wasn’t a gorging type of overeating, but one of indulgent disobedience:

*“[W]hen the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and she ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her and he ate” (Gen. 3:6).*

They were commanded not to eat from it, but giving in to the temptation of the devil, letting their desires become disordered, they acted upon them and ate. Physical appetites are part of our carnal nature. Thus, it can be said that gluttony is a vice that arises from the constitution of our nature. We need to eat food to live, and that food usually brings pleasure. “Gluttony, therefore, has to do with the manner in which we consume food, involving inordinate desire and immoderate pleasure.”<sup>14</sup> Thus, it’s not simply the overconsumption of food that is deadly, it’s also the under-consumption of food as well. For Evagrius, gluttony is the pleasure of eating that becomes so gratifying to one’s palate that he or she is turned away from God and His com-

<sup>14</sup> Dennis Okholm, *Dangerous Passions, Deadly Sins*, (Brazos, Grand Rapids, 2014), p. 18.

mandments by that pleasure. It becomes deadly, then, when one makes a god out of their belly, as Paul notes in Phil. 3:19.

Consequently, gluttony “is not merely a perversion of something good in human nature, as it is true of every sin; it is a perversion of something that is necessary to live.”<sup>15</sup> It takes a brave pastor to enter into such a diagnosis. Food consumption is not considered usual pastoral care of souls. But there is reason for pastors to be mindful of it. Putting it simply, this vice demonstrates a lack of carnal self-control. And the thought goes, if someone is unable to control simple eating habits, how will one be able to control other habits that progress up the continuum of the human soul to rational thought and venture into the sins of the mind? In other words, we are not to let our appetites control us, but we are to have control over our appetites. Here, a fruit of the Spirit — self-control — which is given in Holy Baptism, is to lead the Christian forward (Gal. 5:22).

Of course, when left untreated, countless misbeliefs, despair, and other great shame and vice can result from this vice going unchecked. Eating disorders, unhealthy eating habits, shame from obesity, strained relationships, and a progression towards other sins of carnal indulgence (i.e. lust), are often associated with leaving gluttony untreated. Pastors do well to note any of the various fixations that can become manifest and range from 1) simple overeating, 2) eating at all times of the day, 3) obsessing over the next time one will eat, 4) eating expensive foods, 5) seeking after delicacies (being discontent with common food), and 6) continuously being preoccupied with food (either its restriction or its indulgence.)

A pastor who dares venture into diagnosing this vice does well to be careful and deliberate with the care of the soul. Jumping into a diagnosis too quickly will quite likely risk the pastor and parish-ioner relationship given the sensitive

nature of one's personal eating habits. Special attention and care should also be made when attempting to treat a soul with an eating disorder. Ordinarily pastors do not have the cognitive therapy training to help someone recognize and treat the irrational nature of an eating disorder. Pastors should not attempt to replace professional psychologists. However, pastors can become well-equipped in dealing with the spiritual misbeliefs and idolatry that are generated from an eating disorder, as well as destroying the lies that the devil, the world and the sinful nature will press upon someone with an eating disorder.

The remedy for this vice is often set forth in the classic opposite virtue of “temperance” or self-control, with fasting being utilized as outward training and discipline. Though these things do have value, making the remedy hinge on one's own willpower is a recipe for defeat and failure. However, delivering the victory of Christ, who gives us the power to overcome vice with His grace and virtue, is what a pastor has been sent to do. Jesus is the source of true repose. Therefore, how this repose is given will be demonstrated in the forthcoming baptismal therapy section, which will detail how to provide a spiritual remedy and spiritual care plan for the treatment of this and all other vices.

## 2) Lust

Lust is the second carnal vice. It stems from the natural cravings of the body that become directed toward sexual pleasure of both the mind and body. Therefore it is a sin committed in either thought or deed. Jesus is quite clear on the nature of this sin when He notes that even if a man thinks lustfully of a woman he has still committed adultery with her in his heart. On this vice, the ascetic and Desert Father John Cassian provides a realistic approach that acknowledges natural biological faculties and processes without trivializing them, and deals with mundane bodily particulars

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overcome vice  
with His grace  
and virtue, is  
what a pastor has  
been sent to do.*

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 16.

without being prudish. In other words, he recognizes the basic created sex drive and libido of our humanness, but seeks out and identifies where this passion becomes disordered and, when temptation is afforded the opportunity, how it will lead to destructive behaviors and spiritually deadly consequences as well as devastating earthly consequences (i.e. a destroyed marriage or family, porn addiction, which can lead to a lost job, etc.).

As with gluttony, the mind can become fixated on an impure desire, which will trigger the lower capacities of the soul toward indulging in the act. What becomes especially helpful for the attentive pastor is to note the difference between the temptation to sin and the actual sin itself. That is to say, sin may touch the mind in thought, but it does not have to master us by our consent. Therefore, both Cassian and Evagrius recognized that when the “demons” make use of our “thoughts” that are good in themselves (like the sex drive that is part of our created being), they can thus warp what was good in nature to the point that we succumb to lust. “The progression is from thought, which is linked to sensory impression, to which consent is then given, so that what was a thought has now become a ‘passion’ and, if given into habitually, becomes a deadly sin.”<sup>16</sup> The deadly nature of this progression is that it ends up disordering more than just the carnal passions. When the lower powers of our soul (the lower carnal appetites) are strongly moved toward their objects, the higher powers (reason and will) are hindered and disordered in their proper activities. For when the enemy does not succeed in making the deed come to fruition, the enemy assaults the mind and defiles it through the secret thoughts of lust.

The more traditional remedy for lust, similar to gluttony, is controlling the appetites and an exercising or fasting of the body through discipline. However, as sexual addiction demonstrates, mere

willpower alone is insufficient in the long run, and numerous false beliefs, despair, and other great shame and vice can flow from this disordered passion. Therefore helping a troubled soul draw strength and self-control through their Baptism, as well as drowning the sinful self with all of its desires in that same Baptism to arise as a new creation, is a powerful remedy for pastors to utilize.

### 3) Greed

Simply put, greed is loving money and material possessions too much. It’s not just having things, but having them inordinately. However, greed can manifest itself in compulsive consumption as well as stinginess. Covetousness, of course, commonly accompanies greed. This is particularly deadly when what is coveted is preferred to loving God and when others in our lives take second place to affluence and mammon.

The sinister nature of greed is that it can be a shape shifter. Cassian helps ferret this out when he notes three instances of covetousness modeled by three biblical examples. “Gehazi (over against Elisha) represents those who want to hoard even what they never possessed (such as, in this case, the ‘grace of prophecy’); Judas typifies those who desire what they had earlier renounced; and Ananias and Saphira are models of those who from a ‘faulty and hurtful beginning’ of ‘lukewarmness’ become greedy ‘through fear of poverty and want of faith.’”<sup>17</sup> Here the word “avarice” comes into play. Taken from the Latin root *aveo*, “I desire,” greed goes toward the desire of things lusted after, which can be more than money, including things like knowledge, esteem, health, spouse, clothing, applause, fame, power and whatever else brings immoderate desire.

Evagrius does not have a lot to say about greed, but what he does offer is significant. He calls greed “the mother of idolatry,” which the apostle Paul clearly

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 41.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 65.

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thought, but it  
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consent.*

asserts (Col. 3:5; Eph. 5:5), even blatantly stating the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil (1 Tim 6:10). Jesus also echoes this in His teachings (Matt. 6:24; Luke 16:13).<sup>18</sup> But the point for pastors to note, of course, is how destructive greed can be when taken from thought to behavior to personal fulfillment, and how this vice can feed other vices. The relentless pursuit of ambition, for example, leads to the misbelief that enough is never enough. When one reaches or achieves what he formerly thought would bring contentment and satisfaction, he comes to find it wanting. So he relentlessly presses on to the next thing, often dismissing family, friends, sleep, the beauty of sunsets, and the smell of roses all so that he can prove to himself and others that he has arrived or attained what he thinks is lacking in life, only to once again find himself unsatisfied when he gets there. In fact, when left untreated, greed can begin to show up and give rise to other deadly sins such as vainglory, envy, gluttony, and lust, not to mention the daughter sins such as murder and injustice.

Thus, when hope or trust is placed in the material world and what a man can acquire, he is inevitably seeking fulfillment in himself or his possessions. But Jesus is clear; a person cannot serve two masters. He will either hate the one and love the other, or despise the one and be devoted to the other. You cannot serve God and wealth. Pastors have no problem emphasizing this from the pulpit for a stewardship campaign, but walking through the treachery of this vice with an individual will take more time and gentle exploration.

More times than not, the idol (master) actually holds sway over the individual who only appears to control it. For what the greedy person often experiences is the sin becoming its own punishment. He will gather together all he covets and then becomes anxious over the storage of all that he has amassed, while also

becoming paranoid of his enemies, fearing retribution from them. Greed is a dastardly disordered passion. History and culture, including the Holy Christian Church, is replete with those who have succumbed to its indulgence and been brought to despair and great shame. But pastors don't need to look to history to find someone afflicted by the false belief of greed. As with gluttony, to give care to a member who is wittingly or unwittingly afflicted with greed is no easy task. But it is nonetheless a necessary one.

The common classic treatment for greed is poverty and self-control. But as Evagrius demonstrated, even in a monastic community of ascetic monks living in poverty and simplicity, greed still reared its ugly head. Therefore training in repentance and baptismal therapy, in daily dying and rising with Christ, combined with the outward prayerful training of the body and mind in temperance and contentment will be a consideration in pastoral care.

## 4) *Anger*

The fiercest passion is anger, and it's quite deadly to have it disordered. This one, above all the others, demonstrates how quickly vices can give birth to other offspring. In this case, anger often arises out of greed (avarice), where it must be noted that a causal relationship exists between the two.<sup>19</sup> When our desire to possess or control is thwarted, we become enraged. It is perhaps the most detrimental to the much sought-after tranquility and health of a soul. So intense can this vice become that its destructive behavior boils over into strife, rage, insults, clamor, indignation, blasphemies, wrath and hatred. Anger can also certainly remain unseen while it rages within, while at other times it breaks out in word and deed, sometimes violently so. Often anger arises rapidly and dissipates just as rapidly, and other times it lasts for days, or some cases even years or a lifetime.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 66.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 95.

Pastors do well to understand the nature of this vice and the various progressions and relationships to the other deadly sins in their care of souls. This is particularly important because anger can be so incredibly debilitating. First, in how it interferes with our prayer life and nearness to God; and second, in how anger affects discernment and discretion, and how it cuts us off from wisdom and good counsel. In fact, even righteous anger — anger that might be used to fight off the Evil One and temptation — can easily be hijacked and redirected by the assaults of the Evil One and our own weak flesh, and subsequently aimed toward worldly desires so that we end up fighting with others, and becoming blind in mind and knowledge toward what is good and right (virtuous). Road rage demonstrates the irrational, self absorbed, indulgent outrage that can so consume someone it obnoxiously spills over into violent destructive behavior.

To find relief and repose amid an angry mind and body is near impossible to will upon oneself. Add to that mix wounds received by the hands of others and the nature of how the mind returns again and again to that offense and pain, it becomes clear how attempting to insert sheer willpower to such an emotionally explosive state of being is near futile. It's not that training and discipline in the classic treatment of anger with charity and patience is unable to help. But when hurt and anger has become so deeply ingrained within the soul, truly successful remedies apart from the patience and charity of Christ enacted through the Word of God in baptismal therapy, are few and far between.

### 5) *Envy*

Often said to be irrational jealousy, envy occurs when a person lacks someone else's superior quality, achievement, or possession, and either intently desires it or spitefully wishes that the other person lacked it. Envy is unequivocally ugly. Biblical accounts are loaded with envy.

According to Cassian, it was present in the devil when Adam and Eve were created in the image of God. Scripture records multiple deadly accounts of envy: Cain kills Abel, Jacob and his mother connive to get Esau's birthright, Joseph's brothers sell him into slavery, and King Saul becomes hostile to David. "Envy is grieving over another's good when it seems to lessen the envier's own good name or esteem. It is a self-inflicted wound in which one is racked by the prosperity of another person."<sup>20</sup> Providing pastoral care to a soul troubled by envy is a delicate matter. Leading that soul to repentance and renewal will take a pastor earning the trust of a troubled soul, for envy is often accompanied by shame and embarrassment on the one hand, or denial and anger on the other.

Some observe envy springing from vainglory (too much pride in oneself), while others connect it with avarice (greed). But envy does have characteristics of its own that help identify it. Here, it's helpful to distinguish between coveting and envy. Coveting is the desire of something of our neighbor's without begrudging them for having it. But envy wants what they have so intensely that a person not only begrudges them for it, but also seeks to dispossess or deprive them of what they have, even as they acquire it for themselves.

This vice reveals the darkness of the heart and its capacity to wish ill upon others. Often, at its core is the social context that seeks to compare social standings and status that influences one's self-concept, often with great misbeliefs. This is particularly poignant in our digital, social media age, (including the likes of Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube) and especially prevalent given the narcissism epidemic of our time.<sup>21</sup> To be sure, insecurity can play a role in envy, but it may also simply stem from fear rather than complete envy. Quality pastoral care will aim to take the time to decipher and diagnose what may be at the core of this vice, and how best to

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 120.

<sup>21</sup> See two necessary and fascinating books: first, *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement*, by Jean M. Twenge and W. Keith Campbell, (Simon & Schuster: New York, 2009); second *iPod, YouTube, Wii Play, Theological Engagements With Entertainment*, by D. Brent Laytham, (Wipf & Stock: Eugene Oregon, 2012).

enact baptismal therapy upon a soul troubled by envy. Exploring one's identity in Christ through Baptism, how Christ gives contentment — not generically and patronizingly, but personally and sincerely — through the water and the Word and in a way that is day after day applied to the sinner, perhaps initially done by personalizing and enacting these sacred words of Paul upon him in blessing, could be part of a personal care plan to help habituate that troubled soul to his Baptism: <sup>5</sup>[God] saved [you], not because of works done by [you] in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup>whom he poured out on [you] richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup>so that being justified by his grace [you are an heir] according to the hope of eternal life. <sup>8</sup>The saying is trustworthy" (Titus 3:5-8a).

## 6) Sloth/Acedia

Acedia is a dastardly little demon. The more familiar term of "sloth" misses how the ancients used the word. Sloth refers to laziness or lackluster work ethic. But this slothfulness is not merely of the physical kind. It has a deeply spiritual root to it. Therefore, the word "acedia" is a better fit. Simply put, acedia is the absence of care. But used by the ancients it refers to the absence of care regarding the spiritual elements of life, or more notably, the lack of care over one's own salvation.

This belligerent little demon is on the move in our time, with few who are recognizing it. A close look at the Christians in North America will quickly pull back any blinders people once had on about this terror. Its presence and havoc is running rampant in our times. Be assured, acedia does not discriminate. Pastors are just as susceptible, if not more, to this spiritual tyrant.

Evagrius referred to acedia as the "noon day demon" (from Ps. 91:6). It was a reference to the time of day that

monks would poke their head out of their cell and stare at the sun, wondering why it is moving so slowly, and become utterly listless toward their prayer and meditation, while also restlessly moving about their cell. Evagrius was the first to describe this affliction or "demon" in great detail. It's a fascinating perspective given that it's from an ascetic monk, living in the hermit-like simplicity and poverty of the desert.

Modern psychologists have compared acedia/slothfulness to depression on account of many shared characteristics, "including feelings of sadness or hopelessness; loss of interest in pleasurable or daily activities; changes in sleep patterns, appetite; fatigue; agitation; feelings of worthlessness or guilt; inability to concentrate; and suicidal ideation."<sup>22</sup> But though it may share similarities, it is its own beast, and cannot rightly be called depression.

What makes acedia so devious is that it's found at the intersection of two series of vices on the continuum of the human soul that the Desert Fathers developed, namely, the corporal and the spiritual. With such a convergence, havoc is easily wreaked upon the soul. As there are multiple layers to this demon, pastors do well to pay special attention to how this vice works, and to guard their own soul too. (I offer a case study about my own affliction with this as part of the conclusion.)

Kathleen Norris in her splendid 2008 work, *Acedia & Me: A Marriage, Monks, and a Writer's Life*, vividly opens up the depth of this affliction by drawing on her own experience and, even more aptly, by engaging in the insights of one of the ancient monastic Desert Fathers:

The person afflicted by acedia refuses to care or is incapable of doing so. When life becomes too challenging and engagement with others too demanding, acedia offers a kind of spiritual morphine: you

*Acedia is a  
dastardly little  
demon.*

<sup>22</sup> Okholm, *Dangerous Passions, Deadly Sins*, p. 138.

know the pain is there, yet can't rouse yourself to give a damn. That it hurts to care is borne out in etymology, for care derives from an Indo-European word meaning "to cry out," as in a lament. Caring is not passive, but an assertion that no matter how strained and messy our relationships can be, it is worth something to be present, with others, doing our small part. Care is also required for the daily routines that acedia would have us suppress or deny as meaningless repetition or too much bother.<sup>23</sup>

There are also various dimensions to acedia, which *seelsorgers* do well to recognize. The first is the *temporal* dimension. This is the utter slowness of time and despairing thoughts that come from its slowness. The day seems fifty hours long. The passage of time is never ending. For the monks who were afflicted with this, they found no solace by the slowness of time. As they usually only ate once a day, the oppressiveness of this affliction was only intensified by the meagerness and plainness of the meal. When there is little to zestfully engage the imagination and excitedly pass the time, the passions begin to wander into physical apathy and spiritual lethargy as well as physical lethargy and spiritual apathy.

The second dimension is the spatial dimension. This is "the impression of being hemmed in, of being stifled."<sup>24</sup> Therefore acedia brings with it multiple challenges that constrict and confine the sufferer, but also disorder one's care for what is normally seen as good. This vice, among all the others, must be treated spiritually if any fight against it is going to prevail. Prescribing mere busyness will actually only enable the demon to dig deeper and grow bigger. Attending to the spiritual matters of the Lord is what this demon wants to thwart, particularly as it pertains to one's own soul. Therefore the remedy lies strongly in baptismal therapy and the virtues of Christ imparted to

someone enduring this often intensely debilitating and reoccurring affliction. This will require helping the troubled soul soak in the therapeutic compassion and lively waters of Baptism that deliver Jesus and His abiding presence to the wearied soul suffering acedia.

### 7) *Pride/Vainglory*

Pride maintains a prominent place for both Evagrius and Cassian. Evagrius says it is the "cause of the most damaging fall for the soul," while Cassian says, "it is first in terms of origin and time. It is a most savage beast, fiercer than all those previously mentioned ... it is the beginning of all sins and faults."<sup>25</sup> Ultimately pride is our craving for superiority and the beliefs (right or wrong) that we hold about ourselves that fuels such excessive craving.

Arrogance is a bedfellow with pride. Unique about this, however, is that where we may realize our own anger, gluttony, or greed, we are not aware of our arrogance. And even if we are made aware of it or can see it, it remains difficult to acknowledge because we simply imagine ourselves more important than we are.

The disturbing nature of this vice is that it readily attacks those who appear to be making spiritual progress. The soul, thinking it has achieved good progress in the work of faith or battlement of vice, is blindsided by pride that puffs up the soul with self-vanity, even while one may be trying to maintain exercises to fight against vice. Ironically then, the virtues being exercised by the one whom pride is attacking are now supplying his soul with new fuel for vanity. "Look at me! Look how well I'm doing!" It's a vice deceptively interwoven into our virtues. As Evagrius puts it: "Vainglory is an irrational passion and it readily gets tangled up with any work of virtue."<sup>26</sup>

To combat pride, humility is classically seen as a treatment. However, the na-

23 Kathleen Norris, *Acedia & Me: A Marriage, Monks, and a Writer's Life*, (2008).

24 Jean-Charles Nault, *The Noonday Devil: Acedia, the Unnamed Evil of Our Times*, trans. Michael J. Miller, (Ignatius Press: San Francisco, 2013)p. 30.

25 Okholm, *Dangerous Passions, Deadly Sins*, p. 161.

26 Ibid, p. 165.

ture of pride is to be indulgently overconfident in oneself rather than Christ. Confession and repentance must certainly be part of the remedy, where the virtue of Christ, and our identity in Him through Baptism, must repeal the darkness of pride and replace it with the holiness of Christ, often day after day. Pastors have no small task on how to carefully and tactfully walk a soul through the shadow lands of pride. But with Christ there is a sure way forward.

## Virtue's Role in the Diagnosis of the Soul

Once a pastor becomes familiar with the various disordered passions and desires, and how they may manifest themselves as vices among the flock he tends, a pastor can then begin to be more intentional in using them to diagnose the varying conditions of his parishioners. Not merely as a means to say, "Here's your problem!" But to utilize them as a viewfinder into the soul, exploring the dysfunction, the hurt, false beliefs, the despair, and any other great shame or vice that is presently being manifested by the individual.

Additionally, another method to help diagnose the troubled souls of our time is to consider these vices (or deadly sins) in light of the cardinal virtues, but not simply in light of their classic opposites. Rather, by examining the "hinge" upon which both a particular vice and virtue swing, new insight can be given into the nature of the sin afflicting one of a pastor's flock, allowing pastors to better diagnose the malady of that soul, and more readily identify a remedy and corresponding baptismal therapy treatment plan. Space prevents a detailed analysis, but as circumstance would have it, someone has already done pastors a wonderful service by writing a superb book on this very topic.

*The Cardinal and the Deadly*, brilliantly written by Karl Clifton-Soderstrom, offers a fantastic analysis of the common hinge

upon which both a vice and a virtue swing. Clifton-Soderstrom notes that he takes his lead from Luther, who, in his commentary on Romans, "states that pride and wisdom share a common hinge."<sup>27</sup> That hinge is in how we understand our humanity; pride distorts our view of humanity, wisdom sees it clearly.

In short, most treatments on the seven virtues or seven deadly sins either treats one set or the other, or occasionally treats them as a list of fourteen distinct character traits. The approach taken by Clifton-Soderstrom pairs virtues and vices "in new ways to reveal something more complex about the character of human desire."<sup>28</sup> Each of these pairings, then, teaches us something particular to the individual virtue and vice and how certain virtues can correct vices, but only in the way of God's grace making one new. His point is that, "the task of forming moral character is not simply swapping a virtue for a vice, but rather undertaking an iterative, imperfect, and holistic process that relies at every turn on divine grace."<sup>29</sup>

This approach more closely captures the position of this paper, namely, that at the core of moral character is the grace of God given in and through Jesus Christ, which is imparted to the repentant believer through Holy Baptism, and it can be seen in the life of the regenerate through daily repentance and joyful obedience to the baptismal life of faith.

Each of the classic virtues and vices below are paired based upon a common hinge that Clifton-Soderstrom notes they share, of which is not inherently the direct opposite of one or the other. By doing this, it provides the opportunity to peer even deeper into the desires of the soul. For the sake of ease, each respective vice and virtue is simply listed with the common hinge noted in between them.

*At the core of moral character is the grace of God given in and through Jesus Christ, which is imparted to the repentant believer through Holy Baptism.*

<sup>27</sup> *The Cardinal and the Deadly: Reimagining the Seven Virtues and Seven Vices*. (Cascade Books: Eugene, OR, 2015), p. 9.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*



<u>VIRTUE</u>	<u>COMMON HINGE</u>	<u>VICE</u>
Wisdom	"meaning of humanity"	Pride
Faith	"receptivity to grace"	Sloth/Acedia
Hope	"time — manner of how we live in it"	Greed
Temperance	"human vitality"	Gluttony/Lust
Courage	"how one relates to the goodness of others"	Envy
Justice	"how we respond to the systematic sins of the world"	Anger

With each pairing, one can begin to see how they hinge together, and what may actually be behind a particular presenting symptom or malady. The goal, of course, is a diagnosis that can specifically direct the pastoral care being provided. Specifically, what and how God's Word will be enacted and brought to bear by the pastor upon the troubled soul in order to remedy sin, bring cleansing, and offer encouragement.

#### **Conclusion: Baptismal Therapy for the Cure of Souls and the Key to the "Moral" Life**

*Every Christian has enough in Baptism to learn and to do all his life. For he has always enough to do by believing firmly what Baptism promises and brings: victory over death and the devil, forgiveness of sin, God's grace, the entire Christ, and the Holy Spirit with His gifts. (LC IV 41).*

Baptismal therapy obviously flows out of the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. As already noted, this sacrament connects one to Jesus Himself, not figuratively, not symbolically, but literally and sacramentally (Romans 6). Therefore the baptized believer's life is not his own. He lives in Christ and Christ lives in him. In other words, Jesus actually lives out His own

life through every baptized child of God. This has profound implications for how we understand the life of faith, and how pastors care for troubled souls. Baptism forgives sins, renews lives, and gives a good conscience (Acts 2:38, Titus 3:3-8, 1 Peter 3:21), but it also lets pastor and parishioner alike draw upon Christ, His virtues, and His Holy Spirit for the so-called "moral life" (Gal.3:27, 5:22-23). The acts we do, the behavior we show, and virtues we display, are all really Christ at work in us. Even the character that we demonstrate comes from the character of Christ in us.

But let's be clear. It is not wrong to teach morality. It's not wrong to aspire to goodness, practice specific virtues, or to teach character. It's not wrong to be disciplined. Society and culture need these things. Our children need these things.<sup>30</sup> We need these things, just as we need God's Law. In fact, His Law must be taught as a guide for the Christian life. However, the Law will never reform the Old Adam. It is not the motivation for the virtuous life of holiness.

But as the life of the Christian is wrapped up in Christ, the Christian need simply realize that he or she has already been given the character, virtue, or goodness that he or she may desire in the Lord Jesus Christ. Again, studying and

30 In fact, for fans of C. S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien there is a must read for any enthusiast of their works of fiction, but especially for those who are parents. It delightfully walks readers through the virtue and character taught in the likes of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Hobbit*, and *The Lord of the Rings*. To that end, Louis Markos has written a magnificent book titled *On The Shoulders of Hobbits: The Road to Virtue with Tolkien and Lewis*, in which he observes: "Lewis's Narnia, like Tolkien's Middle-earth, is far more than a land of imagination; it is a place where honor and chivalry stand poised in mortal combat with the life-denying, faith-denying, hope-denying forces of evil. Though Lewis and Tolkien clad themselves, humbly and inconspicuously, in professional robes, these two Oxford dons were in fact medieval knights come down from the past, heroes for a distinctly unheroic age." (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2012), p. 14-15.

learning the virtues is good, right, and proper, but aspirations to practice them need not be and should not be taught to come from one's own willpower. Christ has already bestowed goodness, virtue, and character upon every believer united to Him in Baptism, just as He has also given to them His righteousness, innocence and blessedness through that same Baptism. Faith invites us to believe this to be true.

Paul makes this clear. To the Galatians he says, "*you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ*" (Gal. 3:27). As such, pastors can say to those in their care, "You have been baptized with Christ and you no longer live, but Christ lives in you. The life you live in the body, you live by faith in the Son of God, who loved you and gave himself for you" (Gal. 2:20). Therefore it should become clear that aspirations to live a moral, virtuous, and ethical life are not wrought by one's own willpower, but by the power of Christ in the regenerate believer. This is not done mystically or magically, but by the Spirit of Christ baptismally working in believers through the Word of Christ, which calls all to joyful obedience to Christ and His Word.<sup>31</sup>

So the focus is thus not merely upon specific virtues in and of themselves, but upon Christ who fulfilled those virtues, and who works within the daily life of believers as they live out those virtues. Cultivating character and virtues is therefore not simply to be a moral endeavor *per se*, but rather a baptismal endeavor that lives out one's faith in Christ, and in which the new man, who arose with Christ, delights in God's Law. To be sure, knowing what God considers good and virtuous is important. Just like knowing God's commandments is good, right, and salutary. But aspiring to accomplish them by way of the Law, and apart from Christ — willing oneself to do them, embrace them, or fulfill them — is only to chase spiritual folly. The Small Catechism is a sheer masterpiece of simplic-

ity and brilliance when it confesses what the baptized life truly entails:

"It indicates that the old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever."

Thus, where dangerous passions and "evil desires" disorder life, lead to sin, and defile life, baptismal therapy calls every sinner to repentance. Which, to be clear, means that a man not only confess his sin, but that he turns away from that sin and "evil desire" in sorrow and contrition. In other words, his sinful thoughts, behaviors, and vices are stopped, confessed as wrong, wherein that sinner then pleads for mercy and forgiveness. Here the sinful self is spiritually crucified and buried with Christ. It is spiritually drowned and killed.

But then a new man emerges and a new creation comes forth. In the case of a troubled soul whose "evil desires" have brought defilement and contamination, the washing and renewal of Baptism can be applied by the pastor through the enactment of a baptismal Scripture reading and prayer. Of course, this therapy can also include both the Word of absolution by which sins are actually forgiven before God in heaven (for sins committed), as well as the cleansing and purification of souls sinned against through the holiness of Christ baptismally bestowed, and reiterated by the eating of the sacred body of Christ and the drinking of His most holy blood. The aim is not to limit pastoral care to baptismal therapy, but to celebrate its vibrancy in the life of the believer and encourage its pastoral use among troubled souls.

For through that process the new man spiritually arises with Christ, being cleansed and purified to walk in newness of life. This is more than just a nice metaphor and more than just an intellectual

*The acts we do,  
the behavior we  
show, and  
virtues we  
display, are all  
really Christ at  
work in us.*

<sup>31</sup> The Lutheran Confessions offer clarity on the work of the Holy Spirit compelling us toward practice of virtues as well: "Next the Holy Spirit dwells in the elect who have believed as he dwells in his temple and is not idle in them but impels the children of God to obey God's commands. Therefore, believers should in the same way not be idle either, much less resist the impetus of God's Spirit, but should practice all Christian virtues, godliness, modesty, moderation, patience, and love for one another—and should diligently seek to 'confirm their call and election' [2 Peter 1:10], so that the more they recognize the Spirit's power and strength in themselves, the less they doubt their election." FC, SD, Article XI: Election, 73.

*This is a  
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new life. This is a spiritual and earthly new life, one that has been given a clean conscience, in which the new man walks in faith and the virtues of Christ, even while clinging to Christ and His beautiful forgiveness. Here the new man emerges full of virtue (Christ's virtue), including love — love for God and love for neighbor — that will lead him forward, wherein the ethical or moral life is a natural outworking of the new life in Christ. Delight in the Law and desire for what is good, right, and salutary, especially all biblical virtues, as well as a right ordering of the passions, a spiritual peace and an inner repose, are all possible and present because Christ Jesus already achieved them for us, gives them to us, and yet remains at work in us.

Therefore, as the life of the baptized is rooted in Christ, this readily provides avenues for the extraordinary care of troubled souls through baptismal therapy. Pastors can regularly draw upon the eternal curative remedies of Holy Baptism in the care of troubled consciences and afflicted souls. Whatever the circumstances of a troubled soul, a Pastor can invoke that troubled soul's Baptism, and then enact the precious curative gifts of "washing and renewal" through formal prayer and ritual blessing, and perhaps if desired, even including the anointing with oil (James 5:14), where this enactment of God's Word is tailored to the specific malady that has been previously diagnosed and expressed. And when God's Word is enacted, it can be done with the sign of the cross upon the forehead and prefaced and concluded with the words of a baptismal invocation, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

This curative remedy then announces again and again the delightful gifts of renewal, cleansing and forgiveness that are daily given in Holy Baptism. Where necessary, each pastoral care session can utilize baptismal therapy and apply it toward the specific presenting or reoccurring malady. Likewise, a personal

spiritual care plan can be created in tandem that identifies specific baptismal Scriptures to be read, prayed, and meditated upon, which also corresponds to the catechism's biblical instruction for daily baptismal repentance and renewal, dying and rising, living, and being.

### **Brief Example**

As a brief example, perhaps a troubled soul has a bad conscience that stems from the vice of anger and rage. The wounds that are suffered because of one's rage and the wounds that are inflicted on others can weigh heavily upon a troubled soul. They can suffocate, cripple, and condemn a burdened soul. Yes, such sins make for a very bad conscience. And a bad conscience darkens the soul like nothing else can. Satan knows this to be true, so he presses hard against the troubled soul. But so does the world and one's own sinful nature. Anger's pervasiveness brings a massive affront. Together with the devil, they all frighten, torment, and mislead an angry soul into false belief, great shame, and vice.

"You lost your temper with your kids again. You're unfit to be a father! You're destroying their lives. You don't deserve to be respected. You don't deserve their affection. How many times do you think your kids will forgive you? God will not have you. He'll take your kids from you. He'll reject you as unfit to parent because of your anger. God will reject you as unfit for His kingdom because of your anger. You're a pathetic excuse for a Christian parent!"

The voices of these demons will oppress and attack every angle: "Those little brats constantly disrespect you! They deserved every ounce of anger you threw at them. You deserve better. You deserve more. They don't know how hard you work or what you have to do. You had hurt feelings as a kid. You got over it. They'll get over it. It'll make 'em tougher anyway. Besides, they need to

see that you are in charge, that you're in control, and that they better shape up. They need to fear you!"

An angry soul like this needs to be habituated to his Baptism. Pastoral care will patiently, lovingly and firmly lead this angry soul to the calm waters of the Gospel, to be drowned in contrition and repentance and to be drenched in the Good News of renewal and rebirth (Titus 3:5-8). Here God's Word enlightens this troubled conscience. The Good News of the Gospel brings relief to a bad conscience. There's nothing mystical about it. God wants sinners to have a good conscience. Good pastoral care will exhort and absolve. Good pastoral care will enact God's Word upon a troubled soul. It might sound something like this:

*"God loves you and He wants what's best for you. In fact, He wants to go so far as to clean you up; to erase and remove your sins and hurts from you and make you spotless and pure inside and out. When you were baptized God made this promise. God's Word says it this way:*

***<sup>21</sup>Baptism ... now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3:21).*** So don't ever let someone make you doubt the power of Baptism. Scripture makes its power clear. It's given to save. It's given to give you a good conscience. Thus, your conscience is at full throttle when it's governed by faith in God's Word. That's by divine design. So where God's Law shows you what He wants you to do and where you have failed to do it, the Gospel shows you what Christ has done and how He accomplished it for you, and then works in you to bring about the fruit of your faith.

*Jesus is the very Lamb of God who took all of the sins and hurts of the world into Himself, and suffered once for them*

*all to remove them once and for all. He silences the accusations of Satan and makes you pure and clean before God. Yes, crucified, dead, and buried for the sins of the world, Jesus walked out of the tomb to forgive your sins, cleanse your impurity, defeat the devil, and give you a good conscience. And a good conscience enlivens the soul like nothing else can. It brings light amid darkness, hope to the hurting, confidence for the frightened, and security for the anxious.*

*Having a good conscience is utterly freeing. Your emotions are unbound. Your rage released. Your mind is freed. All of a sudden the world doesn't seem so dark. It's easier to breathe. Your senses seem sharper. Your thoughts become clearer. Your feelings become fuller. Joy is real again. Hope is on the horizon. Life can be lived. That's the power of a good conscience. That's what so many desperately desire. And that's what Jesus Christ gives to you here and now through the water and Word of your Baptism."*

Lutheran pastors have an absolutely versatile and agile resource in the care of souls. It's the simple, yet distinct practice of baptismal therapy. Diagnosing the malady of a troubled soul can be a very messy business. But utilizing the classic list of vices and virtues, understanding how the passions become disordered, affords pastors a new dimension to their pastoral care.

Habituating sinners to their Baptism is important for both the ordinary and the extraordinary care of souls. Baptismal therapy washes and makes new, drowns and raises up, heals and encourages, cleanses and purifies. Baptismal therapy imparts the virtuous life of Christ to the regenerate and remains at work in the believer to produce all manner of goodness, virtue, and character. That is baptismal therapy. May each pastor utilize it and celebrate it in his care of souls.

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### A Concluding Case Study: Acedia and Me

Finally, a case study of baptismal therapy is in order. This particular case study will involve me, however not as the pastor giving care, but as the troubled soul receiving care from another pastor. I offer my own affliction on a number of accounts. First, to demonstrate this affliction is likely more common among pastors than people realize. Second, to demonstrate the ongoing nature of baptismal therapy on a troubled soul, and third, to bring to light the vast unnamed evil of our time that countless pastors, and so many others, relentlessly face — acedia. As was previously noted, this is one of the seven deadly sins that has a disturbing and pernicious effect upon the soul, and a nasty way of disordering the passions.

To distinguish it from despair, Kathleen Norris notes: “For despair, participation in the divine nature through grace is perceived as appealing, but impossible; for acedia, the prospect is possible, but unappealing.”<sup>32</sup> In a nutshell, that explanation captures the spiritual lethargy of my own battle with acedia. Any pastor reading this who has likewise come to a point in time when participating in the divine through grace is viewed as simply unappealing has experienced the faith-sucking tentacles of acedia. “Me, a pastor, so apathetic and unable to rouse myself to give a damn about my own spiritual well being? Isn’t that ironic and pathetic!” Yet, that is exactly the painful spiritual sloth and idolatrous sadness I intensely suffered for some years. And to be honest, it’s a chronic temptation for me to this day. Undoubtedly, many other pastors know what this is like.

This spiritual discontent is often readily manifested through the fixation on time and a corresponding boredom. Evagrius provides a thoughtful observation about the monks who were to be engaged in personal spiritual matters, much like pastors, but who would suc-

cumb to the heaviness of acedia:

The devil of acedia starts by making the soul feel the weight of time; the day seems just endless. Then the victim, prey to sentiment of emptiness, can no longer concentrate. He waits for it to end, hoping that someone will come to lend some substance to that day. But nothing and no one comes to fill the void. Besides, who could fill it since it is interior?<sup>33</sup>

But it’s not that pastors are at a loss for things to do. Sometimes it is precisely because we’re so busy, and so pressed by obligations, that a free moment comes as a burden, where we need someone or something to fill that void. Spending that time in prayer to fill the void, however, is far too taxing, or so the devil tells us. The energy required to actually be honest with the Lord and bare my soul in prayer and meditation, had simply become too overwhelming. I would much rather help someone else do that than tend to my own soul in the same manner. Add to that all the wounds I had received in my ministry, the misbeliefs of my own ego, a swelling internal rage from a disordered disposition, and multiple health complications (multiple knee surgeries and chronic pain), and it was a recipe for all kinds of “false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice.” Of course, very few people actually knew what was going on inside of me — the pressure to please, the insecurity, the anger, the hurt, the loneliness — along with the straight-from-hell lie that I had to gut it out on my own to prove I was a good pastor and grow the church. I carry a very good poker face and let very few people “in.”

But thanks be to God I began developing a relationship with another pastor and Father Confessor who would take me through the depths of this affliction and enact the grace of Christ upon my wounded and sinful heart. In this instance, over the years, our relationship

<sup>32</sup> Norris, *Acedia & Me*, p. 24.

<sup>33</sup> Nault, *The Noonday Devil*, p.152-153.

would blossom into a deep friendship. But of course, not all pastor/penitent relationships will blossom this way, nor, in most cases, should they. In fact, my pastor and I have often talked about the dual nature of our relationship as pastor/penitent and brothers/friends. We both recognize that without careful and alert watchfulness, along with penitent humility, this could in fact be a great impediment to quality pastoral care should the personal relationship begin to govern the spiritual care provided, wherein my “friend” (and pastor) can begin to set aside his God-given office, the Law and the Gospel, in favor of our friendship.

To be sure, the dual nature of being brothers in office who share common interests, while also being pastor and penitent, but who are in this case separated by a generation, should be understood as unique and perhaps rare exceptions to the norm. As such, pastors ought not think that such relationships should be a normal part of the pastor/penitent relationship. Nonetheless, what follows below are three selected pastoral letters (emails) from my pastor to me. I will simply call him Pastor Augustine, after St. Augustine, (but those who know him, and us, will likely easily guess who he is). These pastoral letters are follow-ups to phone conversations, FaceTime video chats, or in-person conversations that we have maintained over the years, and flow out of the intentional ritual care that regularly accompanies our personal pastoral conversations, which include things like prayer, blessing, and confession/absolution.

As you will note, the remedies expressed are not simply limited to the specific elements of “baptismal therapy,” but flow out of baptismal therapy and incorporate and employ the larger curative remedies at the disposal of a seasoned *seel/sorger*. I will attempt to set the stage of each email by noting what afflictions and/or misbeliefs I was enduring that prompted the care expressed in

the corresponding email.

## Pastoral Email Correspondence

This first pastoral care letter (email) followed a phone conversation that was during an extended period of melancholy and *acedia* during this time in my life. Pastoral ministry was so depleting and intense, the years of wounds received in ministry were now beginning to surface intensely, and the lies I had told myself were so ingrained, that making heads or tails of my own spiritual life was difficult. I was very good at the care of souls in my own congregation, but had become very bad at the care of my own soul. This letter provides a compassionate entry into my plight and provides a compassionate word of hope and healing.

Oct. 8, 2013

Dear Lucas,

Thanks for the talk tonight. I could sense how depleted and demoralized you are, which is thoroughly understandable. For the first time you’ve had some time to review some important landmarks in your life, and right now it looks like it’s all gone to seed and strewn with wreckage. While it’s important to note — as you reflect — where you began to build on false conceptions and misbelief, as I said that doesn’t mean that all has been empty and futile. Besides the wood, hay, and straw that you are now beginning to see were involved in your formative years and in your work, you have also built with gold, silver, and precious stones ... and no one can take those away. Best of all these have been laid on Jesus Christ, the only foundation ... and He’s not going anywhere anytime soon. So your work will remain, of that you can be sure, even though much of it may seem false and fake and empty to you, it’s not.

*I was very good  
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soul.*

Best of all, there's this: (1 Corinthians 3:16-17) <sup>16</sup>*Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? <sup>17</sup>If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.*

Remember how precious you are to the Lord who bought you with His blood, and cling to Him. In fact, here's an experiment: for your devotional life, try the minimalist approach. Find a quiet spot where you can just "be." (Think of the farmer who looked at Jesus and Jesus looked at him.) A crucifix/picture/candle might help, but they're not essential.

Invoke God's presence by His Name. Use a text like Psalm 121 to "warm the heart" as Luther says (because God's Spirit comes by His Word), deliberately ask the Father for His Spirit to shed light on your heart and clear up the clutter and confusion that lies dormant there. Then pray very simply like a child: out loud, repeating a variation on the Kyrie or the Agnus Dei. Picture Jesus bloodied and battered, wounded, with your wounds. "Lamb of God, that takes away the sins of the world, have mercy on me."

This sounds weird, but try it: listen and look, more than think. As you listen to your own voice speaking God's Word, remember that His Word does what it says. Look for Jesus in your mind's eye, crucified for your sins, to be sure, but also crucified by the sins of others against you. Pray to Him as victim as well as victor. Each time you repeat the prayer, listen/look for another dimension of the prayer: e.g. "lamb" as innocent victim, slaughtered. "Takes away" — bearing all the hurt away from you, deflecting the wounds directed against you, taking it all into/upon Himself, protecting

and shielding you. "Sins of the world" — not just your guilt, but the guilt of the bullies and perpetrators who hurt you. "Have mercy on me" — the most profound petition of all, it doesn't claim to know the solution to your predicament, other than your cares are too heavy and He must take them or they will crush you.

Repeat this simple prayer over and over, as long as overtones of meaning keep washing over you. Pause now and then to just be quiet and contemplate the depth of Christ's love for you, that He will not abandon you, that He places His sheltering, comforting arms around you. ("In Thine arms I rest me, foes who would molest me, cannot reach me there.") Finally, the last time instead of "have mercy on me" pray "grant me your peace" — not as the world gives, beyond all human understanding, rooted and grounded not in the mind of Christ, but in His incarnate, fleshly body broken for you and your hurt and His holy precious blood poured out for you to cleanse you from the defilement of the abuse heaped on you and to give you the very life that is in His blood.

If you can't find the words to pray for other things, stick with these basic words ... and remember that the Spirit intercedes for you with sighs too deep for words. Remember too that the LORD rejoices over you with singing...

YHWH preserve thee from all evil;  
YHWH preserve thy soul...

Pastor Augustine

This letter was a balm for my hurting heart. To be able to visualize my Lord sheltering me, and protecting me, brought me to a place I had not let my faith take me for some time — a long time. It began putting to rest the lie that I

had to gut things out on my own in order to prove I could be a good leader and pastor. The imagery it invited me to use, along with the prayers it gave me to speak, and the words spoken directly to me, gave me a rich balm of hope. They didn't make everything magically go away, of course. But they provided focus, gave direction, and were for me in the name and the stead of Christ. They also gently helped me distinguish where I had been trying to build ministry upon my own efforts rather than the accomplished work of Christ. But most importantly, they provided for me a place where I could find rest for my weary and injured soul.

.....

This next pastoral letter (email) follows an email update I wrote to him regarding the great physical pain that I have struggled with for years (now including 10 knee surgeries and 13 back injections over the last eight years — from college football and weight lifting — but that were being complicated by what we now know was Lyme Disease), and the fallout it would often bring to my patience, as well as my own family and faith life. This time of life was near the birth of our fifth child (six days away), wherein my wife had also been extremely sick, as is usual for her, for the whole pregnancy. The letter reassures me in my new found trust of someone who would listen, and gives permission for me to lament and cry out for mercy, while also compassionately directing me toward the necessary remedy for my own internal rage and frustration over my perceived ministry challenges, as well as noting the dastardly nature of acedia. It ends with the great solace received in Christ.

*September 24, 2014*

Dear Lucas,

So sorry to hear of your new bout of pain, and its collateral damage ... I won't be so brash as to pretend I know exactly how you feel, though

I'd give anything if I could. Like I told you before, I honestly wish I could take your pain away from you and carry it myself to give you even just a modicum of respite ... but that's not to be. So what I can offer I will: my continual earnest petitions for your endurance and peace as you wait for what relief and release is available through the surgical marathon [on your knees] to come...

Bearing one another's burdens is one of the identifying marks of Christ's church — fulfilling the Law of the Lord who loved us all the way to the cross and death and invites us to love each other with His own love (agape) that endures all things, believes all things, hopes all things. But such open disclosure is also indicative of the singular grace of brotherly love (philia) that helps to lighten the load by relinquishing part of it to a friend. Knowing you as I do I understand that your 'normal' inclination is to bear your own burdens all by yourself so I find it encouraging when you let down your guard when you are hurting and let me in on it. You are not "whining" when you do so; rather your honesty is an exercise of faith in God who sets the solitary in families and lends you His strength in all manner of ways — even through this weak and sinful vessel He has given as your Augustine, as it were.

You said it well, my brother, you cannot do this by your own reason or strength. It's like Luther wrote to his Elector: "Thus others bear my burden, and their strength is my strength. The faith of the church comes to the aid of my fearfulness; the chastity of others endures the temptation of my flesh; the fastings of others are my gain; the prayer of another pleads for me."

As to the new bout of demonic attack, well, we both knew it was com-



ing. You can't blame Satan for putting up a fuss when his tidy little kingdom is being dismantled. Of course he can't just settle for attacking your body; no, he's got to try his damndest to undermine your faith as well by making you resentful — and likely rageful — over the apparent intractability of the people of God who are so sluggish in following the path you've laid out for them so well. He will lay every landmine he can in your path to get you to doubt that the Word you preach is having any effect at all and he will create uncertainty in your heart as to whether God can even be trusted to keep His promises in view of His apparent inactivity and disinterest in your plight.

You know his tricks; he'll try everything he can to disillusion you and rob you of your joy, to tear the heart out of not just your ministry but out of your faith too; making you apathetic toward all things spiritual to try and create a wedge between you and the Holy Spirit who wants to console and comfort you by means of His Word. I'm not telling you anything new; but then Satan isn't very creative. His tactics are tried and true: first he injects the element of doubt and misbelief, making prayer and meditation harder and harder and less and less satisfying. Then ultimately despair and despondency begin to take over and you end up despising the very Word by which the Spirit works. He won't let up until you don't care anymore, and when you don't give a damn, then he's got you where he wants you. All of this is familiar terrain; you know the lay of the land, it's boringly predictable. Acedia is by its very nature boring — damned boring.

Of course body, mind, and soul all work as an entity. When the body is wracked with unrelenting pain, the mind can't focus very well and emo-

tion flounders. So a big piece of your predicament is the perfect storm of relentless pain and chronic anxiety underlaid with sadness. Call it depression, call it melancholy, call it acedia — it's no fun whatever you call it. You're doing well to address this whole syndrome medically, nutritionally, physiologically in a systematic and intelligent way. The spiritual treatment will take increased effort as the despondency increases; but you know that all too well.

Thank God your devotional life is still in place, though no doubt harder and harder and less and less gratifying. Be realistic, my brother. If you're having pain flare ups you won't be able to sustain long intervals of uninterrupted contemplation. Settle for snatches. Don't rely merely on your intellect and mind, use your imagination to picture Jesus in His suffering not just for the world but especially for you. (The visual/tactile tool of the crucifix may help focus your attention/imagination on this.) Call to Him out loud; cry if you will. As you've learned to focus on how He bears the sins inflicted on you and puts them in remission, add in the misery you feel in your body. In proximity to His suffering, yours is sanctified. "Learn of me," He invites. "My yoke is easy and my burden is light." i.e. cast your burdens on Him and yours, though no less painful, will be more bearable, for since He bore them ahead of you He will bear them with you now.

Awaiting the birth of your baby with eager nervousness ... praying for stamina and strength for Becca and a safe and quick delivery for momma and child as well as peace, patience and courage for dad.

Christ Jesus is your Rock ... He fights for you, and He's already won

the victory. When you are weak, He remains strong, and His strength is made perfect in your weakness. You can call on Him and He will be your repose and your refuge:

<sup>1</sup>*Hear my cry, O God, listen to my prayer;*  
<sup>2</sup>*from the end of the earth I call to you*  
*when my heart is faint.*  
*Lead me to the rock that is higher than I,*  
<sup>3</sup>*for you have been my refuge,*  
*a strong tower against the enemy.*  
*(Ps[alm] 61)*

Ever yours,

Pastor Augustine

This letter proved once again to be extremely helpful during a very unsettling time of life. It deftly diagnoses the underlying issues, while passionately leading me to the One, the Rock of Christ, who brings hope and healing.

.....

The final pastoral letter (email) followed a face-to-face conversation, which had concluded with prayer and blessing. I continued to be ravaged by great physical pain (though I rarely showed it or acknowledged to others), which was fast becoming so oppressive that it was changing my outlook on life. I wasn't at the point of despair, but I was now realizing life would no longer be the same. And being a father of five young children, and also accustomed to being very active, it was quite disheartening to look into the future. Nonetheless, it would be after this conversation and letter that I began to see my own suffering in a profoundly new light, namely in the light Christ's own suffering, and my union with Him in His suffering. You will also notice that my pastor invites me to consider some specific steps of prayer from another Christian tradition simply as a means of directing and breathing through the physical pain I was experiencing and the

debilitating effect that pain would have upon my faith life. Once again, he brings me all the more into Christ and His life for me.

*March 2, 2015*

Dear Lucas,

Wonderful conversation tonight! One more thing on "bodily prayer" in the midst of pain. [Consider] the 'Jesus Prayer' of Eastern Orthodox [that] uses the inhale/exhale cycle of respiration as the mental cues for the address and petition:

"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God" (during inhalation)

"Have mercy on me, a sinner" (during exhalation)

But that's for people during normal meditation (without pain).

Seems to me the Kyrie would work well in the midst of pain, especially with the emphasis on *qui tollis peccata mundi* — Jesus taking not just sin, but the results of sin, including pain and agony — onto himself and into himself and then carrying both away with him in His death.

So respiration becomes "Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world" (inhale) "Have mercy on me." (exhale)

The depiction/picture of Jesus in the agony and pain of His passion and cross taking on ours then is captured in the imagination and with practice the soul's prayer is merged with the body's breath. Even though in the midst of severe pain the mind cannot pray, the heart cries out and the body itself does the praying, while the Spirit Himself intercedes with prayers that cannot be uttered. (Rom. 8:26) Thus the paradox; that

*Baptism forgives,  
cleanses, and  
strengthens the  
believer, but it  
also frees the  
believer for daily  
virtuous living,  
drenching them  
(pastors  
included) in the  
virtues of Christ  
and the fruit of  
His Holy Spirit.*

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pain becomes a mark of ownership and an assurance that you belong to Christ. The feel of the crucifix in your hand is the (more tangible than cognitive) reminder that He is with you in your suffering because to know Christ is to know the fellowship of his suffering. (Phil. 3:10) Even though fear and panic may threaten to overwhelm you, that suffering will not separate you from Christ, exactly the opposite, in fact; it is a sign that you belong to Him and you are safely enfolded in His loving arms. While experientially it may be sheer terror, in reality it is holy ground, marked by closest proximity to the Holy One.

As I said, you are (unfortunately) the expert in this department. I take my shoes off in your presence: you are on holy ground, I only offer you the meditation of my heart on this and we can perhaps refine it further in the days/years ahead.

Ever Yours,

Pastor Augustine

This letter provided yet another wonderful word of encouragement and spiritual wisdom in the midst of my affliction. Of course, my specific situation and battle against acedia will not be the same for someone else. And the things that helped and comforted my soul are not automatically going to comfort someone else suffering acedia. It is a nasty little affliction and still tempts my soul today. Vigilance is important. It is far too easy to fall back into old patterns and unhealthy misbeliefs. But the life giving waters of Holy Baptism, the daily dying and rising with Christ, particularly as applied in extraordinary pastoral care, and notably in baptismal therapy, are life-giving remedies for chronic acedia sufferers.

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## A Final Word

As we have explored, today, as ever, the precious souls of God remain engaged in a vicious spiritual battle with the unseen evil enemy. In both body and soul we are subject to the spiritual terrors and behavioral filth that result from the onslaught of the old evil and demonic foe. But, as we discovered, the devil is not our singular adversary. We are also at the same time under the pernicious affronts of the world, along with the malevolent passions of our own sinful flesh that rage within us.

We have examined how the unholy trio of the devil, the world, and the sinful flesh deceive and mislead fallen sinners "into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice." These things regularly attack us, but we pray, particularly in the Sixth Petition of the Lord's Prayer, that we may finally overcome them and win the victory. Yet, as outlined above, overcoming them is more than simply exerting an ever-increasing amount of willpower to tame disordered passions and desires, and singularly strive towards the virtuous life. Rather, they are overcome through the life and virtue of Jesus Christ given to every believer through the water and Word of Holy Baptism.

Baptism forgives, cleanses, and strengthens the believer, but it also frees the believer for daily virtuous living, drenching them (pastors included) in the virtues of Christ and the fruit of His Holy Spirit. This study demonstrated the profound usefulness of the vices and virtues as a diagnostic tool for pastors to utilize in identifying the various symptoms and corresponding overarching maladies of troubled souls. Most notably, it aids pastors in discerning how best to formally apply the curative remedy of "baptismal therapy," and assist in forming a corresponding spiritual care plan that habituates troubled souls to their Baptism. To that end, the Lord bless you in your care of souls. ☩

## Appendix: Pastoral Methods of Extraordinary Care

**1. Caring Conversations:** This is simply the beginning point of extraordinary care. Part of this process involves creating a safe, comfortable, and confidential one-on-one pastoral care environment for the troubled soul to openly express the malady, sin or struggle of life that afflicts them. The desire is to offer the troubled soul compassionate listening and understanding so the curative remedy of God's holiness can be readily, regularly and ritually received. Thus, active listening, a compassionate voice, and a calm demeanor are important to facilitating these conversations. A pattern of listening might be: listen – clarify – listen – ask – listen – clarify – listen – ask. Utilizing this listening skill will foster the ability to better diagnose a particular spiritual condition. When the time is right, one other consideration is perhaps the use or eventual use of sacred space (chancel, kneeler, or altar) and liturgical aesthetics and rituals (vestments, anointing oil, or candles) to accompany these conversations and enactments of pastoral care.

**2. Diagnosing the Malady:** Once adequate listening and understanding have taken place, steps toward diagnosis can begin. Helpful to this process is to review with the individual the impressions that were received, i.e. the circumstances of the person's life, the problems they are enduring, the feelings they have, and the temptations they face. Begin peeling back the various layers of affliction. In other words, like a physician, the pastor begins with the presenting symptoms and works toward a diagnosis and cure. What is their chief complaint? What spiritual symptoms can be detected? What responses are emerging? How are they handling things on their own? How is the individual functioning? Healthy or unhealthy? Inwardly as well as outwardly? Note that a combination of symptoms may be observed. They may not in and of themselves be the problem. Rather they may disclose the particular misbelief, unique idolatry, deep wound, or affront that lies at the heart of their spiritual condition or malady.

It's important to be mindful of the various categories of symptoms so that an accurate diagnosis might be obtained and correspondingly proper cure offered. Careful consideration for the *Spiritual*, *Emotional*, and *Physical* symptoms that are being manifested, along with particular *Behavior patterns*, is a significant step toward proper diagnosis and cure. Often spiritual distress may be accompanied by emotional and physical symptoms, for which examination and treatment by qualified therapists and physicians may be necessary. (In fact, pastoral care should not be substituted for the quality work of a specialized mental health therapist that may also be needed. There can be great benefit in a pastor and therapist working together for the good of a troubled soul.) Below are two charts that can help give shape and understanding to the diagnostic process.

<u>Spiritual</u> <u>Symptom(s)</u>	<u>Physical</u> <u>Symptom(s)</u>	<u>Emotional</u> <u>Symptom(s)</u>
Defilement	Sleep Disruption	Indifference/Apathy
Guilt	Appetite Disruption	Frustration
Shame	Sexual Disruption	Exasperation
Remorse	Weight Change	Paralysis
Grief	Attention Difficulty	Frenzy
Fear	Diminished Energy	Resentment
Anxiety	Exhaustion	Depression
Idolatry	GI Distress	Withdrawal
Pride	Elevated Pulse	Hyperactivity
Anger	Elevated Blood	Agitation
Desire for Revenge	Pressure	Obsessions
Misbelief	Speech Irregularities	Compulsions
Despair	Self-Mutilation	Impulsivity
Hopelessness	Suicidal Gestures	Impatience
Doubt	Thought Disorder	Irritability
Unbelief	Cognitive Limitations	Mood Swings
Inability to Pray		Narcissism
Inability to Forgive		Suicidal Thoughts
Unwillingness to		Paranoid Traits
Forgive		Delusional Thinking
Worship Reluctance		Hysterical Traits
Worship Rejection		
<u>Behavior Pattern(s)</u>		
Marriage Difficulty	Truth Avoidance	
Parenting	Habitual Lying	
Ineffectiveness	Conflict Avoidance	
Rebellious Behavior	Social Skills Deficit	
Family Performance	Sexual	
Academic	Abuse/Addiction	
Performance	Sexual Perversion	
Hyperactivity	Gender Identity	
Isolation/Avoidance	Confusion	
Introversion	Drug Abuse/Addiction	

One can use these charts as helpful diagnostic resources. They can be used by placing a check by all of the symptoms that appear to be present in any particular situation. Then one can go back and place a "V" (victim) at every check mark where a particular individual appears to be sinned against or feeling the impact of a broken, fallen world. Then again go back and place a "P" (perpetrator) at every check mark where the individual appears to be the sinner (discerning where one is able, whether or

not the person is penitent or impenitent). Finally, give consideration to what might be the unique misbelief, idolatry, affliction, despair, shame, or vice that seems to be the root of the individual's distress, difficulty, sin or overall condition. Please remember that these resources are meant to aid the pastor in developing a pastoral mindset of care — *habitus* (habit) — rather than prescribing every exact step he must take to give care.

### 3. Creating Care Plans: Ongoing baptismal therapy plans:

Below is another chart that can be used to help develop a curative framework and help identify what specific curative actions a pastor can take to bring Baptism to bear upon a troubled soul. It must be stressed that the idea here is not to shortchange the responsiveness and adaptability of a pastor that may be needed to address the shifting circumstances of a particular troubled soul. Flexibility, rather than rigidity, is a hallmark of a good *seelsorger*. Again, the point of these charts is to help a pastor develop a

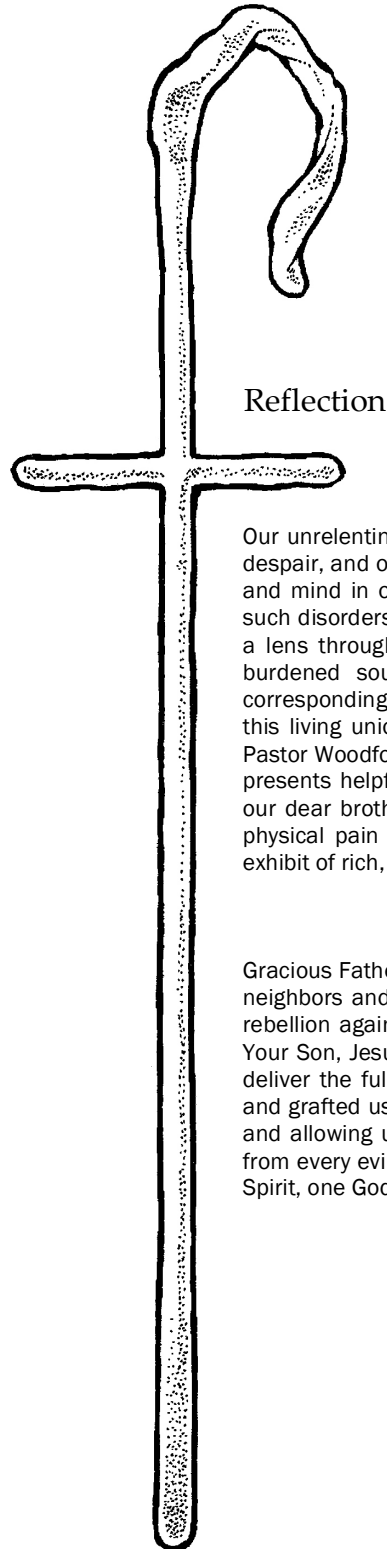
specific, yet flexible habitus of care for the various troubled souls in his flock. It is with that understanding in mind that these charts have been set forward. Accordingly, once the symptoms are identified and a diagnosis of the various maladies is made, this chart can be used as a means (framework) to help provide specific, ongoing extraordinary pastoral care for the individual. At the same time, it can also be used to help direct troubled souls in their own daily spiritual care plan as they live life in between the Divine Service and extraordinary pastoral care visits.

Pastoral Care	Priorities	Date	Date	Date	Date
Listening					
Catechesis					
Admonition					
Rebuking					
Correction					
Consolation					
Confession					
Absolution					
Exhortation					
Prayer					
Blessing					

Once listening and understanding have taken place and the maladies have been diagnosed, now comes the time to enact and apply baptismal therapy upon the troubled soul. The enactment of the grace, mercy, forgiveness and peace given in Baptism will, of course, need to be specific to the malady that has been diagnosed. This means the way in which pastors speak God's Word, apply His holiness, pray for the soul, administer the Holy Supper, and bless them with God's holy name will be done with specific mention and reference to the presenting malady and affliction of the troubled soul.

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### Reflection

Our unrelenting enemies are, as Luther noted, always seeking to drive us to “false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice.” Rev. Dr. Woodford reveals a keen pastoral heart and mind in offering what he calls *baptismal therapy* for the cure of souls plagued with such disorders. This essay provides a thoughtful consideration of the seven deadly sins as a lens through which to view and pastorally diagnose the spiritual ailments afflicting a burdened soul. These vices are presented in a cogent unfolding of each with a corresponding consolation through the living baptismal connection with Christ Jesus. It is this living union with Christ and His virtues that provides health and healing to sinners. Pastor Woodford also beautifully elucidates the virtues to which our Lord has called us. He presents helpful “hinges” that connect the virtues and corresponding vices. At the close, our dear brother reveals a bit of his own personal spiritual battle in the midst of severe physical pain and the wise counsel of a gifted, loving pastor. These letters are a lively exhibit of rich, comforting, Christian pastoral care.



Gracious Father, You created us for an ordered life of harmony with You, Your creation, our neighbors and our own souls. You've seen the disorder, disbelief and shame of our ugly rebellion against You, yet You've answered our anger with the softest answer in sending Your Son, Jesus Christ, to bear the results of our vice in His crucifixion and death, and to deliver the fullness of His ordered virtue in His resurrection. You took us dead branches and grafted us into Your Son in Holy Baptism, making His death and resurrection our own, and allowing us to flourish in Him, the true Vine. Cause Your saving rescue to deliver us from every evil and preserve us in Jesus' life; for He lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

- *Pastor David Fleming*