



Credible Catholic

# CREDIBLE CATHOLIC

## Big Book - Volume 15

### TEMPTATION, DECEPTION, AND DEADLY SINS



Content by: Fr. Robert J. Spitzer, S.J., Ph.D.



# **Credible Catholic Big Book**

## **Volume Fifteen**

### **Temptation, Deception, and Deadly Sins**

**Fr. Robert J. Spitzer, S.J., Ph.D.**

**As dictated to Joan Jacoby**

**Edits and formatting by Joey Santoro**

**Editor's Note:**

The content of this volume is limited to a very small portion of the total document, because much of the material will be published by Ignatius Press at the end of 2018 in a new trilogy on moral theology and the struggle between spiritual good and evil entitled *Called Out of Darkness: Contending with Evil through Virtue and Prayer* (Volume 1). Interested readers can purchase this text from Ignatius Press when it is available at the end of 2018. In December 2019, the full text of the document will be made available on [www.crediblecatholic.com](http://www.crediblecatholic.com). Readers interested in a summary of this document can click on the Credible Catholic Little Book (Volume 14) to read an abridged version.

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**This Volume supports The Catechism of the Catholic Church,  
Part Three – Life in Christ**

**NOTE:** All teachings in the **Credible Catholic** materials conform to the **Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)** and help to explain the information found therein. **Father Spitzer** has also included materials intended to counter the viral secular myths that are leading religious people of all faiths, especially millennials, to infer that God is no longer a credible belief. You will find credible documented evidence for God, our soul, the resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and the Catholic Church, as well as spiritual and moral conversion.

**Part One** from the CCC is titled, ***THE PROFESSION OF FAITH***. The first 5 Volumes in the *Credible Catholic Big Book* and *Credible Catholic Little Book* fall into Part One. **Part Two** of the CCC is titled, ***THE CELEBRATION OF THE CHRISTIAN MYSTERY***. This is covered in Volumes 6 through 12. **Part Three** of the CCC is ***LIFE IN CHRIST*** and information related to this topic will be found in Volumes 13 through 17. Credible Catholic Big and Little Book Volumes 18 through 20 will cover **Part Four** of the CCC, **Christian Prayer**.

The Big Book can also be divided into two major movements – the rational justification for God, the soul, Jesus, and the Catholic Church (Volumes 1 through 6), and life in Christ through the Catholic Church (Volumes 9 through 20). If you would like a preview of this dynamic, please go to Volume 6 (Chapter 7) at the following link – [Chapter 7 – Where Have We Come From and Where are We Going?](#)

**We all need to be Credible Catholics. St. Augustine said** in his work, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*,

*"Usually, even a non-Christian knows something about the earth, the heavens and other elements... Now, it is a disgraceful and dangerous thing for an infidel to hear a Christian, presumably giving the meaning of Holy Scripture, talking nonsense on these topics; ...If they find a Christian mistaken in a field which they themselves know well and hear him maintaining his foolish opinions about our books, how are they going to believe those books in matters concerning the resurrection of the dead, the hope of eternal life, and the kingdom of heaven..."*

**If we don't respond to these secular myths, who will?**



## **Purpose of this Volume**

In the last volume (Volume 14) we gave empirical and rational evidence of the reality of spiritual good (the Lord, His angels, and His saints) and spiritual evil (Satan and his demonic spirits). We showed there that the primary motivation of our spiritual enemy is to convince us to choose his way of darkness, egocentricity, domination, hatred, and self-worship over the way of the unconditionally loving God revealed by Jesus Christ – the way of light, compassion, virtue, love, other-centeredness, humility, community, and worship of the true God. It now remains to describe how this demonic enemy works—through temptation, deceit, and despair. This will enable us to recognize his presence in our lives as well as the culture. This will help us build a foundation upon which to build a strategy for moral conversion (see Volume 16). The Lord has given us five gifts to construct this foundation—the teaching of Jesus as interpreted by the Church He established (the Catholic Church), the sacraments of the Catholic Church (particularly the Holy Eucharist and the sacrament of Reconciliation), virtue, and personal contemplative prayer. If we are to recognize the truth, goodness, and beauty of these incredible gifts and their necessity in our spiritual and moral lives, we will have to delve into the tactics and strategy of our spiritual enemy who tries to use the inclinations towards sin within our fallen nature (the 8 deadly sins) to tempt and deceive us so that he can persuade us to choose his way of darkness and self-worship over the Lord's way of light and love. As noted above, if readers want more than the two sections given below, they can click on the Credible Catholic Little Book, Volume 15 for an abridged version of the whole text.

Please note: The following Table of Contents gives only the sample sections used in this document.

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## **First Sample**

### **From Chapter Two, Sections II.A. and II.B.**

#### **II.**

#### **Temptation**

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Temptation can be viewed in a completely secular sense – the forsaking of higher long-term goals for the satisfaction of temporary strong urges (e.g. sensorial, libidinal, or ego-centric urges). The classical virtues of temperance (self-control) and fortitude (committed and courageous drive toward long-term goals) counteract these kinds of temptations. Valid though this view is, we are looking at temptation in a decidedly spiritual way—through the lens of Jesus’ teaching about Satan, his demons, and the cosmic struggle between good and evil. In this context, temptation has both a moral and spiritual significance as well as a significance for pursuing our highest long-term goals through virtue and prayer.

#### **II.A**

#### **Temptation and Three Cardinal Virtues**

Temptations can originate from within ourselves, through demonic suggestion, or both. Frequently enough, we enter into situations that we know will present challenges – what used to be called “the near occasion of sin” – and it should not be surprising to us that these actions lead to the engagement of aberrant desires, which in turn can lead to a choice to satisfy them – giving rise to vice or sin. When we intentionally enter into situations that we know will engage aberrant desires, demonic influence is minimal. All that is required of them is to encourage the sinful action. Sometimes when we are consciously trying to avoid the near occasion of sin, we find ourselves besieged by dozens of images that seem to be drawing us into a sinful situation that we are not voluntarily pursuing. These images and thoughts are meant to engage our desire for one of the eight deadly sins – gluttony/drunkenness, lust, greed, anger, envy, sloth, and vanity/pride. The cause of this barrage of unwanted images and concepts is very likely a demonic spirit. Whether a temptation originates from within us alone or from an evil spirit, the process that occurs before we choose to act on it is generally the same. It includes four major steps:

1. A sensory or mental image capable of engaging an aberrant desire.
2. We let our desires be engaged by the aberrant sensory or mental image.
3. We entertain the aberrant desire over against the possibility of saying “no” to it.
4. Once the lower desire has gained momentum, we choose to act on it (instead of acting on higher desires).

All temptations begin with an image – a picture thought. These picture shots may come from a sensorial perception or the remembrance or reconstruction of a past picture thought (what we normally call “conceiving”). Whatever the origin, these picture thoughts stimulate (arouse) particular desires within us.



## CCBB - Temptation, Deception, and Deadly Sins

Most philosophers would agree that desire is one of the most difficult human characteristics to explain, for it is more complex than a stimulus-response mechanism. True enough – all of our desires have a fundamental receptivity to stimuli; when the stimuli is received, it creates an impulse or drive toward action, but it does not necessarily result in action. Every human desire can be contravened by a rational reflection process which determines that a particular action is good for us or bad for us – good in the long term or bad in the long term – good for our ultimate purpose and fulfillment or bad for our ultimate purpose and fulfillment, etc.

The recognition of the “good” does not come from a sensorial or imaginative stimulus, but rather from a reflection process that compares goods, and evaluates them as having greater or lesser potential to bring about lower or higher satisfaction, fulfillment, and purpose in the short and long term. If a potential action is self-destructive in the long term, it is generally viewed as “bad.” Conversely, if a potential action is likely to bring about higher satisfaction, meaning, and fulfillment in the long term, it is seen as “good.” The higher and more long-term the satisfaction, meaning, and fulfillment, the higher the good.

What Aristotle called “rational desire” is more than the reflection process that determines the higher good. This reflection process is also connected to a desire to *do* the good. Thus, rational desire receives a stimulus from a practical reflection process (that determines the higher good) and produces an impulse to act on the higher good. This impulse from rational desire can contravene the impulse to move a lower desire into action. When this occurs, our self-consciousness (ego) must choose between the lower desire (with its immediate and intense satisfactions) and the higher desire (with its less immediate and intense satisfaction, but greater meaning, fulfillment, and contribution).

There are other factors involved in this “battle of lower and higher desires” beyond rational desire. Some of them favor the lower desires – such as bad habits (to act on lower desires), stresses, fatigue, bad influences from peers, and psychological disorders (ranging from neurosis to psychosis, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, multiple personality disorder, etc.).

Some factors favor rational desire (the higher good) – such as conscience, empathy, and the graces coming through faith. We will examine each of these factors explicitly in the next volume. For the moment, suffice to say, that if we give emphasis to rational desire, conscience, empathy for others, virtue and faith (through sacraments and prayer), we will likely resist spontaneously acting on lower or evil desires and will likely choose virtuous desires and higher goods.

Let us return for a moment to the four major steps in temptation – whether these come from self-initiation, an evil spirit, or both. How can we use our four higher powers (rational desire, conscience, empathy, and spiritual faith) to resist temptation and choose the higher good?

The reader may already have intuited part of the answer – namely, the earlier we bring our four higher powers to the process of fighting temptation, the more likely we are to resist it and to choose a higher good. So for example, when a sensory or mental image comes to consciousness, we should engage our four higher powers before we engage our lower desire – the desire to which the sensory or mental image is oriented. If the combination of rational desire, conscience, empathy, and faith can take the center stage of our consciousness, they will

effectively prevent engagement of the lower desire. However, if we are slow to engage our four higher powers – either because we ignore them or put them off – then we allow the image to engage our lower desire – and we enter into temptation’s enticement. This leads to entertaining the temptation, but we have another chance to bring the four powers to bear. Unfortunately this time it will be harder to break the spell of temptation because we are already enticed. If we again ignore or put off our higher powers, and entertain the lower desire, we allow it to grow stronger and more powerful, leading to an almost inevitable path to action. We could, of course, bring our four higher powers to bear at the last minute, but it will be very difficult to break the spell of temptation because we have allowed the lower desire to grow into a Goliath.

The Church fathers and medieval philosophers<sup>1</sup> recognized that three of the four cardinal virtues: prudence, temperance, and fortitude—could be brought to bear on the process of fighting temptation.

*Prudence* is first in importance because it enables us to differentiate between evil desires and good desires—and between lower goods and higher goods. We might say that the virtue of prudence guides our rational desires and our conscience to their proper ends—the higher or highest good. We will discuss how to make this practice a habit – a virtue—in the next Volume

*Temperance* is the ability to say “no” to an evil or lower desire. As might be suspected, it is more than “just saying ‘no’.” It is the discipline of bringing our four higher powers (rational desire, conscience, empathy, and faith) to the forefront of consciousness as quickly as possible when we feel ourselves drawn into temptation by a particular sensorial or mental image. This requires not only that we be aware of our four higher powers, but also of how to use them to fight temptation.<sup>2</sup> It also requires being alert to when a particular stimulus or condition is about to engage our lower desire and move us toward a regrettable action. Hence, we need to practice (to the point of creating a habit—a virtue) the following:

- recognizing lower stimuli that could lead to sin,
- bringing our four higher powers to the forefront of consciousness to resist these lower stimuli,
- disciplining ourselves to use our four higher powers as quickly as possible before the lower desire gains strength.

Notice that the realization of these three dimensions of temperance is a free choice—and the continual practicing of them (to make them a habit) is also a free choice. Over the course of time, a habit (a virtue) will be formed which makes *choosing* the good easier and less consumptive of psychic resources, for we have made temperance “second nature” (i.e. a habit), allowing it to emerge *naturally* from our psyche when temptation occurs.

*Fortitude* is the commitment and courage to move toward the highest good in the pursuit of our ultimate and intermediate objectives. We might say that it goes in the opposite direction of temperance. Where temperance says “no” to lower desires, fortitude is saying “yes” to higher

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<sup>1</sup> See St. Augustine, *De Moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae* (*The Morals of the Catholic Church*) 1,25,46:PL 32,1330-1331. and St. Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologica* II-II, q 47, a2

<sup>2</sup> See Volume 16.

desires. As with temperance, fortitude is dependent on prudence—for we must be able to distinguish between evil and good desires--between lower and higher desires—to commit ourselves to good and higher desires. Fortitude, like temperance, builds on our four higher powers which cause us to fear or abhor lower desires and to love higher ones. For example, rational desire takes reason's discernment of lower desires and brands it with a sense of “waste of my time,” “under-living my life,” and “beneath myself”. It also takes reason's discernment of higher desires and brands it with a sense of “great use of my time,” “optimizing my life's purpose,” and “worthy of my time and energy.” Similarly, the power of conscience brands evil actions with deep feelings of shame and guilt while branding good actions with feelings of honor and nobility. Empathy brands actions that are hurtful to others with a sense of guilt, self-alienation, and regret—while branding actions that are good for others with a sense of bonding, higher purpose, and self-respect. Faith imbues evil actions with a sense of shame, regret for disobeying the loving Creator, and guilt—while imbuing good actions with feelings of being at home with the Creator and loving the Creator.

Philosophers have long noticed that feelings transform thoughts into actions. Thinking alone results in a conceptual judgement, but in order to transform this reasonable conceptual judgement into action, there must be an emotion—a feeling—which has the power to move us to action. Rational desire is imbued with the emotions to disdain lower desires and love higher desires. Conscience not only recognizes the difference between evil and good actions, it also is imbued with feelings of guilt and shame toward evil actions, and feelings of honor and nobility toward good actions. The same holds true for empathy and faith. Thus our four higher powers not only conceptually recognize the difference between evil/lower desires and good/ higher desires, they imbue those concepts with negative feelings to move us away from evil or lower desires, while imbuing good/higher concepts with positive feelings that move us toward the higher good. We might adduce from this that temperance cultivates and makes habitual the prompt use of negative feelings attached to evil or lower actions, while fortitude cultivates and makes habitual the prompt use of positive feelings attached to good or higher actions.

The more we grow in temperance (cultivating and making habitual the prompt use of negative feelings toward evil and lower actions), the more proficient we will become at resisting temptation, because we will be able to bring the above four sets of negative feelings strongly to bear on our decision process the moment an evil, destructive, or lower stimulus comes into our purview. We will have habitualized our aversion toward evil or lower desires before engagement takes place—or at the very least—before we begin to engage the desire.

The more we grow in fortitude (cultivating and making habitual the prompt use of positive feelings toward good and higher actions), the more we will empower consciousness to move committedly, resiliently and courageously toward good and higher objectives—even in the most difficult of times. Though it seems like temperance is more important in resisting temptation than fortitude (because it mitigates evil or lower desires), subsequent reflection will reveal that fortitude is just as important—because our love of the good drives us to our true end, which gives purpose to temperance's negative feelings. It is not enough to say “no” to evil or lower desires; we want to imbue our rejection of those lower desires with the noble reason and purpose for doing so – namely to reach our highest meaning, dignity, and fulfillment. When we



combine the negative feelings of temperance with the positive feelings of fortitude, we empower our rejection of the former with the rationale and purpose of the latter.

So what is the task that lies before us to help us resist temptation and pursue our ultimate and eternal purpose in the perfectly good and loving God? We will need to cultivate several disciplines:

1. To grow in *prudence* which involves two steps:
  - a. Understanding the difference between our lower and higher desires (which we have discussed in some detail in Volume 13 with respect to the Four Levels of Happiness),
  - b. Cultivating our four higher powers (rational desire, conscience, empathy, and faith) to grow in love of our higher desires – and to grow in disgust, shame, and guilt toward evil and lower desires,
2. To grow in *temperance* which involves cultivating and making habitual the prompt use of the negative feelings (intrinsic to our four higher powers) toward evil or lower desires,
3. To grow in *fortitude* which involves cultivating the positive feelings (intrinsic to our four higher powers) toward good and higher desires.

As noted above, the detailed consideration of these three disciplines will be the subject of the next volume. For the moment, suffice to say that the process of promptly recognizing and mitigating temptation (the enticement of evil or lower desires) can be greatly assisted by learning how to recognize and use our four higher powers (rational desire, conscience, empathy, and faith) in three distinct ways that philosophers past and present have identified as the virtues of prudence, temperance, and fortitude. This means that we will have to engage in long-term preparation to cultivate the above three virtues to hasten and strengthen our short-term response to temptation. Long-term concerted preparation leads to quick and effective short-term resistance to temptation.

### II.B

#### How the Evil One Tailors Temptation for Each Individual

Satan does his homework—he seeks out the vices to which we are most prone, the virtues which are least developed, the times and conditions in which we are most vulnerable, and any deep resentments we might have toward God, the Church, or any moral authority such as parents and teachers. In his fourteenth rule (of the First Week) in the “Rules for Discernment of Spirits” in *The Spiritual Exercises*, St. Ignatius Loyola describes the tactics of the evil one as follows:

[the evil one] behaves as a chief bent on conquering and robbing what he desires: for, as a captain and chief of the army, pitching his camp, and looking at the forces or defenses of a stronghold, attacks it on the weakest side, in like manner the enemy of human nature, roaming about, looks in turn at all our virtues, theological, cardinal and moral; and where he finds us weakest and most in need for our eternal salvation, there he attacks us and aims at taking us.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> St Ignatius of Loyola 1914 *Spiritual Exercises* trans by Fr. Elder Mullan, S.J. (New York: P.J. Kenedy & Sons) p. 90.

If we are to better resist the temptations of Satan, we will want to first study his techniques, and then with self-knowledge deduce his likely plan of attack for someone like us. The well-known military adage, “forewarned is forearmed,” is applicable here. If we know how the evil one is likely to attack us, we can prepare a strategy through virtue and prayer to resist him. As noted above, there are four major components that the evil one considers when preparing his specific plan of attack for us:

1. the vices (eight deadly sins) to which we are most attracted,
2. the virtues which are the weakest – or least developed,
3. the times and conditions in which we are most vulnerable
4. the resentments we might hold toward God, the Church or any moral authority (e.g. parents or teachers)

Let us consider each in turn. In Chapter Three below, we will describe and explain each of the eight deadly sins—interior negative attitudes or vices—that undermine faith, hope, and love within us, and so impede our movement toward eternal salvation. We will explain there that there are really eight deadly sins because the sin of pride has a very broad range that includes vanity (“I am better, more intelligent, more beautiful, etc. than you”) as well as lust for power and dominion (“You are subject to me”). Notice that these “deadly sins” are not manifestations of bad actions or behaviors, but rather negative interior attitudes that undermine love and faith—and if possible, eternal salvation with the Lord. As a reminder, the “eight” deadly sins are: gluttony/drunkenness, lust, sloth, greed, anger, envy, vanity, and lust for power.

It is not unusual for us to have propensities toward more than one deadly sin. Frequently these stronger propensities are connected with our level of happiness/purpose in life (see Volume 13). For example, if we are Dominant Level One, we might expect that gluttony/drunkenness, sloth, greed, and to some extent lust, would be our strongest vices (negative interior attitudes). If we are Dominant Level Two, we might expect that anger, envy, vanity, lust for power and, to some extent lust, would be our strongest vices. These propensities are frequently combined with perceived lacks or deficiencies during our youth. So, for example, if we negatively interpret, say, low economic status of our family during our youth, we will have a strong propensity toward greed. Similarly, if we negatively interpret our parents’ dietary prescriptions during childhood, we may pursue a lifetime of compensation through gluttony, tobacco, and alcohol. Again, if we negatively interpret our adolescence as being unattractive to the opposite gender, we may attempt to compensate for it by pursuing any person who is interested in us. If we felt deprived of power, then we likely will pursue power – and so forth.

Another factor that is particularly relevant in this culture is the availability of stimuli in three of the deadly sins—gluttony/drunkenness, lust and greed. The fact that these stimuli are easily available (e.g. inexpensive alcohol, free internet pornography, and convenient online mail-order consumer goods) and that they help people with significant stresses and challenges to forget their problems, assures that many will avail themselves of them continuously. Hence, we have the cultural phenomenon that many have addictions not only to alcohol and drugs, but

addictions to food, pornography and shopping! These kinds of addictions seem to start as a type of self-medication for stressed, depressed and bored dispositions, but they soon get out of hand because more and more stimuli is required to manage the same level of stress. This leads not only to distraction from higher desires and long-term contributive purpose, but also to craving for and obsession with the stimuli where one doesn't even recognize higher levels of desire and responsibilities beyond the self. As the obsession grows, families are undermined, work performance is diminished, personal growth is stunted and conscience and empathetic connection are minimized.

The above three inducements—Dominant Level One and Two Happiness/Purpose, perceived lack of fulfillment as children, and easily accessible and addictive satisfaction of sensorial desire—are fertile ground for the evil one. Anyone who has a combination of these susceptibilities to temptation can expect a barrage of imaginative suggestions from the evil spirit. This is generally accomplished by suggesting past satisfactions through a particular vice, introducing new possibilities of the satisfaction of that vice, and then suggesting a myriad of ways that the vice can be satisfied quickly and easily—“bring a cocktail to lunch,” “just turn on your computer and search for the free stuff,” “take some time after work to join friends at the bar,” “a shopping trip to the Mall will help you feel better,” etc.

As noted above, the evil one can be greatly assisted by a lack of religious conviction, church membership, moral knowledge, and moral conviction. He can also be assisted by a Dominant Level One/Level Two identity and considerable stress and challenge in one's work and family. Individuals with these characteristics are highly unlikely to resist any of his temptations, because they have no moral or religious reason to resist them—and they need the satisfaction of these vices to fulfill their Dominant Level One/Two desires, their perceived unfulfilled yearnings in the past, and their need for self-medication. This group might be considered “low hanging fruit” for the evil spirit, because they are easy “long-term converts” to his self-destructive way of life – and with very minor prompting, he can lead them to a lifetime addiction of selfishness, darkness, undermining of work and family, and in the end, resentment and despair.

As may now be evident, the above group is very susceptible to temptation, self-destruction, and the subversion of others, however, there are other groups that are likely to fare much better because of church membership, religious conviction, and development of the above three virtues. We will address each of these points in the next volume, but for the moment we might adduce the following principle: the stronger our religious conviction, the deeper our awareness of the destructiveness of vice and the positivity of our four higher powers, and the more cultivated the virtues of prudence, temperance, and fortitude, the more likely we will be able to resist the temptations to the eight deadly sins and the self-destructiveness and subversion of others that come from them. In the teaching of Jesus, this resistance to the deadly sins enables us to love more deeply, and this deeper love, in turn leads us to eternal salvation and helps us to lead others to their salvation. Thus, the life of virtue and prayer not only protects us from self-destruction and subversion of others in the short-term, it also leads to our and others' salvation for all eternity.



## CCBB - Temptation, Deception, and Deadly Sins

We might here suggest a ranking of the path from least proficient to most proficient – to a positive and productive life in this world and ultimately to eternal salvation in the unconditional love of God:

1. Lowest level—least proficient to positive, generative, non-destructive, loving life in this world and in the next. This is the group described above—no religious affiliation, little spiritual conviction, little awareness of the destructiveness (to self and others) of the deadly sins, little awareness of the four higher powers, and little development of the virtues of prudence, temperance, and fortitude. These individuals are likely to hit “rock bottom” forcing them to make a radical change in their lives – or submit to emptiness, despair and possibly self-destruction. These individuals are described quite well by the protagonists in Shakespeare’s tragedies (Macbeth, Hamlet, Iago, Richard III, King Lear—see below, Chapter Three).
2. Low intermediate level – some possibility of resisting habitual attachment to one or more deadly sins, and the self-destructiveness and subversion of others coming from them. This group generally has a weak (underdeveloped) commitment to religious affiliation, may also have a vague awareness of the four higher powers and the destructiveness of the deadly sins, as well as an elementary development of the above three cardinal virtues. This elementary development of virtue and prayer will prove vital to these individuals when the destructiveness of a life imbued with the deadly sins becomes painfully obvious. If they are to move beyond the destructiveness (to self and others) of the deadly sins they will have to strengthen their commitment to virtue which will probably entail a strengthening of religious affiliation and spiritual commitment.
3. High intermediate level— reasonable likelihood of resisting habitual attachment to deadly sins, leading to a life of continuously improving virtue and love opening upon eternal salvation. This group has a high degree of commitment to God and religion, and as a consequence, they have an adequate awareness of the dangers of the deadly sins, a striving for more authentic love, and a basic awareness of the virtues and how to use them to resist temptation. These individuals are committed to God and interior moral conversion, but this conversion needs to be deepened, and therefore they can let their guard down (or be tricked) opening themselves to temptation, rationalization, and submission to one or more deadly sins.
4. the highest level—strong likelihood of resisting habitual attachment to deadly sins, leading to a life of continuously improving authentic love and virtue opening upon eternal salvation. This group not only has strong religious affiliation and spiritual commitment, they are also well aware of the dangers and destructiveness of the seven deadly sins; they have committed themselves to a life of virtue and prayer, leading to

proficiency in prudence, temperance and fortitude motivated by their faith, deep empathy for others, and a well-developed conscience.

The general path to moral conversion (awareness of the destructiveness of deadly sins and commitment to and proficiency in virtues for the sake of God, love, and others) frequently occurs through religious affiliation and commitment which imparts at once an awareness of eternal and transcendental destiny, the spiritual world, the centrality of love, the destructiveness of the deadly sins, and the importance of virtues to mitigate those sins.

Though religious conversion is frequently central to moral conversion, it need not always be so. There are many non-religious individuals who take seriously Level 3 contribution to others and experience deep empathy for those challenged and unfortunate. Evidently, they have deeply appropriated a Level 3 purpose and identity (contribution and love), but not a Level 4 purpose (faith and transcendence). The major reasons for not making the transition include:

- Growing up without any experience of religion or religious involvement.
- Doubts about the rationality of God and transcendence (though these doubts, as this *Compendium* makes clear, are unfounded).
- Growing up in a religious household that portrayed God as terrifying, angry, disgusted, or indifferent (which as this *Compendium* makes clear, is not the conception of God according to Jesus Christ).
- The inability to reconcile suffering with a loving God (which is addressed in considerable detail in Volume 19).
- Conviction that religion has caused more harm than good throughout history (which as Volumes 4, 5, & 6 make clear, is completely erroneous).
- A conviction that religion is naïve and mere wishful thinking (which is contradicted by the evidence presented in Volumes 1 through 6).

As we have explained, it is impossible to disprove the existence of God by rational or scientific means, because it is methodologically impossible to do using empirical evidence, a priori evidence, scientific evidence, and logic.

As noted above, those who do not have a religious and transcendent component in their lives can be deeply contributive and empathetic. Nevertheless, they are likely to feel cosmic emptiness, loneliness, and alienation, as well as the negative dimensions of non-religious affiliation reported by the American Psychiatric Association Study (increased meaninglessness, bouts of depression, suicides, all aggressivity, impulsivity, substance abuse, and familial tensions).<sup>4</sup> Furthermore they are unlikely to be aware of the reality of spiritual evil and the challenges it presents to the moral life. They are also unable to make recourse to prayer, grace, and theological teaching to help them in their moral and ethical lives.<sup>5</sup> Finally, though these individuals can be deeply committed to the virtue of love, they frequently lack objective moral

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<sup>4</sup> Kanita Dervic, et. al, 2004 American Journal of Psychiatry.

<sup>5</sup> Parboteeah study – religious people are much less likely to act on an unethical impulse at the time that decisions are made.

principles (frequently conveyed by religion) tending instead to use emotivism and personalism as a foundation for ethics. This makes deeper moral conversion – beyond empathy and feeling – quite difficult.

These individuals constitute a subgroup within the second major group elucidated above - though they have no religious conversion (like the first group) and a deeper moral conversion (like the third group). Since this Volume is directed to those open to faith (and who are willing to study the evidence in support of it) and those who are able to call upon faith, prayer, and the grace, guidance, and inspiration of the Holy Spirit to support their moral lives and contend with the evil one, we will restrict our remarks only to the above-mentioned four groups – without making special mention of the non-religious, contributive/empathetic group. Helping these individuals to pursue deeper moral conversion without recourse to religion, grace, prayer, and religious teaching is beyond the scope of this book.

### II.B.1

#### The First Group – No Religious or Moral Conversion

The evil one uses different tactics to tempt and deceive each of the above four groups.<sup>6</sup> Since Group 1 has no spiritual or virtue defenses against the deadly sins, the evil one barrages him with multiple suggestions toward multiple sins in the hopes of habitually attaching him to a life of narcissism, domination, self-worship, self-indulgence, and depravity. The evil one's "hope" is to disguise the emptiness, alienation, and loneliness arising out of this life of depravity by providing false consolations and "ego boosts" coming from self-importance and worldly status. He continues to do this as long as possible to "secure the victim's allegiance," prevent him from repenting at the last minute, and convincing him ultimately to choose hell rather than heaven (persuading him that hell is where he will find true happiness, and that heaven is a boring place for "losers").

The victim will manifest behaviors and attitudes revealing his interior restlessness and discord which others are likely to recognize long before the victim. Many of these behaviors and attitudes are elucidated by the American Psychiatric Association's study of non-religious affiliation—such as increased thoughts of suicide, impulsivity, aggressivity, substance abuse, familial tensions, and bouts of depression.<sup>7</sup> Though the victim may recognize that something is missing or wrong in his life (which may be manifest by severe emptiness, nightmares, and free-floating anxiety), he does not associate the cause of these feelings with a lack of love, virtue, or communion with God. Instead, he treats his symptoms with increases in sensorial stimulation—both healthy (e.g. traveling, socializing and nature) and unhealthy (e.g. alcohol, drugs and trysts). He might pass by a church, and feel compelled to go in (inspired by the Holy Spirit—which could have remarkable remedial effects), but the victim generally resists it. The longer the victim

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<sup>6</sup> See the division between the first week and the second week in St. Ignatius of Loyola's "Rules for the Discernment of Spirits" in his *Spiritual Exercises*. The evil one's tactics for the first week (what we would call groups 1 & 2) are direct and strong images and suggestions to continue in a life of habitual attachment to one or more of the deadly sins; however, his tactics for those in the second week (what we would call groups 3 & 4) are more tricky – aimed at rationalization, deceit, and discouragement in times of suffering. See *ibid*, pp 84-94.

<sup>7</sup> See Kanita Dervic, Oquendo M, Grunebaum M, Ellis S, Burke A, Mann JJ, 2004. "Religious Affiliation and Suicide Attempt." In *American Journal of Psychiatry* (Vol. 161, No. 12). pp 2303-2308.  
<http://ajp.psychiatryonline.org/article.aspx?articleid=177228>.



has given himself over to his life of habitual attachments to the deadly sins, the more he is likely to resist the Spirit's inspirations to seek God and repentance. The Spirit never stops providing inspirations and clues (from friends, colleagues, television programs, etc) to turn his life around, but in the end, the victim must *choose* to respond to these inspirations with an act of sorrow and a commitment to religious/spiritual affiliation. Evidently, the evil one will do everything possible to convince the victim that the urgings and inspiration of the Holy Spirit are nonsense, weak, naïve, and likely to produce "unhappiness."<sup>8</sup> As virtually every saint would say, this is a dangerous life which teeters on the brink of the victim choosing eternal darkness as if it were eternal happiness.

## II.B.2

### The Second Group – Weak or Tepid Religious and Moral Conversion

The evil one changes tactics for Group 2. Recall that even though this group has religious affiliation as well as an awareness of love and virtue, their religious affiliation is restricted and weak, and their awareness of love and virtue unrefined, inarticulate, and almost unconscious. The evil one means to keep them precisely in this weakened and inarticulate condition. His first tactic is to "help" the victim to forget that commitment to a church (and its moral and spiritual life). He wants the victim to become detached from the Church's teachings and urgings toward relationship and communion with God, who has created him and called him to Himself. This causes the victim to shift his attention during church services from authentic communion with God (praying for his needs, expressing his sorrows, giving thanks, and giving praise) to "getting something out of it" or being "entertained." If the victim shifts his focus completely, he will leave church services complaining about boredom, poor preaching, and poor music (which may be the case), but he will be completely unaware of the fact that during the entire proceeding--including reception of the Holy Eucharist—he never once repented, expressed a need, or gave thanks or praise to his Creator and Redeemer. He views Church services as not about cultivating a relationship with God, but only about his regret and resentment for not having received enough. At this juncture, the victim may choose to search for another church where he can be better fed and connected with God—or he might give up worship altogether and settle for a Sunday morning filled with greater opportunities to obtain information and be entertained.

For Group 2, the evil one focuses on rationalization, because their weakened spiritual state makes them susceptible to it. Rationalization can pave the way for deep entrance into the dark, but seemingly satisfying world of the deadly sins. However, like all the protagonists in Shakespeare's tragedies, the initial euphoric elation and satisfaction coming from the deadly sins turns into a departure from faith, authentic love, and integrity which leads at once to emptiness, alienation, loneliness, and guilt as it undermines the lives of others and relationships with them. As we shall see, the deadly sins undermine faith and authentic love —no matter how innocent or satisfying they first appear to be, and when they do this, they destroy both self and others, undermining virtually every relationship.

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<sup>8</sup> This is seriously, yet humorously portrayed in C.S. Lewis' comprehensive volume on temptation—*The Screwtape Letters*. A free e-text of this treasure is available at <https://novel12.com/242829/the-screwtape-letters.htm> A free YouTube audio version of this text read by John Cleese is available on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SBxpcGfznos>

When I was in a Scriptural Exegesis class at Harvard Divinity School, I sat next to a student who was thinking about going to seminary. I asked him where he went to church services and he told me he no longer did so because the sermons were not very intelligent and the services were boring. He then went on to indicate that this led to an ongoing dilemma in his life—“every Sunday morning, I get a Sunday edition of the New York Times on my doorstep, causing me to choose between it and church services; unfortunately, the New York Times always wins.” I thought to myself that this was an incredibly brilliant tactic on the part of the evil spirit. Here he had a victim who had enough religious affiliation to take theology classes at Harvard Divinity School, and even to aspire to seminary and ministerial service. Instead of barraging him with temptations toward several deadly sins, he used the victim’s egocentricity and intellectual pride—in combination with the culture’s entitlement philosophy (“you have a right to be entertained and to obtain benefit from everything you do at all times”)—to distract the victim from religious services and to weaken his communion with God. Without this religious/spiritual commitment, the victim was left wide open to rationalize his way into two deadly sins—spiritual sloth (*acedia*) and intellectual vanity and pride (see below, Chapter Three). *Acedia* is a state wherein the victim does not care that he does not care about the significance or ultimate significance of his life, and so he simply follows the path of greatest stimulation—either sensorial or intellectual—instead of directing his path to his highest dignity, authenticity, fulfillment, and destiny.

Note here that the evil one’s tactic is not to regress a victim back to the first group by compelling him to give up his weakened religious and moral commitment. This could fill the victim with increased cosmic emptiness, loneliness and alienation, alerting him to the fact that there is something missing or wrong in his life. Instead, the evil one focuses first on keeping the victim in a weakened religious and moral state by making him feel entitled, distracting him, and then inciting him to rationalize his weak commitment. This keeps the victim in a weakened moral state where he can be easily tempted to pursue a life of egocentricity, intellectual vanity, and the pursuit of status and honors. The “ego-booster” from such a lifestyle are significant indeed and can mesmerize the victim to such a great extent that he ultimately forgets about God altogether—opening him to the suggestion that he can be “god” for himself and others.

As with the first group, these victims will also experience cosmic emptiness, loneliness, and alienation along with nightmares and the other negative dimensions elucidated by the American Psychiatric Association study—increased suicide thoughts, impulsivity, aggressivity, substance abuse, familial tensions, and bouts of depression. However, when these negative interior dispositions manifest themselves, the evil one uses the same three tactics with which he started his deception—first, entitlement (“church services and prayer are to provide *you* with information and entertainment – not to enter into relationship with God through prayers of need, forgiveness, thanksgiving, and praise”); secondly, distraction (“there is something more important and more entertaining than prayer and church services to which *you* will want to attend”); and thirdly, rationalization (“God really wants *you* to read the New York Times thoroughly on Sunday because the more informed you are, the more you will be able to help others”).

Again, the Holy Spirit will counter the evil one’s tactic by calling the victim into a church or presenting him with a conversation or a book that makes God’s reality and presence more palpable. If the victim has not fallen into spiritual torpor and other deadly sins, he might follow

the Holy Spirit's inspiration, and pursue an increased spiritual commitment followed by an increased moral commitment.

This was the path followed by St. Augustine after his encounter with St. Ambrose (see *Confessions*, Book 8, Ch 12). Though Augustine had broken free of Manichaeism, and had begun to take Orthodox Christianity quite seriously (thanks to the teaching and example of St. Ambrose), he had resisted a deepened moral conversion primarily because of his addiction to sexual gratification and his proclivity toward intellectual vanity. One day when he was anguishing about whether he should commit himself to chastity and humility, he heard a child in the next yard singing “take it and read it; take it and read it.” He took out his Bible, opened it randomly, and read St. Paul's words in Romans 13:13-14:

“let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”

Immediately upon reading these words, Augustine had no doubt about his need for a deeper moral conversion and decided to be baptized in the Christian faith. After his baptism on Easter AD 387, he not only committed himself to a life of prayer and virtue, he also pursued the priesthood and was ordained in AD 391. He was then elevated to Bishop of Hippo a few years later.

Notice how the Holy Spirit worked in the life of St. Augustine. First, He inspired Augustine by St. Ambrose's polished rhetoric, philosophical wisdom, and allegorical interpretation of Scripture which moved him to study the Christian scriptures more thoroughly (for he had formerly been quite disedified by the primitiveness of the Old Testament view of God that he thought contradicted the more mature and developed view of God in Manichean doctrine and the New Testament. As the obstacles to increased religious commitment were overcome by Ambrose's preaching, Augustine became more moved by his example seeing in him a manifestation of authentic love, piety, and virtue. This brought him to the brink of decision at which point the Holy Spirit moved him with a child's song and a random selection of Romans 13:13-14. At this point, Augustine had moved from Group 2 to Group 4 and was never to look back. It should be noted that the Holy Spirit never compelled Augustine to do anything. He used the words of Ambrose to redress the tactics and errors of the evil one that kept Augustine in spirit abeyance. It was Augustine who received Ambrose's word with awe and delight, and Augustine who followed his inspiration into deepened spiritual and moral conversion.

The second group may also be subject to another dangerous rationalization – they may become convinced that they are morally sound without God or religion. No doubt, many people can live a fundamentally ethical life without being spiritually committed—that is, they can be authentically committed to the six general principles of ethical propriety—being fair, not harming others unnecessarily (personally, physically, psychologically, reputationally, or financially), not stealing, not cheating, not overtly lying, and not causing marital infidelity or rupturing other committed relationships. This is commendable indeed, but as Jesus pointed out, there is need for not only ethical behaviors in our relationships with others, but also *interior* conversion toward a heart of authentic love—away from egocentricity, anger, envy, vanity, and the pursuit of domination and power. Though it is theoretically possible for someone to achieve the interior conversion of say, Socrates, we must remember that Socrates was not just a philosopher, but also a pious, religious man. Though he may not have benefitted from his religion in the same way that a Christian might benefit from the Holy Spirit in the process of moral conversion, his commitment to God and the sacred led to a remarkable humility that

helped him resist intellectual vanity, the pursuit of power and dominion, and obsession with envy and wealth.

I bring this rationalization up because I believe that the evil one frequently suggests to Group 2 individuals that they have attained a high state of personal and ethical development without a strong commitment to God and religion, because they believe in God and adhere to the six generally accepted principles of ethical behavior. The evil one does not suggest giving up these commitments, but rather that they are *enough*, more than enough. Though God will no doubt look upon these individuals with great mercy for the commitments they have, we must remember the two dangers that lie beneath this rationalization. First, spiritual acedia is quite dangerous because it produces considerable apathy about one's ultimate purpose in life – not caring about one's ultimate meaning, significance, dignity, and destiny—and even not caring about not caring. This can lead to under-living one's life, under-using one's talents, and under-actualizing one's potential for authentic love and transcendental dignity that might have been possible with increased spiritual commitment. Secondly, religious commitment almost invariably leads to greater humility (if for no other reason than our consciousness of being a creature) which in turn generally leads to greater authenticity of love (arising out of a non-godlike view of self) and a diminishment of most forms of vanity and desire for dominion. We are left in a precarious spiritual and moral position without this fundamental humility and striving for authentic love.

Once again, the evil one's tactic proves brilliant because we will not strive for what we do not desire, and we will not desire what we are not aware of. Thus, we are better off following the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to greater religious/spiritual commitment that brings in its wake *awareness* of the need for prayer, humility, authentic love, and virtues to protect us from descending into the darkness of the deadly sins.

### II.B.3

#### **The Third Group – Striving Toward Strong Religious and Moral Conversion**

We may now move on to the Third Group—those who have a high degree of commitment to God and religion, and as a result, have a fundamental awareness of the dangers of the deadly sins, a striving for more authentic love, and a basic awareness of the virtues and how to use them to resist temptation. This group is committed to God and interior moral conversion, but their moral conversion needs to be deepened, and therefore they can let their guard down (or be tricked) opening themselves to temptation, rationalization, and submission to one or more deadly sins.

Though this group is well on their way to deepened spiritual and moral conversion, their use of prayer and the virtues to resist temptation is not yet proficient and habitual, hence, the evil one can take them by surprise. If the believer begins to let his guard down, and become more lax in his spiritual commitments and less vigilant in the practice of virtue to resist temptation, the evil one will try to surprise him with several different kinds of stimuli and temptations. Recognizing that the believer may be alerted to the danger of these temptations (and the damage they are likely to cause) the evil spirit suggests several opportune rationalizations to “help” the believer submit to the temptation – “so what if you have a few more drinks with your friends; you’re not hurting anyone;” “go ahead and relax with a little bit of free internet pornography—

you're not harming yourself or anyone else;" "it's alright to be angry and vengeful; the Old Testament is full of it!" "You're not being vain and proud, you're just being competitive in a competitive world;" "greed is good because it motivates people to take risks to build the means of production," etc. Rationalizations need not be as blunt as the ones stated here—remember, the evil one is a master at presenting them subtly.

If the believer has let his guard down, begins to engage in and even entertain a particular stimulus, and buys the rationalization, he is likely to submit to the temptation. If he does, the evil one will follow rapidly with false consolations and other rationalizations to cushion his fall and to minimize his perception of its effect. Though we can be quite certain that the Lord looks with unconditional mercy upon believers who fall into this situation, he will waste no time in trying to counter it before the believer descends more deeply into the deadly sins. Sometimes the Holy Spirit will present the believer with a sense of cosmic emptiness, loneliness, and alienation which could scare the believer into getting back on track. However, if the believer has become smitten by the sin and has bought deeply into a rationalization for it, he might ignore his feelings of cosmic emptiness, loneliness, and alienation, and regress to a state of submission to temptation. At this point, the believer may sense three negative changes in his life—more intense feelings of emptiness, alienation, loneliness, and darkness, a decrease in trust, hope, love, and religious fervor, and a consequent loss of interest in religious and moral conversion. This should set off alarms in the heart of the believer, and if it does not, the Holy Spirit will intensify them which will normally provoke the believer to reject the rationalizations he has been using, express contrition for his sin, and turn away from his satisfaction from the sin before it takes him into its darkness.

Since Group 3 believers have a strong commitment to God and a religious life, basic awareness of the dangers of the deadly sins, and the need to resist temptation out of love for God, protection of the soul, and adherence to conscience, there is a very good chance that the believer will reverse his regression into the Deadly Sins (along with his rationalizations) when faced with the negative consequences of his turn (dark and desolate feelings, confusion, and decrease in trust, hope, and love). This will normally result in deep contrition, a rejection of the rationalizations, and a rekindling of effort to resist the stimuli of temptations at their origin. When he does this, he will return to his former spiritual commitments and a renewed interest in deepening his moral conversion. As this occurs, he will become progressively more free from the enticements of sensorial stimulation, uncommitted sexual gratification, ego-comparative advantage, and vanity. This will lead to three important changes in disposition:

1. Awareness of authentic love and the freedom to follow Christ Our Lord into it.
2. Freedom to surrender to the Lord and His Will before all else.
3. A progression in the spiritual life that will fill him with affective consolation (feelings of love–sacredness–unity–joy–home). These feelings of affective consolation will be punctuated with affective desolation to help the believer in his final state of purification (this is generally referred to as the “dark night of the soul”<sup>9</sup>).

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<sup>9</sup> As will be discussed in Volume 20 – Chapter Three, the dark night of the soul has four stages – the active dark night of the senses, the passive dark night of the senses (in the purgative way), as well as the active dark night of the spirit, and the passive dark night of the Spirit (in the illuminative way). St. John of the Cross explains these four

As the believer (in the third group) becomes proficient at resisting temptation and draws closer to the Lord in prayer, the evil one must shift his tactics from overt temptations (which have become less effective) to deception and discouragement. We will discuss these two tactics briefly here, and discuss them more thoroughly below in Section III (Deception and Discernment) and Section IV (Discouragement and Hope in Christ).

With respect to deception, the evil one will have considerable difficulty trying to overtly tempt group three believers. He will also have great difficulty convincing them of falsity in the area of faith and morals. Hence, he attempts to deceive them by appearing like an angel of light. This deception can be so devious that St. Ignatius of Loyola had to devote a large section to what he called “Discernment in the second week.”<sup>10</sup> This will be taken up in detail below (Section III).

The evil one frequently uses discouragement to undermine Group 3 believers who are moving into Group 4. These believers are well-aware of their shortcomings in charity, humility, and authenticity -- even though they have made great progress in resisting the deadly sins. The lives of the saints are filled with their recognition of inadequacy in the areas of charity, humility, and authenticity which at first provokes discouragement, but later, consolation in the love, mercy, and grace of Jesus Christ. St. Paul’s plea in the Letter to the Romans is at first filled with excruciating frustration that ultimately leads to hope through Christ:

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate... I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! Romans 7: 15-25.

Virtually everyone in Group 3 will go through this kind of discouragement on multiple occasions, because attachments to certain dimensions of the Deadly Sins can be quite deep, and the evil one will work overtime to prevent the believer from making progress. If he does make progress, then the evil one takes on the role of the accuser (see Revelation 12: 10) by showing him his imperfections in the past and present, implying that he will never be able to attain the love of Christ in the future. He implies that this is what God really expects, and so God is not satisfied with either the believer or his progress. If the believer takes the “bait,” the evil one stresses his false doctrine that God looks only at the believer’s imperfections and in disgust rejects him and his “little” attempts to become better. This false doctrine can lead to complete discouragement and despair, causing the vulnerable believer to abandon his struggle for deeper moral conversion and even his striving to be united with God. When St. Ignatius of Loyola was in the thralls of his religious and moral conversion in the caves of Manresa, and his view of God was not developed enough to recognize God’s unconditional love, his recollection of his past sins and his present condition, drove him to the point of complete discouragement and even self-

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stages of the dark night in his work *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* which includes *The Dark Night of the Soul*. See the references in Volume 20, Chapter Three.

<sup>10</sup> See Ignatius of Loyola 1914 *Spiritual Exercises* pp. 91-93.

destruction.<sup>11</sup> Fortunately, the Lord intervened, and showed him that his discouragement was unwarranted – and the evil spirit had caused his distress.<sup>12</sup> After that time, he was free from the discouragement of his past sins and present condition. What does this mean for us? Group 3 believers who are making progress in resisting temptation and appropriating the loving heart of Christ should expect that the evil one (taking on the role of the accuser) will torment them with every form of discouragement about their past and present. The solution is to depend totally on the unconditional love of God preached by Jesus and demonstrated by His completely self-sacrificial passion and death – and then to place ourselves completely in His infinitely merciful arms, crying out with St. Paul, “Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Rom. 7:25).

As the Group 3 believer continues on his journey, he will find himself moving into the fourth group (highest level of religious and moral conversion) in which he will be proficient at resisting temptation, free to love as Christ loved, and united with the Lord in prayer (union-home-love-ecstasy-sacredness).

#### II.B.4

#### The Fourth Group – Strong Religious and Moral Conversion

Those who become spiritually and morally proficient (entering into Group 4) can expect a high degree of religious commitment, moral purification and sanctity, freedom for authentic love, and significant apostolic contribution. They are very likely to lead multitudes into faith and moral conversion by both example and works. They will likely experience periods of considerable affective and spiritual consolation (which may include extraordinary divine inspiration and even visions).

They can also expect to be confronted – rather than tempted—by Satan. This can happen in a variety of ways – for example, harassment where the evil one will disturb their sleep with loud noises, pressure, and frightening images (as was the case for St. John Vianney<sup>13</sup> and St. Padre Pio<sup>14</sup>). They will also be challenged by the responsibilities they have in their religious and apostolic lives. For example, the evil one will attempt to use their willingness to do anything for the Lord, pushing them to go beyond even a state of exhaustion in the hopes of creating a mental collapse or discouragement (from exhaustion).

Additionally, individuals in this group may well be in the illuminative way – and so may be subject to the passive dark night of the spirit. (We will discuss the challenges of this dark night in Volume 20, Chapter Three) These individuals, such as St. Thérèse of Lisieux and St. Teresa of Calcutta are generally aware of the objective and ultimate result of this dark night (i.e.

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<sup>11</sup> St. Ignatius Loyola 1900, *The Autobiography of St. Ignatius*, ed. by J.F.X. O’Conor, S.J., (New York: Benziger Brothers) pp. 45 – 51.

<https://books.google.com/books?id=T6dlAAAAMAAJ&q=manresa#v=snippet&q=manresa&f=false>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. pp 50-51.

<sup>13</sup> Leon Cristiani devotes about one-third of his text to the harassments of John Vianney (the Curé of Ars) and how he overcame them with trust in God, prayer, and humility. See Leon Cristiani 1977 *Evidence of Satan in the Modern World* (Charlotte, NC: Tan Books and Publishers) pp. 5-40.

<sup>14</sup> Like St. John Vianney, Padre Pio was often tormented and harassed by the devil throughout his life. He treated these harassments in much the same way as Vianney – with trust in God, prayer, humility, and patience. See Renzo Allegri 2000, *Padre Pio: Man of Hope* (Charis Books) pp. 35-45.



final purification, union with God, and mystic ecstasy). Hence they are able to patiently endure this purification – painful as it is – with great trust in God. St. Thérèse and St. Teresa of Calcutta endured this purification until the end of their lives, but then the Lord came to them with the ecstasy and grace they confidently believed He would give. In the case of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, ecstasy came a few minutes before her death. One of her siblings who was also a Carmelite sister – Mother Agnes of Jesus (Pauline Martin) gave the following testimony:

Fixing her eyes on the crucifix, she slowly said: "Oh! . . . I love him . . . My . . . God! . . . I . . . love . . . You!" Having pronounced these words she fell back gently, her head a little to the right. Mother hastily summoned the community to return, and all were in time to witness her ecstasy. Her face, which had become purple and contorted during her agony, had returned to its pristine freshness and the lily-white colouring of healthier days, her eyes stared upwards, shining with peace and joy. A sister drew near with a torch to get a better look at this sublime gaze, and the light of the torch produced no movement of the eyelids. This ecstasy lasted for the space of a *Credo*. Then I saw her close her eyes; she sighed several times, and rendered her soul to God.<sup>15</sup>

Saint Teresa of Calcutta also experienced a long dark night of the soul similar to that of the saint she longed to imitate (Saint Thérèse). Fr. Benedict Groeschel reports what happened to her in the last two weeks of her life:

Toward the end of her life the darkness lifted. Fr. Brian records the sisters' observation when Mother Teresa returned to Calcutta shortly before her death: "After her return from Rome [and New York] . . . Mother had been extremely happy, joyful, optimistic, and talkative. Her face was always radiant, full of fun. The Lord must have revealed to her the impending end of her life." Our readers may find it interesting to know that I personally observed this joyfulness the day before Mother returned to Calcutta. I was asked by her sisters to offer Mass for her. She was so weak that she could not stand, but attended Mass lying on a cot. My confrere Fr. Andrew Apostoli and I were utterly astonished after Mass when she was "bubbly." She laughed and told us with great joy the number of sisters and convents they had throughout the world. Mother never spoke about this before, and she was not doing so in any boastful way. Rather, she was rejoicing "with triumphant exultation" at the great blessings God had been able to grant through the Missionaries of Charity.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *From the testimony of Mother Agnes of Jesus [Pauline Martin] at the diocesan inquiry into the life of St. Thérèse, given as a part of the process for the cause of canonization. Source: St. Thérèse of Lisieux by Those Who Knew Her. Edited by Christopher O'Mahony. Dublin: Pranstown House, rep. 1989.*

<sup>16</sup> Benedict Groeschel 2007, "Mother Teresa Remembered" *First Things* 9-11-07 <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2007/09/mother-teresa-remembered>

Notice that the dark night of the soul (initiated by God) and the harassments of the evil one are not ultimately vexing, though they may be frustrating and painful. Those who are spiritually and morally proficient generally have the faith, inspiration, virtues, and spiritual freedom to deal with them effectively. Ironically, this leads them to increased purification, freedom to love, and in the end, the ecstasy of eternal life.

## **Second Sample**

### **From Chapter Three, Section VIII**

#### **VIII.**

#### **Pride (Superbia)**

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Pride in the most general sense refers to egocentricity that leads not only to self-absorption but to the exclusion, neglect, and even derision of others. It can include or exclude vanity (which is concern with self-image, recognition by others, and perceived status). Since we have treated vanity independently of pride (in Section VI above), we will here restrict ourselves to the other major dimension of pride—Superbia—the will to be superior, the will to power, lust for power and dominion.

#### **VIII.A**

#### **Explanation of Pride and its Five Stages of Destructiveness**

Recall what was said in Volume 13 and this Chapter (Section VI above) about dominant ego-comparative (Level Two) identity. As noted there, winners in the comparison game can content themselves with mere vanity (being given recognition, adulation, and superior, or even, celebrity status). Frequently, this is not enough. One not only wants to be the center of attention and recognition but also inherently superior and even the center of power and dominion. This urge or lust aims at making one's perceived superiority felt by the external world. It can be subtle (and sneakily Machiavellian)<sup>17</sup> or exceedingly strong and self-delusional – even to the point of acting like a messiah (an anointed savior) or a demigod. Yet, Superbia need not rise to the level of a despotic dictator like Hitler or Stalin – it can be manifested in dominating and Machiavellian leaders of every sort – political, business, military, educational, and even religious. Furthermore, it need not be restricted to high-level leaders; it can also be found in middle managers who, “lord it over others and make their authority over them felt” (MT 20:25). This can come not only from a sense of superiority and contempt for others, but also from a sense of inferiority disguised as superiority for the sake of saving face or ego-comparative advantage. In either case, the motivation and result are the same – the motivation is ego-comparative advantage for its own sake and the result is the domination of another for the sake

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<sup>17</sup> Machiavellian refers to the attitude recommended by Niccolò Machiavelli to political leaders in his classic work *The Prince*. He contends there that the prince (the person in power) may do anything—including unethical, underhanded, devious, threatening, and even violent courses of action in order to remain in power. The term has come to mean “devious, underhanded, and cunning schemes and actions to maintain one's power and advantage.”

of that advantage. Thus, the practitioners of pride need not be “winners” in the comparison game – they can also be “drawers” and even “losers” who have carved out a path to some form of power advantage – whether by good fortune, Machiavellian tactics, or brutal politics. Once they have the advantage, they make their power and authority felt.

If the belief in one’s inherent superiority—whether it come from objective comparative-advantage in the external world or a projection of superiority onto feelings of inferiority—is strong enough, then it will naturally seek fulfillment by exercising that superiority over others (i.e. seeking legitimate authority over them) or dominating others (imposing authority over others who are perceived to be weak by allowing domination to occur). If this belief in inherent superiority is not counter-balanced by empathy and genuine care for others, it will tend toward narcissism that excludes not only cared for others, but also respect for them. As this grows, the narcissistically proud person becomes progressively more insensitive to others’ needs and then to their right to individual, political, and economic justice, and finally to their right to life.

We may adduce from this five stages of growth in pride which are concomitantly five stages in the decline of empathy, conscience, care, and love:

1. Dominant ego-comparative (Level Two) identity
2. An increasingly strong belief in one’s inherent superiority (whether this be based on a comparative-advantage in talent or facades to cover over inferiority feelings)
3. The desire to make one’s belief in inherent superiority felt within the external world (this can lead to a seeking of legitimate political or commercial authority—or an urge to dominate anyone who is weak enough to allow it.)
4. A desire to press one’s advantages in the external world to their fullest limit (regardless of whether this violates one’s conscience and feelings of empathy and care—or violates others’ rights to life, liberty, property, and minimum justice). At this point, the urge to dominate overshadows and suppresses one’s conscience and feelings of empathy and care.
5. The choice to be despotic – that is to exercise one’s power over others in an absolute, oppressive, and even cruel way – not for any external advantage, but simply to exercise “god-like” authority over them. When one reaches this stage, it is generally accompanied by the belief that one is divine or has been messianically chosen by a non-moral providence (e.g. by a Hegelian “world spirit”) to rule as a god or demi-god. To maintain this delusion, the subject must believe that they have transcended good and evil—or rejected the idea of good and evil.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Adolf Hitler, for example, believed that he was messianically chosen by a non-moral world spirit (which he probably borrowed from Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right* and *Phenomenology of Spirit*). He also was highly influenced by Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Will to Power* and *Beyond Good and Evil*. See Henry A. Murray, M.D., 1943 “Analysis of the personality of Adolph Hitler” *Harvard Psychological Clinic* and also See William L. Shirer and Ron Rosenbaum 2011 *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany* (New York: Simon & Schuster) pp xxii-xxiv.

In the previous section, we presented three internal powers or drives that oppose the progression from the first stage of pride (dominant ego-comparative identity) to the other stages of pride culminating in the fifth stage (despotic authority) – conscience, empathy, and religion. I believe that these three powers/drives have their origin in a supernatural or transcendent cause for reasons explained in *The Soul's Upward Yearning*.<sup>19</sup> For the moment, suffice to say that one has to marginalize these three powers in order to make “progress” in the stages of pride, particularly in the move from the belief in one’s inherent superiority (stage two) to the exercise of narcissistic, uncaring, unjust, and despotic authority over others (stages three, four, and five). Hitler, for example, used the non-moral view of god/religion of G.W.F. Hegel (the “world-spirit” developed in *The Philosophy of Right*)<sup>20</sup> to bolster his belief in being messianically chosen by a non-moral providence – and Freidrich Nietzsche’s view of the superman’s transcendence of good and evil through *The Will to Power*<sup>21</sup> to justify his negation of good and evil, and empathy/care for the weak.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Vladimir Lenin<sup>23</sup>, Friedrich Engels<sup>24</sup>, Joseph Stalin<sup>25</sup> and the Bolshevik party effectively used Marx’s atheism<sup>26</sup> to justify their rejection of religion -- and his dialectical materialism to justify their historical ascendancy to despotic authority.<sup>27</sup> They were also able to use Marx’s moral relativism and reduction of good and evil to the “evil of Capital” to justify their marginalization of conscience and of moral good and evil.<sup>28</sup> Virtually every despotic ruler and despotic social movement finds a theoretical and practical way to rationalize the marginalization of God, religion, empathy, and conscience, allowing for the ascendancy to the absolute, arbitrary, and cruel use of power. Even religious despots, like Jim Jones, David Koresh, other religious “cult” leaders, have to marginalize conscience, principles of good and evil, empathy, and a personal relationship with a just and loving God. Though this may seem counter-intuitive, many cult leaders search out religious texts from their traditions that are quite ancient in origin (e.g. texts from the oldest strands of the Old Testament that have been superseded by later prophets and by Jesus, such as the requirement for vengeance against defeated enemies in 1Samuel13-15) to justify the religious suspension of the ethical, religious

<sup>19</sup> Spitzer, 2016, Chapters 1, 2, 4, and 6

<sup>20</sup> See G.W. Hegel, 2001, *Philosophy of Right*, trans by S.W. Dyde, (Batoche Books, Kitchener), pp 8,47-52, 266-269

<sup>21</sup> See Friedrich Nietzsche 1997 *Beyond Good and Evil* trans and ed by William Kaufman (New York: Dover Publications) and 1968, *The Will to Power*, trans by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books).

<sup>22</sup> See Yvonne Sherratt, 2013, *Hitler's Philosophers*, (New Haven: Yale University Press) pp 16-32, 41-43 & 52 (for Hegel) & pp 16-30, 42-52 70-71 (for Nietzsche).

<sup>23</sup> Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, 1909, “The Attitude of the Workers' Party to Religion” *Proletary*, No. 45, May 1, 1909 (26) <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1909/may/13.htm>

<sup>24</sup> see Friedrich Engels, 1878, *Anti-Duhring* (India: Leopard Books)

<sup>25</sup> see James Thrower, 1983, *Marxist-Leninist "scientific Atheism" and the Study of Religion and Atheism in the USSR*. Walter de Gruyter.

<sup>26</sup> See for example Marx’s declaration that “Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.” see Karl Marx, 1843, *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm#05>

<sup>27</sup> See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, 2007, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (Radford, VA: Wilder Publications); see Karl Marx *The Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*

<sup>28</sup> See David S. Levin, 1984, “The Moral Relativism of Marxism” *Philosophical Forum* 15 (3) pp 249 ff ; see also Nicholas Churchich, M.Phil., Ph.D. 1994, *Marxism and morality: A Critical Examination of Marxist Ethics*, (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co)

intolerance, harsh punishments for cultic violations, and a cruel/angry view of God.<sup>29</sup> If religious leaders violate wholesale their own ethical code (or reduce ethics to their own decrees) and lack a sincere relationship with God, they are, as Jesus noted, nothing more than wolves in sheep's clothing (Mt. 7:15) and "bad fruit" (Mt. 7:16-20) – to which Jesus adds "the tree that bears bad fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire" (Mt 7:19).

Many literary, philosophical, and political writers have contended that pride is the worst of all the deadly sins, not only because it has ego-centricity and narcissism "at its heart," but also because it naturally tends toward self-idolatry (the divinization of self) which seeks to replace the true God (the one uncaused and unrestricted intellectual and loving power who is the creator of everything else in existence<sup>30</sup>) with one's exaggerated and even delusional divinized self-image. This dimension of pride makes it not only destructive to self and others, but also evil (directly cooperating with Satan through the continuous commission of the particular sin that separated him from God and the Blessed—see below). Evidently, we are not the true God—and if we even begin to exaggerate our self-importance to that level, we verge on the grossest kind of inauthenticity, trying to pretend to ourselves and others that we can bring ultimate happiness, dignity, and fulfillment through our pretense to ultimate truth and power. Though this attitude might temporarily lead to a hyper-inflated ego-high – like that enjoyed by most political, commercial, cultural, and religious despots—it soon implodes as resistance grows against the audacious pretense and its inability to be truly divine. Even if sufficient resistance cannot be harnessed to overthrow the despot (as happened to Macbeth, Hitler, and David Koresh) the despot will not be able to avoid growing old and then dying. As this process takes place, many despots suffer from continuous nightmares and bouts of depression. Elizabeth I could not escape the torment within herself after executing Mary Queen of Scots and the Earl of Essex. According to Anna Whitelock:

Elizabeth suffered bouts of depression that drove her to seek sanctuary, away from the public glare of the court, among her women in the privy chamber. When Sir John Harington, her godson, arrived at court he was shocked by what he saw. His letter to a friend paints a vivid picture of the unmasked queen. "So disordered is all order," that she had not changed her clothes for many days, she was "quite disfavoured, and unattired, and these troubles waste her much." She now kept a sword close by her and, as Harington described, "constantly paced the privy chamber, stamping her feet at bad news and thrusting her rusty sword at times into the arras [tapestry] in great rage."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Jesus was well aware of the devil's capacity to quote Scripture as He personally witnessed during His temptations in the desert (Mt 4:1-11). Shakespeare notes this well through the wisdom of Antonio in *The Merchant of Venice*, "The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose. An evil soul producing holy witness is like a villain with a smiling cheek, a goodly apple rotten at the heart. O, what a goodly outside falsehood hath!" (Act I, Scene III).

<sup>30</sup> See Spitzer, 2010, *New Proofs for the Existence of God*, Chapters 1-5. See also Spitzer, 2016, *The Soul's Upward Yearning*, Chapters 3-4, and Appendix 2.

<sup>31</sup> Anna Whitelock, 2013, *Elizabeth I: The monarch behind the mask* in *BBC History Magazine* (June issue 2013) [www.historyextra.com/article/elizabeth-i/elizabeth-i-monarch-behind-mask](http://www.historyextra.com/article/elizabeth-i/elizabeth-i-monarch-behind-mask)

Adolph Hitler suffered from the same depression, anger, nightmares, and suicidal tendencies according to the psychological profile developed of him by Henry Murray based on O.S.S. intelligence reports which came from inside the Third Reich. He notes there:

Every new act of unusual cruelty, such as the purge of 1934, has been followed by a period of anxiety and depletion, agitated delection and nightmares, which can be interpreted only as the unconscious operation of a bad conscience. Hitler wants nothing so much as to arrive at the state where he can commit crimes without guilt feelings; but despite his boasts of having transcended Good and Evil this has not been possible. The suicidal trend in his personality is eloquent testimony of a repressed self-condemning tendency.<sup>32</sup>

We now need to return to the less extreme manifestations of pride—and consider its seemingly more benign starting point (the first and second stages mentioned above). It should be noted that this seemingly benign starting point is deceptive, because pride tends to grow first in the mind, then in ambition and will, and then in dominating and destructive power. Aristotle describes this more moderate form of pride quite accurately in *The Rhetoric* after defining anger and envy (“spite”):

Insolence [“pride”] is also a form of slighting, since it consists in doing and saying things that cause shame to the victim, not in order that anything may happen to yourself [“to get something for yourself” as in greed], or because anything has happened to yourself [“to get vengeance” as in anger], but simply for the pleasure involved [the pleasure of shaming someone in order to feel superior]. (Retaliation is not ‘insolence’, but vengeance.) The cause of the pleasure thus enjoyed by the insolent man is that he thinks himself greatly superior to others when ill-treating them. That is why youths and rich men are insolent; they think themselves superior when they show insolence.<sup>33</sup>

One can sense Aristotle’s disdain for the proud person who causes shame or injury to someone simply for the pleasure of feeling superior. He seems to hint that this offense is worse than greed, because the greedy person does not want to injure a person for mere pleasure (as in sadism or narcissism), but is motivated only by his insatiable desire for wealth. He suggests further that pride is worse than anger, for the angry man shames or injures a person because he himself has been shamed or injured – and so he is “justly” seeking revenge. The proud man undermines and injures others for the sheer pleasure of injuring them which makes him feel superior.

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<sup>32</sup> Henry A. Murray, M.D., 1943 “Analysis of the personality of Adolph Hitler” *Harvard Psychological Clinic* [https://archive.org/details/AnalysisOfThePersonalityOfAdolphHitler\\_240](https://archive.org/details/AnalysisOfThePersonalityOfAdolphHitler_240)

<sup>33</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1378b. in *Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed and trans by Richard McKeon, (New York: Random House), p1381

**VIII.B**  
**The Destructiveness of Pride in the Bible**

The Bible is filled with warnings about pride—not only because it arises out of a completely false and inauthentic inflated self-image, but also because of its destructiveness to others, and to the Divine order and plan—self-idolatry. The references are so extensive that we will only be able to give a few examples of this “worst of all sins.”

We have already seen the primary appeal to pride in the serpent’s temptation of Eve to disobey God’s command in Genesis 3:1-7-- “for God knows that when you eat of it [the fruit of the forbidden tree] your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen 3:5). Though the serpent is trying to incite envy to obtain the outcome of abject disobedience to God, he uses pride as his essential stepping stone to getting there—“if you eat of this fruit you will become like gods.”

Much of the first book of Samuel is devoted to the transformation of Saul from a humble man (1 Sam 9:21) to an overweeningly proud king who flagrantly disobeyed the Lord, set up a monument to himself, and lied to Samuel about his misdeeds (1 Sam 15:10-23). Since Saul disobeyed God, God chose another man for Samuel to anoint—David the youngest son of Jesse. And when Samuel anointed him, the Spirit left Saul and rushed upon David—though Saul did not yet know that David had been anointed by Samuel. Nevertheless, he felt the loss of God’s Spirit, and so by God’s providential action, Saul’s servants brought David to him as a skilled harpist who would bring him consolation.

David’s prowess in battle began with the killing of Goliath and continued to grow throughout his campaigns as military leader against the Philistines. After a particularly important battle, Saul heard the women of Israel chanting “Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands” (1Sam 18:7). Saul’s pride was badly injured, and he envied the accolades that the crowds gave to David. So as scripture reports, “an evil demon rushed upon him,” and while David was present, he tried to kill him by thrusting him with his spear twice, but David avoided him. Saul interpreted these events as the Spirit of God protecting David, so he began to fear him, but since his pride and envy knew no bounds, he ignored his fear of both God and David.

Saul then tried to kill David by placing him at the forefront of his armies, but the Lord continued to protect him, and he grew in honor among the Israelites because of his courage and military feats. David married Saul’s daughter Michal and was best friends with Saul’s son Jonathan. Despite all this, Saul’s pride and envy stirred him again to persecute and kill David. Jonathan challenged his father’s motives by telling him that David had done no wrong to him – and indeed had done him and Israel only good. Saul paid no heed to this challenge, and ignored the implicit accusation that he was acting out of pride and envy in direct contrast to the justice of the Lord—and so he continued in his relentless attempts to kill David. Finally, his own daughter (David’s wife) had to help David out the window and deceive her father to protect him. Jonathan again challenged his father about the injustice of his actions, but Saul was bent on killing him, driven to the point of madness by his hurt pride.



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Saul then stooped to new lows, persecuting anyone who helped David in his flight, and massacred 85 priests because they provided David with a sword and the help of the prophet Gad. During Saul's relentless pursuit of David, the Lord enabled David to situate himself in the same cave that Saul used. David spared Saul's life, taking only a piece of his cloak to prove his encounter with him instead of killing him. When Saul exited the cave, David indicated that he had had him within his power, but had mercy on him, showing him the piece of his cloak. Though Saul showed gratitude and remorse for a moment, his pride and envy eventually set him back on a course to kill David.

Once again, the Lord enabled David to approach Saul and his men while they were sleeping. David took Saul's spear and water jug to show that the Lord had once again put Saul under his power – and that David had shown him mercy. Though Saul acknowledged this in gratitude, David recognized that he could not be trusted, and decided to live in the land of the Philistines to gain protection from Saul. When he did this, Saul finally stopped his insane pursuit.

Since Saul felt that the priests, prophets, and mediums of the land could not be trusted, he had all the prophets and mediums driven out from the land of Israel. Clearly, his pride was out of control and he was now using the authority God had given him to undermine God's purpose and presence in Israel. It is difficult to imagine what Saul could have been thinking when he was killing priests and banishing prophets. Had he completely lost touch with God? If not, did he not care about undermining God's purpose and presence in Israel? Could he have been unaware of the consequences of his actions? It seems that pride and envy had left him with a completely distorted sense of God, reality, and himself. His resentment and hatred stemming from his inability to outshine and control David had taken away his soul—and as scripture describes it, “an evil demon had rushed upon him.”

At this juncture, events began to turn against Saul. His pride had alienated him not only from David, but also from God and the religious leaders he had banished. The Philistines once again rose up against Saul with a large army, but David would not be there to help him—indeed, he was marching with the Philistines who were attacking Saul's forces (though the Philistine officers forced him to return to his homestead). Saul consulted the only medium left in the land of Israel (after he had banished the rest), but had to do so in disguise, because she would be frightened of him if she knew who he was. She conjured the prophet Samuel who told Saul that he and his sons would soon be killed, and as the Philistines marched on Israel, the prophecy was proven true. Saul was surrounded by them, then his sons were killed, and so rather than be taken captive by the Philistines, he fell on his own sword after being unable to convince his armor-bearer to thrust him through.

His pride and envy alienated him from God, the priests and prophets, David—his best leader--and thousands of his people. He died alone on the hill-top by his own hand, recognizing that his heirs were all dead, and that the house and kingdom of Saul would come to ruin. The fruit of pride and envy proved once again to be destruction -- the destruction of friends, family, country, religion, and ultimately, oneself.

Saul's story illustrates what Wisdom literature teaches over and over again—“pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Prov 16:18). Since this Wisdom teaching is so central to the Christian understanding of the destructiveness of pride, it is worth closer

examination. Much of the Book of Proverbs is devoted to warnings about pride and admonitions toward humility—e.g. Proverbs 11:2 – “when pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom;” Proverbs 16:5—“The lord detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished;” Proverbs 18:12—“Before a downfall the heart is haughty, but humility comes before honor;” Proverbs 21:4—“haughty eyes and a proud heart—the unplowed field of the wicked—produce sin;” Proverbs 26:12—“do you see a person wise in their own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for them;” and Proverbs 29:23—“pride brings a person low, but the lowly in spirit gain honor.”

Much of the tenth and eleventh chapters of Sirach are devoted to a denunciation of pride—the meaning of which is self-explanatory:

Do not be angry with your neighbor for any injury, and do not attempt anything by acts of pride.

Arrogance is hateful before the Lord and before men, and injustice is outrageous to both.

Sovereignty passes from nation to nation on account of injustice , pride and wealth.

How can he who is dust and ashes be proud? for even in life his bowels decay.

... The beginning of man’s pride is to depart from the Lord; his heart has forsaken his Maker.

For the beginning of pride is sin, and the man who clings to it pours out abominations.

Therefore the Lord brought upon them extraordinary afflictions, and destroyed them utterly.

The Lord has cast down the thrones of rulers, and has seated the lowly in their place.

...Pride was not created for men, nor fierce anger for those born of women. The wisdom of a humble man will lift up his head, and will seat him among the great (Sir10:6-11:1).

We see the same themes mentioned often in the Psalms. For example, Ps10:4—“in his pride the wicked man does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God” and Ps. 138:6 – “Though the Lord is exalted, He looks kindly on the lowly; though lofty, He sees them from afar.”

The prophets also denounced and warned against pride. Isaiah reiterates the Lord’s rejection of the proud--“The Lord Almighty has a day in store for all the proud and lofty, for all that is exalted ... and the haughtiness of men will be humbled” (Is 2:12 & 17) and again “The Lord of hosts has purposed it, to defile the pride of all glory, to dishonor all the honored of the earth.”

Jeremiah condemns the pride of Israel that has led to their wavering faith and weakening hearts—“Thus says the LORD: Even so will I spoil the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem. <sup>10</sup> This evil people, who refuse to hear my words, who stubbornly follow their own heart and have gone after other gods to serve them and worship them, shall be like this waistcloth, which is good for nothing.” (Jer 13:9-10)

Daniel likewise condemns pride - “when [Nebuchadnezzar’s] heart became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory” (Daniel 5:20).

We may now turn to the New Testament. As with envy, Jesus does not give a specific condemnation of pride in the Gospels, because He assumes that His audience is aware of the wholesale denunciation of it by every part of the Old Testament. Instead He extols the opposite virtues of humility, compassion, charity, meekness (gentleheartedness), and the love of enemies—equating these with the heart of His Heavenly Father. We might infer from this that the opposite of these virtues—pride—is contrary to the heart of His Heavenly Father, and therefore describes the nature of their common opponent-- Satan. As noted above, Jesus teaches that self-exaltation is foolish indeed, and such people will be humbled both now and in the future.

Jesus also gives an implicit condemnation of pride in His in his repeated condemnation of the Pharisees self-righteousness which arises out of their overweening spiritual pride. He illustrates the destructiveness of this pride in His parable of the tax collector and the Pharisee. The prayer of the Pharisee (prayed to himself) reveals the “perfect” status he has accorded to himself while he is hypocritically condemning the tax-collector:

Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus to himself, ‘God, I thank thee that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Jesus also formalizes His teaching about the illicitness of pride in the use of power—both worldly and ecclesial power--that attacks Superbia at its “heart”:

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and the great ones make their authority over them felt. But it *shall not* be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you *shall* be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you *shall* be your slave. Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many (Mt 20:25-28).

The word “shall” is used three times (italicized above) to translate “estai” which conveys a mandatory or imperative sense – “you shall not...”. This command is so important that Jesus uses Himself as the model for the Disciples’ future conduct and leadership. He is not only saying “do as I say,” but “do as I do.” By using his eschatological title, “the Son of Man,” Jesus here is not speaking to them simply as teacher and friend, but as Lord and definitive judge.

There is another implicit condemnation of pride in all four Gospels—though it does not come from Jesus Himself—but rather from the outrageous and destructive conduct of one of Jesus’ apostolic twelve companions—Judas Iscariot. We have already seen how pride led to the destructiveness and ultimate demise of Saul, Adolph Hitler, Jim Jones, and David Koresh—

among many others in world history. In the midst of all these, Judas Iscariot is perhaps one of the most remarkable instances of the destructiveness of pride—to self, others, the world, and the cosmic struggle between good and evil—because Judas was so close to the loving antithesis of pride (Jesus) and yet fell headlong into pride’s seduction, inauthenticity and destructive power. If pride could usher in Judas’ seduction by Satan (Lk. 22:3 and Jn. 13:27) while he witnessed Jesus’ miraculous power and the effects of His loving ministry, we cannot underestimate what it might do to us if we allow ourselves to become separated from Jesus and His teaching.

So how did Judas, the companion of Jesus become His betrayer, handing Him over to His enemies with a kiss? In my view, the cause is not simply Satan—it was Judas’ disposition of heart that made him vulnerable to Satan—a disposition that would cause him to elevate his will over the will of Jesus—and even to resent the will of Jesus. This disposition of heart, I would submit, has all the indications of pride as we have described it above. One might wonder how I came to this conclusion since we know so little about Judas from the scriptures. I suppose it might be best described as a process of eliminating other plausible explanations (besides pride). In order to briefly describe this, we must begin with what we *do* know about Judas – five points are germane:

1. He was one of the twelve apostles, was selected by Jesus, and presumably witnessed dozens of Jesus’ exorcisms and miracles – including raising the dead. He would have also witnessed Jesus’ ministry of forgiveness and consolation to sinners – as well as his ministry to the poor, the sick, the grieving, and even his friends.
2. Judas was the holder of the purse –and therefore collected donations from those supporting Jesus – and distributed them to the poor and others as Jesus instructed.
3. Judas was greedy and dishonest, and so helped himself to the common purse – apparently unaware that Jesus and the other disciples knew what he was doing.
4. There was probably tension between Judas and Jesus – and perhaps even resentment of Jesus by Judas – evidenced not only by his betrayal of Jesus to the chief priests, but also by John’s attribution of the protesting of the woman’s anointing of Jesus’ feet to Judas.<sup>34</sup>
5. Another sign of tension between Judas and Jesus is his offer to hand Jesus over to the chief priest *before* they offer him money (Mk. 14:10-11, Lk. 22: 4-5)<sup>35</sup> and that he hands Jesus over to them with a kiss – a snake behind the handshake – indicating disdainful duplicitousness, if not, resentment and hatred.

This small set of facts about Judas suggests not only that he was greedy and dishonest, but also was alienated from Jesus – looking for a way – indeed anxious – to betray him. His duplicitous kiss is not simply a way of cloaking his active betrayal, it is also a way of showing

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<sup>34</sup> Mark attributes the protest to “some people who were present” (Mk. 14:4). Matthew attributes the protest to the disciples in general (Mt. 26: 6-13), but John attributes the protest to Judas (Jn. 12:4-7), attributing dishonest motives to Judas as well. This may not only be John’s way of indicating Judas’ greed, but also tension between him and Jesus.

<sup>35</sup> It should be noted that Mark and Luke indicate that Judas decided to betray Jesus before the chief priests agreed to pay him; only Matthew suggests that Judas betrayed Jesus in order to get 30 pieces of silver (because of greed) – Mt. 26:15-16. John never even mentions the 30 pieces of silver – he only intimates that Judas is alienated from Jesus and this occasions the devil’s entrance into him.

Jesus the falsity of his affection – perhaps a sign of disdain or contempt. Judas not only seems alienated from Jesus, but also disgruntled or angry – seeking some way of putting Jesus in his place or exacting retribution. It is impossible to know why Judas might have felt this way – perhaps he felt overshadowed by Jesus, or controlled by Jesus, or not respected properly by Jesus. Whatever the case, Judas decided to set himself up over-against Jesus – to set his will above Jesus’ – and to hurt him rather than help him.

He may not have known that the chief priests would follow through on their desire to kill Jesus. Perhaps he thought that they would just admonish or punish him – or that Jesus would be able to extricate himself from them. Yet he must have known that his betrayal would hurt Jesus, his ministry, and even the other apostles who were his companions. It is hard to imagine that he could have wished Jesus and the apostles harm for mere money – especially after seeing Jesus’ miraculous power, authoritative preaching, and loving ministry to sinners and the sick. In my view, he wished Jesus and the apostles harm because he was angry or resentful, and the only likely reason for this, in view of Jesus’ love for him (and his divine prophetic powers), is that he had felt hurt himself – perhaps belittled or humbled before Jesus’ authority and power.

If this conclusion is correct, then the cause of Judas’ anger and resentment is not merely feeling hurt by Jesus’ authority and power, it is *Judas’ attitude* toward Jesus’ authority and power. Judas did not look upon Jesus’ miraculous power and authoritative teaching as a sign of His divinity, provoking obedience; he viewed it as competition with his own ego and autonomy, provoking a battle of the wills leading to disobedience. It seems that Judas was put off – even jealous – of Jesus’ miraculous power and authoritative teaching instead of being impressed, edified, and led to belief.

Sometime after he began his discipleship with Jesus, he began to feel unimportant or insignificant in Jesus’ light, and so his jealousy, resistance, anger and resentment grew to a point of no return. He would not be happy until he received the respect he deserved from Jesus -- until he had subjected him to harm by betraying him with a kiss. If these conclusions are correct, then Judas seems to have followed the profile of Saul – following the stages of *pride* to their tragic conclusion – from hurt pride to jealousy to anger to resentment to unjust vengeance and to self-destruction.

A student at Georgetown once asked me how one might gauge the extent to which one is egotistical or proud. I indicated that there are many ways of knowing this, but the most obvious is the degree to which your pride is hurt and your anger provoked when you encounter someone who is thought to be superior to you by others you respect. If the reaction is like Saul’s reaction to the song of the women about him and David – “Saul has killed his thousands, but David his tens of thousands,” then this probably indicates a degree of ego and pride that could well get you into trouble. If we react explosively to someone else’s acknowledged superiority or to subtle slights, we may have enough ego-centrality, and even ego-idolatry, to cause destruction to others, the culture, the community, the kingdom of God, and ultimately to ourselves. This seems to have been the profile not only of Saul and Judas Iscariot but also the political and religious demigods – such as Hitler, Lenin, Stalin, Jim Jones, David Koresh, and other cult leaders – whose lives could have done much good, but instead caused vast destruction, ultimately leading to their own demise.

**VIII.C**  
**The Destructiveness of Pride in Literature**

So much of contemporary literature is concerned with the destructiveness of ego-centrality, ego-idolatry, the will to power, the will to be the highest, and the will to dominate that to simply list these works would be overwhelming. Therefore I will eschew the desire to be comprehensive and briefly consider three classic works devoted to this subject:

1. Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queen* Book I (1590).
2. John Milton's *Paradise Lost* – Book I (1667).
3. William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (1608).

Let us begin with Edmund Spenser's the *Faerie Queen*.

Spenser provides an allegorical interpretation of pride that he equates with Queen Lucifera (named after the fallen angel Lucifer – the devil -- who was banished from Heaven -- see Rev.12:7-12). In the following passage, the Redcross Knight (representing Christian virtue and divine law) after having defeated the pagan dark Knight Sansjoy in the presence of Queen Lucifera is brought to her palace (the Palace of Pride) amidst the applause of the crowds to recover from the wounds of battle. The Palace is beautiful to look at from the outside – ablaze with gold and gems, and on the inside filled with seemingly successful and powerful people. While the Redcross Knight is recovering, a witch named Duessa (representing falsity, deceit, and shame – a relative of the Queen of Darkness) pretends to weep over him – to win his confidence – though she has no sympathy or love within her. As the Redcross Knight is recovering, his dwarf discovers a dungeon in the basement of the Palace of Pride where very famous and powerful people who had once occupied the Palace are now being imprisoned, tormented, and dying. The Knight and his dwarf hastily leave the Palace – before his wounds are healed, surprising Duessa when she returns to the palace from her visit to hell. Spenser describes the scene – giving us a warning about pride's deceit and ultimate aim of destruction – as follows:

The false Duessa leaving noyous Night,  
Return'd to stately Palace of Dame Pride;  
Where when she came, she sound the Fairy Knight  
Departed thence, albe his Woundes wide,  
Not throughly heal'd, unready were to ride.  
Good cause he had to hasten thence away;  
For on a Day his wary Dwarf had spy'd,  
Where in a Dungeon deep huge Numbers lay,  
Of caytive wretched Thralls, that wailed Night and Day.  
A rueful Sight, as could be seen with Eye;  
Of whom he learned had in secret wise  
The hidden Cause of their Captivity,  
How mortgaging their Lives to Covetise,  
Through wasteful Pride, and wanton Riotise,  
They were by Law of that proud Tyranness  
Provok'd with Wrath, and Envy's false Surmise,

Condemned to that Dungeon merciless,  
Where they should live in Woe, and die in Wretchedness.<sup>36</sup>

Earlier in the *Faerie Queene* Spenser tells us that the ultimate objective of pride is dominion over others – to be lord of oneself and others requiring the rejection of the true Lord who rules not by domination and subjugation, but by love. It is this desire to be lord of self and others that causes the high angel Lucifer to be expelled from heaven – and what motivates Lucifera to host her many willing victims in the Palace of Pride. They wish to be dominators, but what they don't realize is that they have put themselves under the power of the queen of dominators in order to reach their objective. Though the Queen allows them to enjoy their revelry, wrath, envy, and vanity for a while, she ultimately comes around to exacting the price of her hospitality – the dungeon underneath the Palace where she can dominate them forever. Spenser names many of the famous individuals who populate the dungeon later in the Canto – the Great King of Babylon (King Nebuchadnezzar who conquered Judah, sent it into exile, and destroyed the temple), Semiramis (the Queen of Syria who was reputed to be exceedingly powerful and lustful – adored as a goddess), and Cleopatra (the famous Queen of Egypt who eloped with Antony of Rome who took her own life by allowing a cobra to bite her). In doing so, Spenser shows how pride fuels the other 7 Deadly Sins – in particular, envy, wrath, lust, vanity, and greed.

Let us now consider John Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost* that considers the inner workings of the sin of pride through the self-diagnosis and self-justification of its chief advocate – Satan – before the other fallen angels (Mammon, Beelzebub, Belial, and Moloch). Though Milton considers pride from many other angles – particularly in the original sin of Eve and Adam – the speeches made by Satan to his fellow fallen angels best exemplified the pure state of pride that could move an angelic being to resent and reject the Creator who fashioned him in love. A few passages from Book I of this epic poem will hopefully entice the reader to probe more deeply into this worst of the deadly sins.

Our first passage presents Satan's attitude toward the Creator and Jesus His Son after he has lost the battle in heaven and finds himself in hell with his allies. Instead of feeling regret, if for nothing else than the miserable situation into which he has been consigned by his rebellious actions, he feels nothing but rage and resentment toward "the victor" and in unyielding refusal to acknowledge his sovereignty over creation, he rallies his fallen allies to an eternal war with the supremely good being he hates without measure:

What though the field be lost?  
All is not lost; the unconquerable Will,  
And study of revenge, immortal hate,  
And courage never to submit or yield:  
And what is else not to be overcome?  
That Glory never shall his wrath or might  
Extort from me. To bow and sue for grace  
With suppliant knee, and deifie his power  
Who from the terrour of this Arm so late

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<sup>36</sup> Edmund Spenser Ibid Book I Canto V.



Doubted his Empire, that were low indeed,  
That were an ignominy and shame beneath  
This downfall; since by Fate the strength of Gods  
And this Empyrean substance cannot fail,  
Since through experience of this great event  
In Arms not worse, in foresight much advanc't,  
We may with more successful hope resolve  
To wage by force or guile eternal Warr  
Irreconcilable, to our grand Foe,  
Who now triumphs, and in th' excess of joy  
Sole reigning holds the Tyranny of Heav'n.<sup>37</sup>

Satan appeals to a complete and icy inversion of the heart's logic by seeing "hope" in his defeat, because now he has gained enough hate to muster the courage and force of an *eternal* war, and experience to predict how his enemy might counter him in the future. He tells his troops to find within themselves their unconquerable will, the desire for revenge, and unmitigated hatred so that they may wrest an eternal advantage from their miserable condition – the "advantage" of proclaiming that they will *never* "bow and sue for grace with suppliant knee, and deifie his power." The implication of this speech makes one shudder – for the eternity of Satan's miserable condition does not come from God, but from *his* desire to eternally refuse the honor of the triune God and to eternally resent and hate him, and to eternally rebel against him. Satan, not God, is responsible for the eternity of his misery, because he prefers to draw his banal satisfaction of eternal resentment and hatred from his unmitigated force of freewill – his unmitigated will to rebellious power.

Our second passage reveals the source of Satan's eternal resentment and hatred of the Creator who fashioned him in love. He declares that he deserves better than honoring God as his creator and the Son of God as his Lord, because as he falsely and inauthentically asserts to his allies he is *self*-begot and *self*-raised. As such, he deserves to be treated as an equal – not as a creature who would show gratitude and love for being brought lovingly into being:

When this creation was? rememberst thou  
Thy making, while the Maker gave thee being?  
We know no time when we were not as now;  
Know none before us, self-begot, self-raised  
By our own quick'ning power, when fatal course  
Had circl'd his full Orbe, the birth mature  
Of this our native Heav'n, Ethereal Sons.  
Our puissance is our own, our own right hand  
Shall teach us highest deeds, by proof to try  
Who is our equal: then thou shalt behold  
Whether by supplication we intend  
Address, and to begirt th' Almighty Throne

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<sup>37</sup> John Milton 2011 *Paradise Lost* in Project Gutenberg, Book I, <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/20/pg20-images.html>.

Beseeching or besieging. This report,  
These tidings carrie to th' anointed King;  
And fly, ere evil intercept thy flight.<sup>38</sup>

Satan here appears to be deceiving even himself, appearing to be convinced by the dazzling logic in his ontological argument for his own divinity. He tells his allies that since they are eternal beings, then it cannot be proved that there was a point at which they were nothing, and therefore that they were created by a higher being than themselves. He uses the remarkable timeless attribute through which they were created to show the difficulty of proving the existence of a *higher* or *highest* creator. The self-deception is remarkable because this argument works only from the perspective of the lower being – an angel – but not from the perspective of the higher being – the Supreme Being – who knows that its essence is in all ways unrestricted, and therefore unique. The supreme irony is that *any* rational being can prove the unrestrictedness and uniqueness of an uncaused reality because it can be proven from the requirement for an uncaused cause which is necessarily (by nature) unrestricted and unique. We have given one such proof -- a contemporary Thomistic metaphysical proof of God in Volume 1 (Chapter Two, Section I). In view of this, Satan must be at least partially aware of the falsity of his claims, but *chooses* to remain in culpably false projected of self through a Nietzschean will – self-proclamation to divine power. The only problem is, only God can make this self-proclamation truthfully – so every other self-proclamation is nothing more than bad faith expressed resolutely and hypocritically to oneself. We can here feel the insipient despair of the ultimate and hypocritical lie to self, incited by pride.

Our final passage concerns the key point in Satan's argument. Though he grudgingly admits that he and his allies are in an unhappy place, they have satisfaction that more than compensates for it – the freedom to be absolute ruler in a domain unoccupied by God. Satan thus rallies his troops to make their eternal choice and to proclaim, "It is better to reign in hell than to serve in heaven."

Here[in hell] at least  
We shall be free; th' Almighty hath not built  
Here for his envy, will not drive us hence:  
Here we may reign secure, and in my choyce  
To reign is worth ambition though in Hell:  
Better to reign in Hell, then serve in Heav'n.  
But wherefore let we then our faithful friends,  
Th' associates and copartners of our loss  
Lye thus astonisht on th' oblivious Pool,  
And call them not to share with us their part  
In this unhappy Mansion, or once more  
With rallied Arms to try what may be yet  
Regaind in Heav'n, or what more lost in Hell?<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

As usual, Satan falsely attributes his own motive – envy – to the creator and His only begotten Son. He tells his band of “disciples” to bear up bravely on the “oblivious pool,” not only because they can reign “supreme” away from their sovereign, but also because of their “hope” of regaining their lost position in heaven. After saying this, he seems to catch a highly unusual glimmer of truth to self – “or what more lost in Hell?”

In my view, Milton has explored profoundly the complete self-deception of *pride* and its capacity to engender a choice for eternal misery through anger, resentment, and hatred for the truth of creaturehood and the sovereignty of even an unconditionally loving creator.

We may turn to our final literary appraisal of pride – Shakespeare’s tragedy *Macbeth*. After a dramatic opening scene in which three witches set their sights on Macbeth and we hear the report of Macbeth’s valiant defeat of the traitor Macdonwald, the play proceeds to a scene in which Macbeth and his friend Banquo are discussing their victory. As they are walking along, three witches hail them and deliver a remarkable prophesy to Macbeth. Though these witches may have been inspired by the three fates, Shakespeare has transformed them in their ugliness and intention into demonic powers whose pleasure and purpose is the demise of humankind.<sup>40</sup> They tell Macbeth that he is about to receive two promotions – first, he is to become Thane of Cawdor in place of Macdonwald (the traitor he defeated), and secondly, that he will then become King of Scotland. Though Banquo and Macbeth are uncertain about the veracity of these predictions, Macbeth begins to feel inflated by the prospect – his mind filled with desire and temptation. Banquo then asks the witches about his future, to which the witches respond, “Lesser than Macbeth, and greater. Not so happy, yet much happier. Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none.”<sup>41</sup> Banquo asks a curious question that seems to refer to the witches who had just vanished, but also refers to the prophesies they have delivered – “Were such things here as we do speak about? Or have we eaten on the insane root that takes the reason prisoner?”<sup>42</sup> Macbeth has clearly eaten of the root of pride which delivers the prospect of Kingship with the authority of the witches’ prophesy. All that is required to transform it into the insanity that takes the reason prisoner is a verification from another Thane who comes on the scene to deliver the message that Macbeth has been made Thane of Cawdor by King Duncan. After hearing it, Macbeth is enchanted – or better, bedeviled – by the power and glory of his impending kingship.

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<sup>40</sup> Several scholars believe that Shakespeare made this demonic adaptation of the witches to cultivate the favor of his patron King James I, who himself had written a book on witchcraft, and to gain the interest of his audience who had an interest in the occult (see Amanda Mabillard “Shakespeare and the Witches” in Shakespeare Online. <http://www.shakespeare-online.com/faq/macbethfaq/macbethdarkness.html>). I do not believe that Shakespeare made this association for these practical reasons alone. He had a view of the supernatural and of a cosmic struggle between good and evil that comes out in preternatural forces – like ghosts – in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. Shakespeare’s public faith was Protestant, but then again, he had no choice to be otherwise since Elizabeth I made Catholicism unlawful. Nevertheless, his parents were very likely covert Catholics who influenced him in his religious upbringing (see Amanda Mabillard, *Shakespeare’s Religion in Shakespeare Online* -- <http://www.shakespeare-online.com/faq/shakespearereligion.html>).

<sup>41</sup> William Shakespeare *Macbeth*, Project Gutenberg, Act I, Scene III. <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/1129/pg1129-images.html>.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

## CCBB - Temptation, Deception, and Deadly Sins

King Duncan comes to greet and congratulate Macbeth on his victory and tells him that he will stay with Macbeth at his castle that night. He states that he has named his son Malcom as his rightful heir.

Macbeth sends a letter about this to his wife, Lady Macbeth, who is far more susceptible to pride and unbridled ambition, and she begins plotting the downfall of both King Duncan and his son so that her husband might become king. As she hatches her plot she prays to “the spirits” to be deprived of conscience, womanly feelings, compassion, mercy, and decency so that she can follow through on her insidious and brutal plan:

The raven himself is hoarse  
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan  
Under my battlements. Come, you spirits  
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here  
And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full  
Of direst cruelty! Make thick my blood,  
Stop up the access and passage to remorse,  
That no compunctious visitings of nature  
Shake my fell purpose nor keep peace between  
The effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,  
And take my milk for gall, your murdering ministers,  
Wherever in your sightless substances  
You wait on nature's mischief! Come, thick night,  
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell  
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes  
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark  
To cry, "Hold, hold!"<sup>43</sup>

She then conceives a plot in which Macbeth is to get Duncan's chamberlains drunk, and then enter the room of Duncan to stab him while he sleeps. In the morning when the chamberlains awake, they can be unjustly blamed for the outrage. When Macbeth hears of the brutality of the plot, he begins to have second thoughts. Lady Macbeth minimizes his objections, pushes him, and insults him until he finally relents and accedes to his role in the intended brutality.

As Macbeth proceeds to Duncan's room to kill him, he has a vision of a bloody dagger that piques his conscience and unnerves him. Nevertheless feeling compelled to finish the task given him by Lady Macbeth, he kills Duncan in his bed. Emerging from the room with bloody hands and still shaken by the vision of the dagger, he cannot go back to the scene to place the daggers near the chamberlains, and so Lady Macbeth finishes her bloody work. She then tells Macbeth to cool down, to resist the promptings of conscience, and to wash his hands:

Why, worthy Thane,  
You do unbend your noble strength, to think  
So brainsickly of things. Go, get some water

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid. Act I, Scene IV.

## CCBB - Temptation, Deception, and Deadly Sins

And wash this filthy witness from your hand.  
Why did you bring these daggers from the place?  
They must lie there. Go carry them, and smear  
The sleepy grooms with blood.  
MACBETH. I'll go no more.  
I am afraid to think what I have done;  
Look on't again I dare not.  
LADY MACBETH. Infirm of purpose!  
Give me the daggers. The sleeping and the dead  
Are but as pictures; 'tis the eye of childhood  
That fears a painted devil. If he do bleed,  
I'll gild the faces of the grooms withal,  
For it must seem their guilt.

Lady Macbeth is so drunk with ambition and the prospect of royal power that she shuts down her conscience – along with every urging of justice and love. Beyond this, she goads her husband into doing the same by insulting his “noble strength,” calling him “infirm of purpose,” and accusing him of being childish – “’tis the eye of childhood that fears a painted devil.”

Though Macbeth is not nearly as power hungry and cruel, he is still guilty of allowing his wife to goad him out of following his conscience, particularly when he has had a haunting supernatural apparition of the bloody dagger. In this sense Lady Macbeth is correct – Macbeth is weak – even to the point of allowing his wife to goad him out of his conscience and religious sensibility. Even as he does so, his conscience and religious sensibility grow progressively weaker so that he feels little compunction about killing the innocent chamberlains who he fears might divulge his terrible actions. After that, he descends to the level of his wife and orders the killings of four other people, including his friend Banquo. Ultimately we become what we do. If we choose murder – even by being goaded into it – we become murderers, and the grizzly habit becomes our second nature.

The plot continues. After Macbeth kills the chamberlains and word gets to Duncan's sons, they flee from Scotland fearing that they too may be killed. In their absence, Macbeth is made king because he is a close relative of the now deceased King Duncan. Macbeth has now become the moral equivalent of his wife and will do just about anything to maintain his power. He begins to feel anxious about his kingship because of the witches' prediction that Banquo's progeny would also be kings. Since Banquo, and more importantly, his son Fleance, will be leaving the vicinity, he hires two assassins – and then a third to kill them. Though the assassins kill Banquo, his son escapes, thereby allowing the witches' prediction to stay in effect.

Later when Macbeth hosts a banquet for the nobility, he is “treated” to yet another supernatural portent – the ghost of Banquo sitting in Macbeth's chair. Macbeth not only feels fear and guilt at the ghost's presence, but also anxiousness about the future of his kingly power. He trembles at the sight of the ghost and angrily tells him to go away. Since Macbeth is the only one who can see him, his guests think he has gone mad, eventually the ghost leaves and Macbeth returns to normal. When the ghost reappears, Macbeth again becomes fearful and angry, and Lady Macbeth has to dismiss the guests.

Is the ghost merely a projection of Macbeth's guilty conscience or a real preternatural portent? For Shakespeare, it is irrelevant, for in both cases Macbeth is confronted by the depravity of his unscrupulous actions. This is Shakespeare's point – no one can escape being judged by one's own actions – not just in the life to come, but in many cases, here and now. The more unjust and depraved the action, the more likely the confrontation will take place in the present – through mind, spirit, or both. Macbeth's pride, lust for power, and abandonment of conscience has literally come back to haunt him, and his spirit descends in to the darkness and madness that he has created by his deeds.

When Macbeth comes to his senses, he goes back to the witches to obtain clarification about their previous predictions. They give him a cautionary prediction to beware of Macduff, and then two reassuring predictions -- that no man born of a woman shall harm him, and that Macbeth will be safe until Great Birnam Wood comes to Dunsinane Hill. Macbeth is relieved, but asks one further question about Banquo's progeny inheriting the throne. The witches show him a vision that indicates they will. Macbeth concludes from this that the only way to secure his throne is to get rid of the threat – Macduff. At this juncture, Macbeth's conscience is completely eroded and his lust for power has led to paranoia, so he orders the wholesale murder of Macduff and his household. Macduff escapes to England, but Macbeth's assassins kill the rest of Macduff's household.

In Act V, the two principal characters reverse roles. Lady Macbeth who was formerly more power hungry, unconscionable, and cruel than Macbeth suddenly feels the weight of judgment upon her. This reversal of character seems to correspond to the principle that the more unconscionable and heinous one's actions, the more likely one is to be confronted and harshly judged by them in this lifetime. So, Lady Macbeth begins to feel darkness, emptiness, and guilt accompanied by nightmares – like Elizabeth I, Hitler, and so many of history's other great tyrants. She begins to walk in her sleep, and see imaginary blood on her hands that she tries vigorously to remove. She carries a candle with her to dispel the darkness around her and rubs her hands for long periods of time trying to rid herself of the blood, exclaiming:

Out, damned spot! Out, I say! One- two -why then  
'tis time to do't. Hell is murky. Fie [ecch!], my lord, fie! A soldier, and  
afear'd? What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our  
power to account? Yet who would have thought the old man [King Duncan whose  
murder she instigated] to have had so much blood in him... Here's the smell of the  
blood still. All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. Oh, oh,  
oh!<sup>44</sup>

Though Lady Macbeth believes that no human being knows what she has done – and apparently does not believe in a divine being who would be able to do so – she finds herself convicted by her own conscience, rising up like an alter ego to judge her for her depravity. Eventually she will succumb to it and apparently commit suicide offstage.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid. Act V, Scene I.

While Lady Macbeth convicts herself through the agency of conscience and justice, Macbeth who has “successfully” overridden *his conscience* will be convicted by divine providence whose intention is to rescue Scotland from the tyrant and restore beneficence and order to its people. This is done through the hands of two survivors – MacDuff, who has heard about the death of his family and rides to confront Macbeth, and Malcolm (Duncan’s son) who escaped to England and has now raised an English army for the same purpose. They are supported by the Scottish nobility who are also appalled by Macbeth’s tyranny – and so he is convicted on every side. As the opposing army approaches Dunsinane Castle, they cut down boughs from the trees of Birnam Wood to disguise themselves – fulfilling yet another one of the witches’ prophecies. Before the opposing army arrives, Macbeth hears of his wife’s apparent suicide, and is struck with emptiness and depression leading to his famous lament about the meaninglessness and stupidity of life:

She should have died hereafter;  
There would have been a time for such a word.  
Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day  
To the last syllable of recorded time;  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!  
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage  
And then is heard no more. It is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing.<sup>45</sup>

Interestingly, Macbeth feels no qualm of conscience. His emptiness and despair seem to arise out of the turn of fortune in his life – his wife’s suicide and the opposing army approaching him. Nevertheless, he bolsters his confidence in his continued Kingship by recalling the witches’ predictions about the movement of Birnam Wood and not being harmed by a man born of a woman. Suddenly a messenger comes, informing Macbeth that the opposing army has disguised themselves with boughs from the trees of Birnam Wood, fulfilling one of the witches’ predictions, and striking fear into his heart. Yet he is still convinced of his invincibility because of the witches’ prediction that he would not be harmed by a man born of a woman.

The English forces begin to defeat Macbeth’s army, but he continues to fight confident that he cannot be harmed. When he is confronted by Macduff, he informs him that he was not born naturally, but “untimely ripped from his mother” (by Caesarean Section). Macbeth sees his impending doom immediately before Macduff kills, beheads him, and displays his head for all to see. The final judgment of divine providence (“That calls upon us, by the grace of Grace”) is proclaimed by the just heir to the throne – King Duncan’s son, Malcolm:

What's more to do,  
Which would be planted newly with the time,  
As calling home our exiled friends abroad

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid. Act V, Scene V.



That fled the snares of watchful tyranny,  
Producing forth the cruel ministers  
Of this dead butcher and his fiend-like queen,  
Who, as 'tis thought, by self and violent hands  
Took off her life; this, and what needful else  
*That calls upon us, by the grace of Grace*  
We will perform in measure, time, and place.  
So thanks to all at once and to each one,  
Whom we invite to see us crown'd at Scone.<sup>46</sup>

Macbeth's frame of mind closely resembles that of other tyrants, such as Adolf Hitler, who might be said to be similarly judged by divine providence. As he received news that the Russian forces were approaching from the East and the Anglo-American forces from the West, he remained confident in his messianic destiny (supported by cocktails of methamphetamines). When the Russians were hours away from his bunker, he committed suicide with his new bride – Eva Braun and had his body burned (though the Russians claimed they had discovered his skull – like Macbeth's head -- in the ashes).

What is to be gleaned from the tragedy of Macbeth? First, as with all other tragedies, it speaks of the blinding, driving, and destructive power of the deadly sin of pride. All the deadly sins have this blinding, driving, and destructive power – evidenced in the spell of lust (that bewitched Anna Karenina), the spell of greed (that charmed Bud in *Wall Street*), the spell of anger (that transfixed *Hamlet*), the spell of vanity (that enchanted Norma Desmond in *Sunset Boulevard*), the spell of envy (that gripped Iago in *Othello*), and hard as it may be to imagine, the spell of sloth (that absorbed Cecil Vyse in *Room With a View*). Yet pride seems to have an even greater power to blind, drive, and destroy, leading not only to the outrageous crimes of literary characters like Macbeth and his wife, but to real historical figures, such as Saul, Judas Iscariot, Hitler, and Stalin. This is why pride is selected from among the other deadly sins to characterize the sin of the devil himself in both the bible (Gen. 3:1-14 and Rev. 12:7-12), and in literature (Queen Lucifera in the *Faerie Queen*, and satan in *Paradis Lost*).

Secondly, the tragedy of Macbeth shows how pride can overcome and erode conscience if free agents allow it to do so. If they *do* allow it to do so, they can expect it to reap a whirlwind of destruction, including their own self-destruction whether this be caused by the judgment of conscience or Providence or by the human community. In the end, giving leeway to the awful seduction of pride will do nothing but cause darkness, emptiness, destruction, and evil. As the witches of Macbeth intimate (and Milton's Satan decrees) pride is the open door to the demonic, and the entryway for Satan into our minds, hearts, and Spirit.

Thirdly, we will need the help of the concerned Providential God -- whom Shakespeare calls "the grace of Grace" and Milton identifies as "the Son of God" – to help us extricate ourselves from pride's grip. Pride is nothing to be trifled with for it looks so innocuous at first, and as it grows, it progressively blinds us to its ever increasing power over us. When we allow pride – with its seductions of status, ambition, power, dominion, and insipient self-idolatry – to have even a little entryway, it begins its hypnotic spell, and we soon forget the goodness and

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid, Act V, Scene IX.

love of our Creator and Redeemer, allowing our relationship with Him to go to sleep like Lady Macbeth's conscience.

When we are so spellbound, how can we be dislodged in our freedom from our course of certain self-destruction? For man, it is virtually impossible; but for God all things are possible (Mt. 19:26). Providential help can present itself through a perfectly natural occurrence of suffering (caused by ourselves, others, or nature) -- or occasionally by a supernaturally induced one (like Paul getting knocked off his horse and blinded). When this occurs we can be sure that God will surround that suffering with His Providence to call us through the voice of a friend or stranger, through the words of scripture or literature, through a "chance" encounter -- to return to faith and love -- particularly, to humble-heartedness, gentle-heartedness, and peace. Though God frequently uses suffering (whether caused by ourselves, others, or nature) to reveal the way out of pride's blinding and destructive power, He need not do so, and often uses other means such as new opportunities, friendships, "chance" encounters with the Church, or other means to make us aware of his sublime, saving, and loving Spirit sent out to inspire, guide, and protect us.

We will know when we encounter God's Spirit because the spell of pride will be temporarily and surprisingly broken -- perhaps shattered -- and when this occurs -- whether it be caused by deprivation, suffering, opportunity, new friends, or a direct encounter with the Church -- we need to act upon it by allowing ourselves to sense the goodness, wisdom, and love of what is being presented to us, and follow it. Frequently, when pride's spell is broken, it will be accompanied by an awareness of the emptiness and darkness of the life we pursued while under pride's spell, and when this happens, we will feel what we think is fear, but it will not be like any other fear (which causes panic, adrenaline, and the heart to race). Rather, it will be like what Rudolf Otto calls "horror" (which causes coldness and a shudder as the heart slows down and the blood drains from our face) -- the horror that comes from listening to a ghost story. But the evil of pride's spell goes beyond any ghost story, and when we feel the horror of that evil, we must reach out spontaneously as Peter did when he was drowning, and plead, "Lord, save me!" (Mt. 14:30). He will surely reach out and save us just as He saved Peter, but when He does, we must try to stay on the road of His teaching, the road of the Beatitudes, particularly through membership in the Church community. If we stay on the road through the church community -- through its teaching, sacraments, community, and spiritual encouragement -- we will begin, as Augustine did, to love the word of the Lord evermore deeply, and as this occurs, to be astonished and revolted by the life of pride we left behind. At this point, we will not want to forget to give thanks to the Lord who rescued us from a fate literally worse than death -- an eternity of self-idolatry separated from love and surrounded by darkness. Augustine expressed this gratitude and love beautifully in Book VIII of the *Confessions*

Lo, you were within,  
but I outside, seeking there for you,  
and upon the shapely things you have made  
I rushed headlong -- I, misshapen.  
You were with me, but I was not with you.  
They held me back far from you,

those things which would have no being,  
were they not in you.  
You called, shouted, broke through my deafness;  
you flared, blazed, banished my blindness;  
you lavished your fragrance, I gasped; and now I pant for you;  
I tasted you, and now I hunger and thirst;  
you touched me, and I burned for your peace.<sup>47</sup>

**IX.**  
**A Personal Conclusion**  
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My life experience, study of philosophy and psychology, and reading of classic literature have converged into a single felt and thought conviction – the Deadly Sins are scary attitudes indeed – and if they become habitual, they are terrifying. What is most scary is the thought that continually rolls through my mind as I reflect upon my life – “There but for the grace of God go I.”<sup>48</sup> All of us are inclined to certain deadly sins rather than others – and so I will speak only for myself. What has really scared me about the above eight capital sins in both reflection and experience is how Judas, after witnessing the Lord’s divine power and love again and again, allowed his pride to supersede obedience and love – “there but for the grace of God go I;” and how easily bud was seduced into a life of greed by Gordon Gecko that almost resulted in complete disaster for his family and friends – “there but for the grace of God go I;” and how easily Anna Karenina was swept into the persistent belief that her illicit relationship with Count Vronsky was beautiful and good as it shattered her family, son, and friends – “there but for the grace of God go I;” and how persistently Prince Hamlet believed that his anger and vengeance were justified when it led to the destruction of so many innocent people – “there but for the grace of God go I.” These reflections have led me to three conclusions that I will explore more deeply in the next volume:

1. We must be vigilant about examining our lives in light of the above eight deadly sins – otherwise we might fall under their spell, and as Augustine noted, “A ‘forward will’ will become a lust [sinful desire], a lust [sinful desire] served will become a habit, and a habit not resisted will become necessity.”<sup>49</sup> Without repentance and the grace of God, we could easily sink into the tragic lives of Judas Iscariot, Anna Karenina, or Prince Hamlet -- hard to imagine as this might seem.
2. We will need the grace of God to recognize and quell the eight deadly sins at their inception, and if we allow them to do so, as they grow; for as St. Paul tells us – “For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of

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<sup>47</sup> Augustine *Confessions*

<sup>48</sup> Attributed to John Bradford, but recognized by St. Paul 1Corinthians 15:8-10.

<sup>49</sup> “For of a forward will, was a lust made; and a lust served, became custom [habit]; and custom [habit] not resisted, became necessity.” Augustine 1914 *Confessions*, trans. by Edward Bouverie Pusey, *Sacred Texts*, Book VIII  
<http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/augconf/aug08.htm>

wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand (Eph. 6: 12-13). St. Augustine knew that even though his own iron will had initiated his lusts, Satan [the enemy] created the chain that had kept him bound.<sup>50</sup>

3. Though the four cardinal virtues are essential for building and maintaining the prudence and discipline to resist the deadly sins, the theological virtue of love (*agapē* – caritas -- charity) is essential for recognizing and initially resisting them when the fire is beginning to grow. After decades of experience, I have found that only one tactic really works to quell a temptation or a growing, sinful desire. It is not fear of the consequences – though this might work for a short time – but rather love as Jesus defined it. This love begins not with an act of will or discipline, but from gratitude to and love for Christ Jesus Our Savior; for this gratitude and love incites and opens us to the softness of heart – the humility, gentleness, and peacefulness of the Beatitudes -- which is the only remedy, in my view, for a heart burning with egocentricity or lust.

I have found that softness of heart – humility, gentleness, and peace – not only tempers my desire *naturally*, but also opens my heart to the mind and heart of Jesus who is trying to breathe the Spirit of the beatitudes – His own Holy Spirit – into me – even as I am contending with temptation and my own inflamed desire. Up to the time of my thirties, I believed that we had to *fight* temptation to quell it – and that “fighting” meant mustering a tremendous act of will from within my will – almost like a stoic or Nietzschean will to power. However, over my later years, I discovered that this strategy, which depended mostly on myself, was a miserable failure, and so I thought it better to use fear of negative consequences to quell the desire. Though this strategy was more successful than the first, it seemed to last only a short time, and then my heart, captivated by sinful desire, would throw caution to the wind, and I would proceed boldly. I needed the Lord to intervene and help me when that occurred, and I found that the best help was His gentle and calming presence He was trying to engender within me. How best to remember and incite it? One passage from scripture – amidst many possibilities – does this best for me – particularly when I can hear Jesus saying it directly to me:

Blessed are the poor in spirit [the humble-hearted], for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are those who mourn [are sorrowing], for they shall be comforted.

"Blessed are the meek [the gentle-hearted], for they shall inherit the earth.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness [to be readied for salvation], for they shall be satisfied.

"Blessed are the merciful [the forgiving and compassionate], for they shall obtain mercy.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

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<sup>50</sup> “My will the enemy held, and thence had made a chain for me, and bound me.” Ibid – Book VIII.

## CCBB - Temptation, Deception, and Deadly Sins

"Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.

One final note – some of the greatest sinners became some of the greatest saints – yet what led them ever more “strongly” away from sin was not their strength of will – but instead their confidence in the Lord. They never lost hope no matter how dejected they felt by their repeated failures. They never lost confidence in the unconditionally loving and healing will of the Lord. St. Paul expresses this well in the Letter to the Romans:

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate... I can will what is right, but I cannot do it.

For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.

Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self,

but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members.

Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Rom. 7: 15-25).