

The Art of Soul Care

Converging Art and Spirituality as a Pastoral Theology of Discernment for Acedia

A Phenomenological Case Study

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is with the deepest appreciation I extend my gratitude for the many who have walked with me along the course of this journey. I begin with extending such wishes to Dr. Lorraine Ste-Marie, my thesis advisor, for her good counsel, and empathetic approach for the many challenges I faced. Along with this, there are the celebrations of many personal and professional discoveries as well. And the laughter! I am exceptionally grateful for Dr. Ste-Marie's advocacy on my behalf on several occasions, along with the extension of her gentle yet assertive wisdom.

I would like to thank the additional members of my committee, Dr. Fabrice Blée, and Dr. Christian Bellehumeur, for their insights and expertise regarding the subject matter, and for their thoroughness and attention to detail. I extend a particular gesture of indebtedness toward Dr. Myrtle Power for her intuitive wisdom and our common appreciation for the works of John O'Donohue, and the ancient voices of Celtic wisdom. I give thanks to Dr. Pierrette Daviau for her comprehension of qualitative methodology and for leading me into the foray of research at the onset of my journey, and for highlighting the importance of staying centered. To the other professors of the faculty that taught the varied courses as part of this endeavour, your knowledge and style of education has helped shape me for the better.

A humble expression of gratitude goes toward the Governing Members of Saint Paul University for the many bursaries, awards, and scholarships I have been granted, and for the provisions that were made. To the staff of Saint-Paul University, I say *merci* for the due diligence, support, and clear guidance. To Elba-Villegas-Douglas, disability

accommodations officer at Ottawa University, I offer my sincere thanks for her support, encouragement and sympathetic nature.

I would also like to thank my mentor Jane Blais, whose guidance, listening, and constant concern was of exceptional merit. Additionally, I offer a sincere and heartfelt thank you to my good friend and roommate Céline Léger, for her generosity, kindness and nurturing ways – particularly in the kitchen. I hold a deep amount of respect and gratitude for the six participants who took part in the *Art of Soul Care* Retreat. May your own spiritual journey continue to be contemplative and transformative.

I extend a profound amount of gratitude to David Law, my landlord who recently passed away. His integrity, humility and generous nature have been formidable, as was his expression of love for the land. I have learned much. If not for him, *The Art of Soul Care* would not be situated in this beautiful environment. To the many friends that have ‘been there’ along the way, many of whom I call ‘family,’ I say ‘thank you.’ And to the dearest of Church companions that invested time, energy and financial gifts in support of my success, I say ‘thank you.’

Beyond this, there are the many angels, and the presence and voices of family and ancestry that I need to acknowledge. There are the ancient ways, the peace of the land of where I reside, and the tenacious Spirit of creative wildness. And for the Grace of God that has shaped my faith and destination in incredible and miraculous ways.

I humbly acknowledge the immeasurable vastness of Beauty, the preciousness of Time, along with the discipline of the contemplative life – all of these, exemplars of Wisdom. And may I bow to the power of the Imagination, as I acknowledge the ongoing

responsibility to serve the world, for the greater good of all. May love, perseverance, patience and humility prevail. Thank you.

ABSTRACT

Under the umbrella of theology and the arts, this art-based research focused on the possibilities of how the elements of converging art and spirituality may guide us toward pathways of spiritual renewal and transformation. Though the practice is designed to question many of the challenges we presently face in our contemporary Western world society, this phenomenological case study took on a particular task of discernment for the potentially soul-killing spiritual illness presently known as *acedia*.

Acedia is rooted in the historical elements of Christian monasticism. Though systemized as ‘despondency’ by a 4th century, Christian monk known as Evagrius of Ponticus, the spiritual illness of the soul has been described as many other things. ‘The noon-day demon,’ 8th deadly sin, precursor to sloth, and despair are some of its familiar descriptions. Acedia has a long list of symptoms: laziness, apathy, and depression to name a few; restlessness and anxiety mentioned frequently. The 17th century Greek etymology of the word means ‘absence of care.’

Given the present day disregard toward ecological and environmental concerns, the ongoing historical exodus of refugees and migrants around the world, the cascading cries of war, capitalist impunities, rogue political disdain, and the lack of concern for the inherent worth of so many on our planet, to regard acedia as a global social stigma is sadly a viable consideration of our times. Acedia’s ultimate danger of suicide may conversely find its way into the very fabric of humanity’s existence, as we notably wrestle with a culture that is leaning more and more toward anxiety, restlessness and less and less away from a principled morality of care.

Although acedia’s trajectory of possible causes and dangers is evident even in the

most rudimentary introductions on the topic, the literature lacks detailed accounts of contemporary pastoral education. Investigating acedia as a causality of identity crisis, I questioned if the convergence of art and spirituality – as a practical theology and the arts – could not only serve as a pastoral practice of discernment for acedia, but also offer the possibility of transformation; asking the existential question: Who am I? Addressing this question with five sub-text questions: What do I believe? What do I value? What is my purpose? What are my challenges? Who am I called to become?

A phenomenological case study – seeking to determine what is meaningful – was the most appropriate methodological approach for this project highlighting the experience of six participants who took part in a four day (once-a-week) – five-module retreat. The participants, with varied religious beliefs, ranging in age from 34 – 69, demonstrating an initial interest after public announcement of the project, were selected via a preliminary interview process. The method was designed with material presentation, discussion, meditation, and art time. And the sharing and witnessing of such, culminating with the writing of a renewed spiritual covenant – a mission statement outlining what each participant believes, values, and ‘who we are called to become’ as it aligns with one’s purpose. The results of the research suggest a practical theology of the arts merits consideration as a feasible practice of discernment for acedia. The participants collectively shared of the positive experience of the project, and overall described some shape of transformative experience.

Thematically, connection is investigated as a prime and imperative facet of ‘meaning.’ As we have serious deliberation of the widening field of method and methodology, the parameters of theology and the arts might help define future qualitative

research. Furthermore, a practical theology and the arts may provide considerable weight to the field of practical theology as a sustainable extension of how Divinity inspires through imagery, as the first language of the soul. The convergence of art and spirituality – as an art-based research – may provide us with connections otherwise left unconsidered, as it may offer responses that are far more intricate, intimate and vulnerable, as its nature tends to reveal agendas in a transparent manner. The world of abstract and symbolism speak to places of significance that otherwise may go undetected.

Structured as qualitative research, the study offers considerations for the practices of pastoral care, and offers ideas for curriculum development. There is also supporting qualitative evidence to support the study of ethics. Included in the final recommendations are to correlate theology, and theology and the arts with both the fields of philosophy and psychology as a means of investigating acedia as a psychological complex, and its potential association with trauma, to contribute to the advancement of these fields, as well as to consider its potential in the field of ethics, and care. Additionally, to consider that acedia with an underlying facet of fear, if not directly defined as, is nonetheless associated with the fear of suffering. Pastoral, theological and practical considerations are also listed.

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Introduction

“You will not fear the terror of the night
Nor the arrow that flies by day,
Nor the plague that prowls in the darkness
Nor the scourge that lays waste at noon.

(Psalm 91:5-6)

She or he – they – most likely stood filled with fright, frozen with terror praying for a word, a sign...something to rid herself of her anguish, he, to divest his despair. Perhaps it was a time of war, or famine or both; perhaps they were destitute, lonely and poor. Perhaps they had lost everything, or were traumatized by the evil of the days. Whatever brought the weary ones to this prayer, most likely they were finding themselves filled with desperation, fear, anxiety and anguish. This psalm is ‘known as the psalm of protection.’ What prey are these somnolent pilgrims in need of protection against I wonder? My personal experience and studies have led me to claim the answer to this question might be *acedia*.

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This thesis explores and addresses in a very particular context the spiritual illness of the soul known as *acedia* that has seemingly gripped our Western society. This research explores the historical and contemporary elements of *acedia*, while also providing a reasonable base of how practical theology, and more substantially a practical theology and the arts may serve as a practice of discernment for *acedia*. I am deeply concerned that *acedia* is demonizing our thinking toward ecological and environmental habitats, our economical and capitalist systems, and most dangerously, our political

arenas. We are at risk of global suicide if acedia continues to find its way into the weakened crevices of our soul. Acedia puts us at risk of denying our authentic selves: our purpose to serve the world.

Acedia has a long history of being named as a demon, and a ‘scourge.’ It is often described as an elusive cluster of emotions and reactive behaviours or ‘bad thought.’¹ Acedia is inline with all sorts of negative and woeful consequences and is characterized by many a dark and tragic circumstance. Regardless of having been ‘scourging’ the minds and hearts of many living their lives in antiquity, the nature of acedia is not a well-known phenomenon in today’s day and age. I counter that despite our ignorance, acedia is a resurrecting villain and offer the assumption that it may be part of the cause of much destruction in today’s society, including the ever-eroding church decline that we are witnessing. Acedia is pervasive both within and without church walls, traversing across and beyond denominational lines. Says well-known author Kathleen Norris on the subject of harm to society: “And unless that wrong is named and addressed, its harmful effects will be passed on to future generations of innocent children.”² Acedia is a powerful force to be reckoned with, especially when society is not aware of or is in denial of its existence.

Historically, acedia was recognized as the ‘eighth deadly sin.’ It was then demoted and has become known as sloth, the ‘seventh deadly sin.’ If examined closely one may discover some very subtle differences, with acedia being the forerunner to sloth. For the sake of argument, these words are often interchangeable, as many have come to recognize the word sloth over acedia. But notes Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung as she

¹Gabriel Bunge, *Despondency – The spiritual Teaching of Evagrius Ponticus on Acedia* (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011), 37.

²Kathleen Norris, *Acedia & me – A Marriage, Monks, and a Writer’s Life* (NY: Riverhead Books, 2008), 34.

references Aquinas' concept of acedia: "Because I will be concentrating on Aquinas's conception of the vice, from here on I will refer to the vice by its Latin name, *acedia*, rather than the modern English term, 'sloth.'" ³ DeYoung's reflection bridges a gap given today's societal view of secularism: "As such, his account provides an interpretive link between ancient Christian and modern conceptions of this vice." ⁴ Given one of the main goals of practical theology, this is an important point to note, for it is out of a return to ancient religious norms that we may discover part of the healing modalities necessary to defeat acedia.

How do we discern if this idolatry is affecting the integrity of our soul, personally and collectively, amidst the fear of suffering? What will move us from such acedia to becoming the empathetic protagonists of our time? The relevancy of the topic may be considered in the heartbreak of acedia itself, as its most drastic consequence is suicide: suicide of the soul's relationship with God, our relationship with humanity. Are we at risk of dying as spiritual and religious beings? This may have grave consequences for the world.

Pope Francis' *Evangelii Gaudium* warns us about acedia. ⁵ He expresses what seems like a heightened sense of urgency to determine if acedia's wounds plague pastoral leaders, presenting more than reasonable objectives to educate them appropriately about the nature of acedia. In questioning if I myself was distraught with acedia, I had no professional to turn to – pastoral or otherwise – to help me discern whether or not I was suffering with the *malaise*. I knew of no one offering information about the trajectory of

³DeYoung, Rebecca Konyndyk, "Resistance to the Demands of Love: Aquinas on the Vice of Acedia." *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review*, vol. 68 no.2 (2004): pp. 173-204. *Project Muse*, <https://muse.jhu.edu/> (accessed August 19th, 2014).

⁴Ibid.

⁵Pope Francis, APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION EVANGELII GAUDIUM OF THE HOLY FATHER FRANCIS TO THE BISHOPS, CLERGY, CONSECRATED PERSONS AND THE LAY FAITHFUL ON THE PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL IN TODAY'S WORLD, (2013) item number 81, http://archeparchy.ca/wcm-docs/docs/EG_English.pdf (accessed February 24, 2016).

acedia, its history, dangers and consequences. Nor was there any understanding of what may heal acedia. Aside from reading much of the literature that dealt with the historical points of view of acedia, there was no formal practice that I could engage in to help me determine if acedia had a hold on my soul.

Motivated by this experience, I began the quest to determine whether or not my role as an artist and a practitioner could determine a means in which to explore acedia, as well as to establish a procedure that would enable others to discern acedia for themselves. To name and identify acedia, and how it may be affecting one's life was a prominent goal. Additionally, to consider if such a practice in turn could lead to unconventional and distinct pathways of discovery, offering the possibility of transformation and renewal of spirit. This inspired curiosity led me to consider what I thought to be the most efficient path of discovery: by converging my greatest loves – the arts and theology – I determined that a practical theology would be the most informative and educational way in which to proceed.

As a society theoretically unaware of acedia, I question whether acedia is linked to, or perhaps even the causality of identity crisis. If we do not know who we are, we do not know how to care – care being the antithesis of acedia. By converging art and spirituality can such a convergence help us determine acedia in our own lives? Can such a practice help us name acedia, giving acedia a contour of definition as it relates to our own lives? And provide us with the means in which to find our way toward spiritual renewal and transformation? Let us now proceed to Chapter One, where we will begin to explore these questions. In the opening chapter, the problem, question and relevancy are

addressed, as are the details of the context of ministry involved with the dissertation.

Also included is the structure of the thesis.

Chapter One: The problem

As noted in the introduction, as a result of an opportune situation, I began to consider the phenomena of acedia. Upon discovering a term I had yet encountered, I felt the need to understand more of this disease of the soul: for many reasons. Along with questioning whether I personally was experiencing acedia due to some lingering psychological affect that I at times suffered with, I was also becoming converted to the idea that as a practitioner, what I was hearing some of my clients describe might indeed be acedia. The problem was that although much of the literature referenced the historical make-up of acedia, there was very little information addressing contemporary pastoral practices on how to determine the illness, let alone a means or a method in which to help us establish acedia in our daily life, and how to cope with it.

The quest began to unfold. Not to necessarily determine if acedia is a problem, for in coming to understand the pervasiveness of the illness, it is evident that it is problematic. However, if we don't understand or have no awareness of the nature of a problem then we are faced with an even larger challenge. To determine whether we were suffering or not with 'the problem' became relevant.

With over 650,000 item entries listed in search engines alone – let alone library facilities - less than five percent of those entries have practical theological mentions⁶ – and with those that do, again what we find most often are references to the historical value of the monastic way, and their suggested remedy for healing. How are we to

⁶When “acedia and practical theology” are put in quotes, exact accounts are to be searched. Approximately 22,000+ show up. Many of them academic references to historical references, with no direct practical theology implications surfacing on at least the first, most popular pages.

discern acedia in our present-day lives if we have no pastoral education around the subject? Given the lack of pastoral care regarding acedia, I thought it more crucial to find the means on how to address the lack of knowledge and practice so that we could potentially be able to define and name acedia for ourselves. In other words a process of discernment might help a person judge for themselves whether or not they not only understand the trajectory of acedia, but, to also help them question whether or not it is prevalent in their lives – thus a problem – and if so, what to do about it. I turned my attention to a practice that I had already designed, and wondered if, with a change of focus, it could become an adaptable practice of discernment for acedia; as I felt that the lack of contemporary pastoral education and practice could be the issue for many.

Development of the practice

After decades of self-examination and experience with healing processes with a variety of therapists,⁷ and including my education, the journey culminated into the development of both a workshop model and a private practice model, as I took on the title of a *Spiritual Arts Practitioner*. As an artist and a ‘practical theologian’ in the making, I intuitively felt the need to adopt both theological and artistic merits when dealing with the attributes of existential questioning, as deemed by the convergence of both my personal and professional life. As a multi-media artist, a practitioner, and as a person who as a result of a traumatic past, dealt with my own healing with these very tools: theology and the arts. The elemental focus of such a practice was to determine how the

⁷Participating in a mixture of therapeutic approaches, including Jungian analysis, and the Rogerian method of therapy, combined with spiritual direction, and time spent with Indigenous elders and healers, and adding to the mix a variety of other healing modalities.

convergence of art and spirituality could serve as a tool of discernment as part of the quest for self, and identity.

This practice has been developed and refined over the years, not only for my own gain, but also as a way to address the needs from clients wishing to not only know how to cope with their life's challenges, but also seeking to renew their faith and/or spiritual practices, practices that had evidently lapsed. As many of these clients were in quest of their purpose with some claiming to 'feeling lost,' several of them arrived with the ultimate question: Who am I? Who am I meant to be? They identified a discomfort with themselves, an anger, sometimes a deep rage, and their symptomatic depression – that at times noted, when seeing a psychologist for instance, was not sufficiently addressed.

As a result, I felt called to turn my vocational attention toward the development of this method of pastoral care to address this powerful existential question: Who am I? The understanding of this question is rooted in a five-subtext exploration of agency: belief, value, purpose, challenges, and becoming. The practice developed over time as a result of trial and error. There were trial workshop runs, conversations with people, and questioning clients – predominantly women – who were seeking to answer the vital questions in life, but were also noticeably suffering with despondency, hopelessness, and anxiety.

The practice spoke to similar methods used in art therapy. Notes Cathy A. Malchiodi, research psychologist, in *The Art Therapy Sourcebook*:

Art therapy is a modality that uses the nonverbal language of art for personal growth, insight and transformation and is a means of connecting what is inside us – our thoughts, feelings, and perceptions – with outer realities and life experiences. It is based on the belief that images can help us understand who we are and enhance life through self-expression.⁸

⁸Cathy A. Malchiodi, *Art Therapist Source Book* (U.S.A.: McGraw-Hills Books, 2007), 47.

However the prayer and contemplative time were more in tune with spiritual direction, as was the focus on ‘the call;’ that of one’s vocation, or purpose and identity. The intention of the model was not to label or diagnose a client, but rather to help the client evaluate the role that apathy or depression⁹ played in their lives, where they had felt that traditional models such as psychology had failed them. An important focus for me as a practitioner, was to try and understand the maelstrom of personal experiences that were found to be exceptionally detrimental to the clients – in their relationships, and ultimately, a threat to life itself, and to center some of their suffering around a renewal of spiritual practice. Basic elements that have stood out consistently as part of the make-up of the practice were conversation, time for meditation and reflection, expressions of art, and the space given to enter into dialogue with the imagery that appeared.

These same identifiers can be found in the actual contextual design of this project, and will be described in detail in Chapter Four. As the concept took on new depth and breadth, to present it as ‘a retreat’ made the most sense. It allowed the format to breathe, and provided the space where the questions, presented as modules could unfold with patience and care, allowing enough time to reflect upon the meaning of what was being thought, said, shared, and witnessed. The design permits enough time to contemplate the significance of the images that appear during times of meditation and expression of art.

⁹This is not to say that I believe that apathy and depression are also acedia, though they are symptomatic of acedia. However, at the time of preliminary investigation, listening to the initial descriptions the clients were providing, yet not knowing about acedia, apathy and depression was what initially came to mind. Once I came to understand acedia, I then wondered if their complaints were rooted in acedia.

Converging art and spirituality

Converging art and spirituality proved to be for many a method empathetic to the needs that were surfacing. The method helped define the parameters of an identity that was being called toward integration and conversion. While also providing a consistent voice of compassion and bringing to light the power of humility, vulnerability and acceptance of one's personal limitations. Ultimately, the format offered a distinct opportunity for a conversation of intimacy with God. For myself, defined as a sacred moment. For the humanist, the secularist or the liberal agnostic, the distinction may be acceptably announced as the Self, the Voice of Being.

Convergence – a process of synthesis that carries, emanates, and reflects substance of itself and 'the other.' In this case, art and spirituality, and spiritual movement is eliciting the voice of artistic energy. It becomes the directed authentic 'voice of imagery' of the soul. Imagery, suggesting that it is the inspired appeal of both art and spirituality. Jean-Luc Nancy author of *The Ground of the Image* insists: "The image is always sacred."¹⁰ As a result, he notes: "the sacred never ceases to be confused with that of 'the religious.... that the religious is not ordered by the sacred.'"¹¹ He qualifies 'the sacred' as something that "signifies the separate, what is set aside, removed, cut off."¹² He refers to the sacred as 'something set apart.' "To avoid this confusion, I will call it *the distinct*."¹³ I suggest that such 'distinction' has the power to educe transformation.

¹⁰Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image* (U.S.A.: Fordham University Press, 2005),1.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.

First there was spiritual grief

In correlation with my studies, my questions, and my professional and personal experience, I began to wonder if what I had initially named as ‘spiritual grief’ was the cause for the malaise. And so I initially began to question if the convergence of art and spirituality had the power to heal spiritual grief. Although inspired by the term as it rested at the intuitive level, spiritual grief became remarkably difficult to define. I have yet to find any supportive academic material to defend this claim with any reasonable definition.

This difficult-to-define sorrow was part of the premise of my final integral paper for my Master of Pastoral Studies titled: *Created in the Image of God – How the Convergence of Art and Spirituality has the Power to Heal our Spiritual Grief*.¹⁴ I had continued to sit with the question ‘what is spiritual grief?’ and was eventually inspired with a reflection that began to highlight the darkness of what I was trying to define. The turning point came as I began to question the soul’s loss of ability to ‘recognize itself’ with all of its “desires, sensuality, its passions, mindfulness, its authenticity: its beauty.”¹⁵ Perceiving that at the core of the soul lay a suffering caused by the “lack of the necessary trust to connect with its Divine Self.”¹⁶ Highlighted were possible causes: ‘a betrayal of nurture, or trauma,’ and an inability to connect or “engage authentically with a true call to intimacy.”¹⁷ The reflection continues to name symptoms such as ‘desperation and shame, and unhealed wounds’ and stirringly ‘the inability to call into question the voice of love,’ as part of the description. Spiritual grief was mistakenly forsaking contemplative silence

¹⁴Vivianne LaRiviere, *Created in the Image of God – How the Convergence of Art and Spirituality has the Power to Heal our Spiritual Grief*. Integrative paper completed for Master of Pastoral Studies, Emmanuel College/University of Toronto, 2011. Rev. Joan Wyatt, supervisor.

¹⁵Vivianne LaRiviere, *What is Spiritual Grief?* © 2011. A journal entry inspired after the completion of my integrative paper for a Master of Pastoral Studies degree/Emmanuel College, University of Toronto, 2011.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid.

for the “external, visceral clang of its modern world, assuming this to be reality.”¹⁸ Lurking dangers surfaced, while naming it a disease of ‘isolation, and corruption, and even mental illness.’ Leaving one “dismayed, desperate, full of despair, and corrupt of any soul nurture...left to wander, lost and vagrant.”¹⁹ This description still leaves me at times arrested with a sorrowfulness that is palpable, and deeply visceral. Especially as I gaze at it in hindsight with the fundamental knowledge I now have of acedia. Indeed, it is a terror.

Additional study, and an unanticipated discovery gave me cause to reshape my thinking, and to further extend both the landscape and horizon of my call. I was introduced to the work of author Kathleen Norris and her book *Acedia & me – A Marriage, Monks, and a Writer’s Life*,²⁰ during the *Ancient Christian Practices* course at Emmanuel College, Toronto in the winter of 2012.²¹ I was astonished to find what appeared to be a remarkable resemblance between acedia and what I had been naming spiritual grief. I turned my sights toward acedia working on a hunch that perhaps they were one and the same.

The question

I began to question if spiritual grief might be an affect of the more grandiose complex named acedia. Without an understanding of the basis of this sickness, acedia becomes not only difficult to identify, but also exceptionally challenging to recognize within oneself. As such, elaborating on my previous testimony, and spring boarding from

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Kathleen Norris, *Acedia & me – A Marriage, Monks, and a Writer’s Life*, (Riverhead Books, NY, 2008).

²¹Professor Phyllis Airhart, final course for the Master of Theological Studies, Emmanuel College, Toronto, On., January 2012.

the work of my master of pastoral studies, the question became newly formalized, and two-fold: *Can a practice of pastoral theology and the arts help others discern acedia in their lives? In so doing, could this provide an impetus toward responsible change and transformation?*

I bring this assumption to this research: if acedia continues to be unnamed it remains an inauspicious shadow hindering the future development of spirituality and religion, tearing wide holes in our cultural and social fabric that may soon become irreparable. Although the discovery and naming of acedia is rooted in ancient monasticism, Pope Francis thought it relevant enough to make mention of it in the *Evangelii Gaudium*, which translates as *The Joy of the Gospel*, released in 2013.²² Pope Francis expressed the concern that when pastoral leaders and lay people alike are asked to “undertake some apostolic work,” that “they seek to avoid any responsibility that may take away from their free time.”²³ He notes: “Some resist giving themselves over completely to mission and thus end up in a state of paralysis and acedia.”²⁴ His reflection is indicative of the necessity to also educate pastoral workers, as the problem of acedia lies within the Church as well.

Through the volumes of literature that I have reviewed, I have failed to find any substantial direction of merit that concerned itself with a contemporary pastoral education about acedia. I have had conversations with priests, ministers, teachers, doctors, bishops, deacons, congregants, secularists, humanists and believers alike, and have found no one who had heard of acedia, let alone know how the disease might affect them personally, others they may know, or affect the world at large. Beyond that – no one had heard of any

²²Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*. # 81.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid.

practices that may enhance their knowledge of acedia. Not to say that such people don't exist, but rather I had difficulty in finding anyone who had heard of, or knew anything about acedia. If we are not aware of this contagion, how are we to realize that acedia affects the frameworks of our society: our environmental, ecological, economic and political arenas? How are we to discern acedia given the present lack of pastoral education and practices to help us with such? These are elements of investigation within the context of this research.

Relevancy

As I continued reviewing the literature, I began to sense the dramatic causation of crisis that acedia has the potential of imposing upon one's identity. Pope Francis had addressed a 'depersonalization'²⁵ amongst lay pastoral workers; researchers such as Bunge used the same term.²⁶ Others spoke of 'disconnectedness,' and loss of identity. Though we will be revisiting these terms and quotes in subsequent chapters, suffice to say that the seed was planted, and a predominant theme was emerging. I began to question: could acedia be cited as a causality of identity crisis? Both cause and effect, and if so, how could a pastoral theology of the arts help us determine if there was a crisis we needed to face in our own lives?

Why a practical theology and the arts? The full implementation of these ideas will be discussed at length in successive chapters. However, to note - my personal experience is that of a multi-media artist. My palette has many colours: piano, song writing, photography, painting, poetry, and a reflective style of writing. My academic trek is

²⁵Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 25.

²⁶Bunge, 28,29.

about God: spiritual direction, pastoral care, accompanied with a keen theological curiosity. My own healing path has been about convergence. It would follow that my call would be related to convergence as well.

Bunge provides a hint to what is at stake while providing support for my claim about the convergence of art and spirituality:

One may perhaps surmise that depersonalization is the last result (certainly not intended, and doubtless also not inevitable) of this scientific ‘Gnosis,’ which, in a particular moment of mankind’s history, has become separated from the arts and from theology. With this separation (intended at first to be merely practical or tactical) was lost all reference to an absolute Other, the One who enables one’s own self.²⁷

I reiterate this as a focal argument: ‘separated from the arts and from theology gives cause for a lost reference to God, the ‘One who enables us to be.’ This determines a link pointing toward identity crisis. Bunge’s statement also offers encouragement as we consider converging theology and the arts once again, as a prescription for the spiritual renewal of our primal metaphorical reference(s) to God.

Another area of concern: acedia and restlessness go hand in hand. How does this affect not only our personal lives, but also our place within the fabric of our families, communities, and society at large? I suggest this timely wisdom that John O’Donohue offers: “True belonging is gracious receptivity,”²⁸ giving rise to our desperate need to belong. He continues: “No one can survive by remaining totally restless. You need to settle and belong in order to achieve any peace of heart and creativity of imagination.”²⁹ He adds: “Belonging is a call to integrity and creativity.”³⁰ And finally: “Without a sense

²⁷Ibid., 30.

²⁸John O’Donohue, *Eternal Echoes: Celtic Reflections on Our Yearning to Belong*. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc. 1999), 3.

²⁹Ibid., 6.

³⁰Ibid., 22.

of belonging, we are either paralyzed or utterly restless.”³¹ Though O’Donohue does not use the word *acedia*, his wisdom resonates with that of Pope Francis as they both speak of some kind of paralysis.

In counterpoint, O’Donohue’s thoughts demonstrate the affiliation between peace of mind, in response to creativity, and the urgency of what it means to belong. Bunge offers Evagrius’ caution: “The vice of *acedia* wages war above all on those who remain in seclusion.”³² Bunge shares that Evagrius did not believe the disease to be exclusive to the monastics: “These observations...lead us to a first important result: in the opinion of Evagrius, *acedia* is by no means an exclusive disease of the anchorites! It overcomes those who live in community in exactly the same way.”³³ This is a relevant idea as we are witness to the demoralization of religious and spiritual life and with this, reflecting on O’Donohue – a loss of belonging.

The ultimate danger with *acedia* lies not in the asking of ‘who am I?’ but rather the denying ourselves the question altogether: denying ourselves the quest to be spiritually transformed, regardless of what we choose to name Divine Mystery. We are at risk of losing our lives. Margaret Funk is clear about this danger, as she suggests: “When one gives into *acedia* there is a rejection of a spiritual connection with God.”³⁴ She claims: “That it is different from ignorance, where one is listless and goes through life in a mindless way; a serious seeker has taken all the training, has achieved a certain amount of discipline through practice, and then he or she rejects a life with God.”³⁵ In other words, *acedia* is a wilful choice; by another name sin, by yet a greater name – evil.

³¹Ibid., 10.

³²Bunge, 22.

³³Ibid., 23.

³⁴Margaret Funk, *Thoughts Matter – The Practice of the Spiritual Life*, (NY: Continuum, 1998), 94.

³⁵Ibid.

When we are not in relationship with a Divine Source of Power and Love, we are at risk of becoming apathetic to the world. Quite simply: we lack empathy – an understanding of the other as the other may understand themselves,³⁶ and a fulfillment of our mission to care for their needs. The problem lies in the lack of knowledge, and education about acedia, and the absence of a method of pastoral care in which to highlight a curative path towards transformation and spiritual renewal.

Possible outcomes

Given the implications and dangers of acedia, addressing the lack of pastoral education regarding these challenges offers new horizons of opportunities for the field of practical theology. A fuller understanding of acedia is needed in our present-day religious and spiritual landscapes. The research has relevance to the institution of the Church, as it is called to address impediments toward spiritual growth. Further consideration of acedia may bring the disease into clearer visibility within religious organizations.

This research, together with the development of *The Art of Soul Care*,³⁷ may provide a rationale to support the progress of community ministries, refresh the approaches to the understanding of the ministry of deacons, and to give consideration to the protocol necessary for the formation of priests, ministry, and laypersons alike. These explorations may provide further motivation to inspire advancement in the arenas of practical theology and to encourage a widening expanse of what the vocation of such might mean to someone outside these temporal limits of academia. Beyond church life,

³⁶Fall semester, 2013. Inspired by the teachings of Catherine Clifford, professor at University St. Paul, who – when in conversation about empathy one day – suggested that empathy is not only about understanding the other, but beyond that to understand the other as they themselves understand themselves

³⁷*The Art of Soul Care* was formerly known and referred to as *The Songroom*. It underwent a name change in June 2017. There are further details to follow below.

by raising the awareness about acedia to the general public, we have the opportunity to rejuvenate discussion around the topics of spiritual development, and the possibility to nurture innovative forms of pastoral care. Such results may provide benefits for future pastoral approaches to the disease, offering new direction on not only the understanding of the malaise, but also on how to name and treat the vice.

Correlatively, the subject matter of acedia may ignite an interest in both the areas of philosophy and psychology. Due to the moral agency in question when suffering with acedia, its potential should not be undermined in the area of sociology, ethics, economy, ecology, and/or political science. Conversely, the research may provide a curious motivation in the various fields of ‘care.’ Particularly, how acedia may affect our care of minority groups, for example refugees, communities such as the LGBTQ2S, prisoners, and arenas of multi-faith dialogue and ecumenism. And let us not undercut the effects of the colonized mind laden upon the suffering of the Indigenous peoples.

As the ongoing development of methodologies continues, a practical theology of the arts provides crucial elements to enhance qualitative research. Converging art and spirituality provides opportunities for complementary methodologies to meet face-to-face, extending Gadamer’s function of the *fusion of horizons*: as when phenomenology meets narrative principles and aesthetics meet theology. Illman and Smith describe how Gadamer’s epistemological “knowledge-for-the-sake-of transformation”³⁸ encouraged ‘both the theoretical and the methodological approach’ of their work³⁹ when lining up theology with the arts; as they speak to how Gadamer’s fusion is not about the loss of

³⁸Ruth Illman and W. Alan Smith, *Theology and the Arts – Engaging faith*, (NY, UK: Routledge, 2013), 7.

³⁹Ibid.

‘identity’ but rather an expanding understanding of the other.⁴⁰ Such methods offer hope for innovative structures that can grow out of the genius of abstract notions that only art and mythical theology can illuminate.

Swinton and Mowat speak to the types of “knowledge that one can get through the involvement in qualitative research,”⁴¹ namely “knowledge of the other, knowledge of phenomena, and knowledge of reflexive knowing.”⁴² Whereas some of these styles might prove to be incompatible depending on the perspective, in the context of theology and the arts, they might inform each other in ways that could be considered beyond traditional epistemological values. These forms, when interpreted through such a lens, might provide a substantial elucidation otherwise overlooked by logistical methodologies, as a practical theology of the arts proves to be both method and methodology – indeed a fusion of horizons.

Lastly, we cannot dismiss the rise of secularism and humanism in the world, and an accompanying individualism, nor should we. This is an opportune moment to consider what secularism or ‘secular’ means. For this definition I turn toward contemporary Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor, for in his hefty text *A Secular Age*, he asks the immediate question: “What does it mean to say that we live in a secular age?”⁴³ He addresses the question while laying the groundwork with comparison to other ‘contemporary societies,’ “(e.g. Islamic countries, India Africa), on one hand’ and with the rest of human history, Atlantic or otherwise on the other.”⁴⁴ He describes the detachment of Church and state, and the ‘political’ organizational structures being free of

⁴⁰Ibid., 8.

⁴¹John Swinton and Harriet Mowat. *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, London, 2006),33.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (U.S.A. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007) 1.

⁴⁴Ibid.

religion. He also addresses ‘public spaces,’ that have been “allegedly emptied of God, or of any reference to ultimate reality.”⁴⁵ As he continues to demonstrate various possibilities on how to consider ‘the secular age,’ he defines in what sense he examines ‘our society as secular:’

I could perhaps encapsulate in this way: the change I want to define and trace is one which takes us from a society in which it was virtually impossible not to believe in God, to one in which faith, even for the staunchest believer, is one human possibility among others. I may find it inconceivable that I would abandon my faith, but there are others, including possibly some very close to me, whose way of living I cannot in all honesty just dismiss as depraved, or blind, or unworthy, who have no faith (at least not in God, or the transcendent). Belief in God is no longer axiomatic. There are alternatives. And this will also likely mean that at least in certain milieux, it may be hard to sustain one’s faith.⁴⁶

The author goes on to contend: “Secularity in this sense is a matter of the whole context of understanding in which our moral, spiritual or religious experience and search takes place.”⁴⁷ However, with this rise, we hear the voice of fragility and vulnerability echoing along many strata of society.

Charles Taylor reflects: “Mutual fragilization is at its maximum.”⁴⁸ James K. A. Smith, author of *How (Not) to be Secular – Reading Charles Taylor*, asks a detonating question: “What is the ‘imagined place of the sacred’ in a society governed by expressivist individualism?”⁴⁹ I advocate for the rejuvenation and *témoignage* of pastoral care and the arts as an envisioning of the sacred: providing us with a warm and nurturing reflective location – deep within, sacred, benevolent and true. Compassionate in its delivery, this space inhabits and speaks to the sacred in all of us – regardless of religion or belief system. Taylor’s wisdom on the matter: “So the emergence of art as Art creates

⁴⁵Ibid., 2

⁴⁶Ibid., 3

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Ibid., 304.

⁴⁹James K.A. Smith, *How (Not) to be Secular* (Grand Rapids, Cambridge: W.M.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2014), 87.

room to expand unbelief; unbelief has somewhere to go without settling for the mechanism of a completely flattened universe but also without returning to a traditional religion that is now implausible.”⁵⁰ May it be so. Without attempting to ‘return to a traditional religion,’ let us now turn to a summary of the ministry – *The Art of Soul Care*, and the context, *The Art of Soul Care* Retreat.

Ministry and Context

Ministry

At the onset of these studies, *The Art of Soul Care* was formerly known as The Songroom. As a result of this research The Songroom went through a name change, trying and testing a few variations on the theme of Soul Care. As the premise became more and more defined it became inevitable to converge the central foci of this research: Art and Pastoral Care. The emergence of such an idea gave birth to *The Art of Soul Care*.

The Songroom was initially designed as a record label, as song writing is one of my art forms. As I began to cultivate the integration between my call as an artist and that of a practical theologian, moving from The Songroom, to *The Art of Soul Care*, the mission statement originally read as *a place and space of spiritual renewal, creative expression and community action*. As the ministry grows, and continues to develop and define itself, with the help of a team of professional designers, the ‘branding’ of the mission statement has shifted, and now reads: *a place and space nurturing your needs for spiritual renewal, connection and belonging*.⁵¹

⁵⁰James K.A. Smith, *How (Not) to be Secular*, (U.K.: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2014), 76.

⁵¹This statement was adapted at the time the name change was made and the new website going ‘live.’ <https://theartofsoulcare.com/>

The Art of Soul Care is situated in Saint Lazare, Québec. The site includes my home, with an adjacent studio and workshop space. It is surrounded by trees, and pastures, and offers a view of the Calvaire Mountain, one of the highest peaks of Mont Oka which is across the river from the village of Hudson, Québec – about four kilometers from the site. The dream is that *The Art of Soul Care* will one day become ‘a place and space’ where sojourners come for a day, a week, or a month. The home and studio will be available to young and old alike; travellers, people seeking spiritual direction, and perhaps even offer an ‘artist in residence’ program. There is a rather huge garden to tend. As the property is presently agriculturally zoned, the garden offers the contemplative opportunities associated with many monastic orders, and opens up the possibility of agricultural production. As I move forward with its development, *The Art of Soul Care* will offer rooms in the house for retreat while presenting the mantra: “Pray, play, work and rest.” The goal is to become fully sustainable with this ministry.

Looking at models of monastic communities and retreat houses, we see that many of them are self-sustainable through the services or products they offer. Thich Nhat Hahn’s retreat in France known as Plum Village is one example, and local Oka cheese from the Trappist Oka monastery are but two examples. *The Art of Soul Care* participates in local market places with a line of body products titled *SASWE*.⁵² All of the products have a base of both sage and sweetgrass. Saswe offers soap, body lotions, and balms, bottle-free shampoo bars, body butters, and bath herb teas, an assortment of body mists and tisanes, and even bars of puppy shampoo. There are also some of the traditional Indigenous medicines available such as sage, and sweetgrass. As an artist, there are

⁵²SASWE was inspired as an acronym – the two first letters of ‘sage,’ and the first three letters of ‘sweetgrass.’

works of art for sale; and as a musician there are piano classes to teach, and performances to prepare for along with several other artistic projects in the works.

The Art of Soul Care's vision is to provide a complementary yet alternative facet to traditional religious protocol, melding spirituality with a sound, ethical mindset, which is the foundational character of religious life. The focus is presently on building the system as a malleable and portable idea, offering services in spiritual guidance, life direction, retreats, grief support and consultation. *The Art of Soul Care*'s mandate is focused on the contemplative way.

This ministry operates out of a multi-lateral belief system, without the need to defend an institutionalized ecclesial system, but rather to work with traditional spaces as part of a mandate to find ways to bridge the gap between religious, spiritual and secular societies and beliefs. Professor Dr. Peter Pandimakil of University Saint Paul offers support in his exposé of Raimon Panikkar. He describes Panikkar as: "literally a person of 'double belonging – a term initially used in connection with synchronic double, and later multiple, religious affiliations – not only from a biological but also religious/intellectual perspective.'"⁵³ According to Pandimakil, Panikkar addresses how important it is for us 'to understand ourselves, to strive to become intelligible synthesis – not necessarily a system.'"⁵⁴ And to realize that "experience is paramount, life has the priority, praxis always leads. Our life is the foundation of all our thoughts."⁵⁵ There should always be room to revolutionize our religious thinking, without concern of doctrinal impingement.

⁵³Peter Pandimakil, *The Life and Work of Raimon Panikkar, an ambassador of culture and civilization of India*, "Estudio Agustiniiano" (Vol XLIV – Fasc. 1 –Valladolid, 2009), 62.

⁵⁴Ibid., 66.

⁵⁵Ibid.

Although I had been raised a Roman Catholic I spent many years ‘out of church’ as an agnostic. Within the last two decades, I have sojourned far and wide in order to find a religious home where I could connect and experience a sense of belonging. My journey has included discerning for ministry with both the Unitarians and the United Church of Canada. I had wished to be a community minister, a deacon of sorts, but that doesn’t seem to be in the making, though I am contemplating discernment as a Franciscan Oblate. Presently, I am attending the local Anglican Church. For me, there is something deeply significant about the Eucharist.

The beauty of the Eucharist has proven to be one of my main catalysts of conversion and transformation. Participating, observing and receiving communion continues to hold the centrality of Mystery for me. The discovery of my Indigenous ancestry – Algonquin, Ojibway, and most likely Mi’kmaq – along with participating in traditional indigenous ceremonies, and bestowed with not one but two spirit names, have also greatly influenced my ministerial identity. Other companions for the journey have been the mindfulness of Buddhism, a keen but neophyte interest in the ancient breath of Hindu’s Brahman, the indigenous medicines, teachings and ceremonies of the Red Road, and the willingness to surrender to the ever ‘beyond-ness’ of God, as described by panentheist philosophy. And, I espouse to romantic and existential philosophies. In summation and briefly stated: I can relate to Panikkar’s reasoning. Given the post-modern era we find ourselves in, I am by no means an exception to the rule.

While focusing on the gospel of Jesus, but not necessarily (fully) adhering to the structured strata of dogma, decree or creed, it is my hope that for some of those who share a cognizant belief of Divine Mystery – who some choose to call God – can find

solace, and refuge while engaging with *The Art of Soul Care* community; by simply being present to the sacredness of the Word and the world, to the abstract realities and wisdom of art, and to the communal efforts in which *The Art of Soul Care* engages with. Considering the notable and drastic decline in Church membership, the ministry of *The Art of Soul Care* envisions mutually beneficial relationships with religious, secular and even political spectra, as a way of attempting to ‘bridge the gap’ between religious, institutional life, secular societies, and the actual mission of Jesus.

Organizationally, *The Art of Soul Care* is endeavouring to conceptualize a model based on a spectrum of approaches: the ethos of diaconal theology,⁵⁶ the contemplative discipline yet solicitous tenderness of the monastic life – striving toward the freedom of interiority, and the rapidly moving secular mandate of what is now being referenced as ‘social business.’ Quoting from the front page of IBM’s social business website: “Social business starts when you put people at the center. Amplify the value of human connections.”⁵⁷ Keeping in line with these concepts and the mandate of converging art with spirituality, given its locale, *The Art of Soul Care*’s focus is on the practices of art and the contemplative life, and spirituality, while being connected and engaged with community action. One example is the sharing of organic bounty with the local food bank

⁵⁶“Iona Report – Faith, Worship, and Ministry Task Force on the Diaconate – Competencies for Lifelong Learning, Formation, and Training for the Diaconate in the Anglican Church of Canada,” 10. A blend of practical theology and the *diakonia* exemplifies what is now being highlighted in the most recently released. As we are steering away from the Doctorate of Ministry into the stream of the Doctorate of Practical Theology, and encouraged to exemplify transformative leadership in the communities, I share this quote to substantiate the above-mentioned claim: “Ordination is the church’s way of authorizing a person for leadership within the life of the church and in service to the world through selection with prayer and the laying on of hands. The language of “leadership” is recent. In earlier days it was called “ministry,” but the function is similar. Those who lead are persons who bring focus to the life of a community, who initiate and manage its common activities. “

⁵⁷<http://dl.icdst.org/pdfs/files/2c9772e595e13582cceeceb0b989482.pdf>, – the original site is not showing up when connecting with the link, as it was retrieved 2016. Given the speed of fast websites change their formats, it stands to reason the same message would not be delivered. However, this quote is still intact as no. 4 of a series, part of the information provided to: “Building a smarter enterprise: The essential building blocks.” Accessed January 6, 2019.

and with others in need as part of the mission of connection, and belonging and practicing the values of sustainable living.

When combined with certain features of ancient Christian norms – namely the ‘work and prayer’ of the Benedictines, the mysticism of the Carmelites, the charity and benevolence of St. Francis, and Celtic wisdom notwithstanding – all of these facets may serve to address the function of both *The Art of Soul Care*’s organizational and ecclesial system; as eclectic as they may be. I dare not forget the healing components of both Hildegard Von Bingen’s ministry alongside that of Julian of Norwich, and the rebellious nature of the Beguines. I do not pretend to know with any quantifiable or qualitative depth the full history or wisdom of these ideologies, nonetheless I have been at one time or another inspired by certain facets of their history and their mission, and wish to honour their impact on my inner journey, and my outward expression of ministry, for a vital part of the mandate of *The Art of Soul Care* is to encourage participants to find their ‘inner monk.’⁵⁸

The Context

At the center of *The Art of Soul Care*’s opus is a method of practice, malleable in its design that may serve as a private practice, a workshop, and also as a retreat format. The retreat format, serving as the context of this research, examines the potential of this practice as a means of discernment for acedia. Richard Osmer, in his descriptive-empirical task describes a means of gathering information, as he talks about patterns of contexts, situations, and episodes, as the central piece on how to define what Don

⁵⁸Research does demonstrate that this turn of words is not original. There are several sites that refer to the possibility of an ‘inner monk,’ including the Saint Meinrad Archabbey, who state: “we believe that all Christians have an ‘inner monk...’” <http://www.honoryourinnermonk.org/> (accessed July 2017).

Browning would call the ‘thick description,’⁵⁹ or “the thickness of practical wisdom.”⁶⁰ These contexts, situations, and episodes, are also relevant in defining all of the aspects of his hermeneutical task list. For example, part of what I would be looking for in an Osmer-like ‘situation’ and more particularly an ‘episode’⁶¹ is a qualitative description of both the affect and effect of acedia in one’s life, as we go through the various modules of the retreat, which will soon be described.

In part, the retreat is based on a model of theological reflection, a synthetic template of sorts – as a theology of convergence,⁶² merging not only the similarities and the differences of pastoral care and spiritual direction – as it is designed to address the paramount question: who am I? It also provides a canopy of reflective devices, as participants’ learning styles are as unique as the individuals themselves. Steven B. Bevans introduces the ‘synthetic model’ of theological reflection and clarifies that “the word *synthetic* function in several ways as a description of a particular model of theological method.”⁶³ The author suggests that while the method “tries to preserve the importance of the gospel message and the heritage of traditional doctrinal formulations,”⁶⁴ it also works to demonstrate “the vital role that context has played and can play in theology, even to the setting of the theological agenda.”⁶⁵ Bevans determines:

The synthesis will include the importance of reflective and intelligent action for the development of a theology that does not ignore the complexities of social and cultural change. Second, the synthetic model reaches out to the resources of other

⁵⁹Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology – Descriptive and Strategic Proposals*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1991), 72.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 16.

⁶¹Richard R Osmer, *Practical Theology – An Introduction*, (WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids/Cambridge, 2008), 35.

⁶²The idea was inspired while researching on line, using key words such as theology, convergence, Christology, etc. http://cechome.com/convocation/Theology_of_Convergence.pdf, unfortunately, I am not sure if the link is still working. (accessed April 25, 2015).

⁶³Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology, Faith and Cultures*, (Orbis Books, NY, U.S.A., 2009), 89-90. Please note that part of this quote is used again in Chapter Two when describing theological reflection.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*

⁶⁵*ibid.*

contexts and other theological expressions for both the method and the content of its own articulation of faith.⁶⁶

The basic premise of this ‘synthetic’ model has been developed to converge art and spirituality as a means of addressing the purpose of one’s authentic self, while also examining what challenges are standing in the way of the fulfillment of one’s mission. I maintain the belief that such a convergence has the power to heal and transform.

Along with the retreat being fashioned as a method of theological reflection, the design was also inspired by my experience with the tenets of the Medicine Wheel, the Mandala, Ignatius’ concepts of desolation and consolation, and Carl Jung’s use of ‘active imagination.’⁶⁷ The task of ‘priestly listening’⁶⁸ is brought into the light.

The journey of the retreat is displayed symbolically as a spiral, with an overall view of the question: “Who am I?” along with five-subtext questions, each represented by a separate module. Beginning in the east, the place of fertility and creativity: “What do I believe?” Moves south to the place of ground, and value: “What do I value? Onto the west as a place of purpose: “What is my purpose?” And to the north, as a place of wisdom: “What are my challenges?” Moving finally toward the centre is the culmination of all of these questions: “Who am I called to become?”⁶⁹

Typical to each round is any one or a combination of the following: scriptural, poetic, and/or philosophical reading, a music video. Proceeded by a brainstorming and dialogue around the given question, followed by prayer and meditation. As a result of the body being relaxed, and a contemplative focus on the question, images tend to surface.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Though notably, not a fully acceptable scholarly reference, nonetheless the quote is direct and highlights a clear description of active imagination as a methodology, “Active imagination is a cognitive methodology that uses the imagination as an organ of understanding. Disciplines of active imagination are found within various philosophical, religious and spiritual traditions. It is perhaps best known in the West today through C. G. Jung’s emphasis on the therapeutic value of this activity.” Active imagination: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Active_imagination (accessed August 10, 2016).

⁶⁸Osmer, 35.

⁶⁹Recruitment poster, appendix B.

The participants are then directed to give expression to their images with some art form. Whether it be a poem, a painting, a photograph, a gesture or rhythmic movement, a piece of sculpted clay, or a simple pencil line drawing, the participants are then encouraged to share their work, in discussion in circle, so that we may all bear witness. All of the artwork is done autonomously, with the exception of the last module. The participants are then asked to work on a communal effort, while keeping the silence.

The Benedictines, Carmelites, and Franciscan monastic orders share common ground: prayer and silence. Part of the formation of *The Art of Soul Care* is to enter into one's personal metaphoric cell, to find and connect with our 'inner monk.' The context is designed with consideration to the atmosphere of a retreat, as most authors read suggest a return to prayer and labour as a means of combatting acedia. Such was the case in the historical tradition of the monastics, whereby entering and staying in the cell in silence was part of the prescription for healing.

Time in 'the cell' was deemed an essential way to break the hold of the persistent thoughts of vice, whereas "daily, monotonous, sweat-producing manual labour"⁷⁰ as referenced by Kenneth Russell, was the countenance of a healthy spirit, mind and body. We can learn from these ancient Christian norms, and apply them to our contemporary lives as we quest for a renewal of our spiritual lives. *The Art of Soul Care* Retreat aspires to offer pathways toward transformation, with the convergence of art and spirituality as its pastoral beacon.

⁷⁰Kenneth C. Russell, *Healing the Heart, Desert Wisdom for a Busy World*, (Toronto, On: Novalis, Inner Journey Series, 1993), 69.

Structure of the thesis

The thesis is set out in six chapters, plus the introduction, which has provided a brief description of how this project has come to be. In this first chapter, the problem, and question have been addressed, and the relevancy and possible outcomes have been outlined, as well as a providing the systematic framework of the context in question for this research – *The Art of Soul Care*. We will presently move into the second chapter: the research in practical theology complemented with the research in theology and the arts as a pastoral theology. The other areas of concentration that are relevant to this study are theological reflection, defining art in relationship to theology, and as such with spirituality. Additional material is presented dealing with forums of education and leadership.

Chapter Three will focus on an in-depth description and literature review describing at length the trajectory of acedia: its history, consequences, dangers, and healing potential. The methodology section – Chapter Four – will explain the choices around the chosen methodology: a phenomenological case study. This section will also include the research method and design, and go over the specifics of the retreat format, as the context for the research. The project itself – *The Art of Soul Care* Retreat – will be described in detail.

Chapter Five will cover the plan for how the data was explicitated and follows up with the results and evaluation of the data, with ensuing discussion, and how it may agree with, expand upon, or offer contrasting points of view to that of the literature reviewed. Chapter Six, the final chapter, will examine the various considerations: theological, practical, and pastoral. Further recommendations and a conclusion summarize the work.

Appendices are listed in the Table of Contents and attached to the end of the thesis, along with any figures or art that are referenced in the body of the work, if not listed directly in the thesis itself.

As mentioned above, the art that has manifested itself throughout my life, accompanied by the muse of the Spirit, has shaped the congruence of my healing path. The fusion of these two elements becomes symbiotic, integral – authentic in voice, faithful in action. This convergence holds for me, the providence of contemplation. In serving to facilitate such a pathway for others – I do so with the hope, and the trust that transformation, and spiritual renewal is available to another as well. Transformation – to move beyond our present mindset with a liberated heart – as described by Richard Rohr: “Transformation has little to do with intelligence, willpower, or perfection. It has everything to do with honesty, humility, willingness, and surrender.”⁷¹ And let us not forget about the power of vulnerability, as we move into Chapter Two – Research of Practical Theology.

⁷¹Richard Rohr, *Daily Meditation – Week 38 – Western Christianity*, from the Centre for Action and Contemplation, <https://cac.org/> (accessed September 21, 2018).

Chapter Two: Research of Practical Theology and the Arts

Practical Theology

“Practical theology is the mutually critical correlation of the interpreted theory and praxis of the Christian faith with the interpreted theory and praxis of the contemporary situation”⁷²

Practical Theology is a multi-dimensional theology, made up of various strata of interpretation. Such understanding resides not in a linear point-by-point quantitative equation but rather in the filaments of the sonnets of the human condition. Effectively, practical theology is characterized by its supportive correlative relationship with the various avenues of the human sciences. It does not indulge in absolute paradigms, but rather engages with the study and practice of the many social disciplines available, so that accumulative wisdom may inspire transformation; hopefully both within the context of Church life, and its organic reflections that ripple against societal and cultural backdrops.

Osmer is quick to point out: “I was learning how to engage in interdisciplinary thinking, the task of bringing two fields into conversation.”⁷³ Swinton concedes to the necessity of framing theological ideals in consideration with other ideologies, to maintain a ‘conceptual structure,’⁷⁴ which will connect us in a way that is exploratory and critical while also mutually beneficial for all fields. From the practical theologian’s point of view, one asks how is the word of God reflected in subsequent realities? How are God’s covenants⁷⁵ re-enacted in contemporary culture and context?

⁷²David Tracy, *Foundations of Practical Theology*, In *Practical Theology*, ed. Don Browning, 61-82. Quoted in Browning, 47.

⁷³Osmer, 30.

⁷⁴Swinton, and Mowat, 73.

⁷⁵Osmer, 133.

Osmer highlights the specificity of the Christian traditional covenantal prophecy: both promissory and conditional.⁷⁶ He goes on to demonstrate how the nature of prophetic discernment clarifies the reality of the theological voice as he calls in the importance of theological reflection,⁷⁷ with an ultimate forward motion toward ethical grounding, that of reason. Swinton and Mowat on the other hand take on a more practical approach toward practical theology, offering a model that “reveals it to be a discipline which is fundamentally hermeneutical, correlational, critical and theological.”⁷⁸ Although sounding contemporary in their approach, the authors still abide by the interpretation of Christian tradition but with a ‘hermeneutic of suspicion.’⁷⁹ Both are sound and solid structures toward ‘reasoning’ which are relevant and applicable to the context of *The Art of Soul Care Retreat*, as the research does make correlative reference to outside areas, such as philosophy and psychology, the arts, spirituality, education and leadership.

The convergence of art and spirituality as a pastoral theology of the arts, considers both ‘promissory and conditional’ covenants, as the manifestation of the art speaks to the expression of the present moment, with its conditions and challenges. The voice of the retreat participants too could be prophetic, as their insights may be future directional, while historically rooted. The project offers a practice that nurtures hermeneutics, correlates with other wisdoms, and in its practicality, is theological.

Rising out of these confluences where theory and practice meet is *praxis* – transformative practice – the cultivating of *phronesis* – practical wisdom.⁸⁰ Swinton and Mowat suggest that: “the aim of Practical Theology is to enable personal and communal

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Ibid. 135-151.

⁷⁸Swinton and Mowat, 76.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Swinton and Mowat, 26.

phronesis; a form of practical wisdom which combines theory and practice in the praxis of individuals and communities.”⁸¹ Nurturing several main components of research fosters this wisdom, as does the *praxis* itself. Noting Pandimakil quoting Panikkar: “Our first task is to understand ourselves, to strive to become intelligible synthesis – not necessarily a system. Experience is paramount, life has the priority, praxis always leads. Our life is the foundation of all our thoughts.”⁸² Out of this foundation, rises the voice of agency.

Browning determines *phronesis* as the gateway into understanding the realm of practical theology, namely practical reason. Additionally, he suggests a central question: “How can communities of memory and tradition also be communities of practical reason and practical wisdom”?⁸³ In other words, the fundamental purpose of practical theology is to bridge the gap between traditional practice and transformative practice, with theory formulating part of the bridge: thus – practice-theory-practice. We see this in the context of this research, as theory was investigated to enhance the original concept of the model in question.

However *praxis* needs to be understood alongside *habitus*. *Habitus* – the concept conceived by Edward Farley – is about practice itself. Swinton and Mowat offer this concise definition: “This suggestion resonates with Farley’s concept of ‘habitus:’ a disposition or orientation devoted to the practical but critical living out of faith.”⁸⁴ According to Jackson W. Carroll, Farley refers to *habitus* as directly related to the soul, as he refers to *habitus* “as a kind of ‘a habit, an enduring orientation and dexterity of the

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Pandimakil, 66.

⁸³Browning, 9.

⁸⁴Swinton and Mowat, the authors offer a footnote dating Farley’s concept to 1983 with this quote: “outlines this concept in considerably more detail,” 26.

soul.”⁸⁵ Carroll continues to reference Farley directing us to the intimate character of *habitus*: “It is an existential, personal knowledge of God that gives shape to the way that one views the life of faith, one’s own life, and the purpose of the church and its ministry.”⁸⁶ This ‘existential, personal knowledge’ provides positive support for the character of the context of ministry in question for this research.

Praxis is the transformative practice, based on a ‘fusion’, which occurs when theory and practice meet. This ‘fusion’ stems from Hans-Georg Gadamer’s ‘fusion of horizons.’⁸⁷ It is with the impetus of restoring *habitus* many of the practical theologians focus their attention. For according to Gadamer, it is a way to: “regain the concepts of a historical past in such a way that they also include our own comprehension of them.”⁸⁸ Practical theology endeavours to bridge the gap, between what was, and what is, and so it would stand to reason that language plays a formidable role in our understanding, of both the past and the present, and how we transition to bridge the gap, with the use of transformative practices. States Gadamer:

The guiding idea of the following discussion is that the fusion of horizons that takes place in understanding is actually the achievement of language. Admittedly, what language is belongs among the most mysterious questions that man ponders. Language is so uncannily near our thinking, and when it functions it is so little an object, that it seems to conceal its own being from us. In our analysis of the thinking of the human sciences, however, we came so close to this universal mystery of language that is prior to everything else, that we can entrust ourselves to what we are investigating to guide us safely in the quest. In other words we are endeavouring to approach the mystery of language from the conversation that we ourselves are.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Jackson W. Carroll, *As One with Authority – Reflective Leadership in Ministry* (Edward Farley, 1983, 35f.) (Louisville, Kentucky, Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 161.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marsh 1975 (London, New York: Continuum, 1989, rep. 2006) <https://mvlindsey.files.wordpress.com/2015/08/truth-and-method-gadamer-2004.pdf>, (accessed January 21st, 2019).

⁸⁸ Ibid., 367.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 370.

We develop language as professionals, but there is also the call to ‘priestly listening,’ as previously mentioned. A means in which to focus on the language of ‘the other,’ for imbedded in this sharing are the needs of people, and the expression of Spirit. Quoting Osmer:

Priestly listening is, first and foremost, an activity of the entire Christian community, not just its leaders. It reflects the nature of the congregation as a fellowship in which people listen to one another as a form of mutual support, care, and edification. Within the priesthood of all believers, congregational leaders are set apart by the congregation to carry out ministries that will enable it to participate more fully in the priestly office of Christ. When leaders engage in priestly listening, they therefore do so on behalf of the congregation as a whole.⁹⁰

This style of listening can be extended into the language of the convergence of art and spirituality.

Several practical theologians in several texts make reference to Farley’s understanding of what he names as *habitus*, ‘the faithful experiencing a self-disclosing God.’⁹¹ Common ground on how to determine and restore *habitus* is shared amongst practitioners. Such common ground evokes individual creative responses as a way and a means of moving the thinking and the development of the field of practical theology. Though there is one element that is proving to be contentious for some, Elaine Graham being one of them, as we move through post-modernity: patriarchal language and concepts. Patriarchal language does not encourage equality, or inclusion, in the midst of the social change we are witness to, nor does it always fare well as a staunch approach toward artistic interpretation.

Browning’s ‘five dimensions of practical reason’ and Osmer’s counter argument of four distinct tasks, both of which offer a conceptual agenda on how to gather

⁹⁰Osmer 36, 37.

⁹¹One such example found in: Ruth Illman, Alan, W. Smith, *Theology and the Arts, Engaging Faith*, (NY, London:: Routledge-Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), 3.

information, are workable options on how to collect material. Both authors also offer particular and worthwhile insights into the role of leadership. However, they both espouse patriarchal systems, something Graham names and retaliates against: the androcentric approach to practical theology.⁹² She represents a growing number of practitioners who are tired of the inequality, and the exclusion often summoned up within many religious traditions. Christianity with its millennia-old voice of patriarchal expression can no longer ascertain such expression as a reasonable approach to ‘God,’ or ‘the faithful experiencing a self-disclosing God.’ Osmer’s testimony does mention Graham as an author who points to this issue that is weighing heavily on the outcome of religious life; a claim that I am in agreement with. Though Graham does not elaborate a lot on a task list, she does garner and present material supporting the feminist movement, and draws our attention to some serious issues caused by the patriarchal approach to practical theology.

Osmer underlines Graham’s argument taken from her book *Transforming Practice - Pastoral Care in an Age of Uncertainty*.⁹³ Giving weight to the argument about patriarchal language that I agree with, she states: “That practical theology must face up to the challenges of a postmodern context characterized by a high degree of pluralism, fragmentation, and scepticism.”⁹⁴ Osmer goes on to describe Graham’s concern: “that it is no longer possible for theology to build on a consensus of values in society. Nor can theology take for granted the authority of traditional sources and norms of the church.”⁹⁵ Osmer continues to focus on the importance of transforming practice

⁹²Elaine, L. Graham, *Transforming Practice – Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty*, (Oregon U.S.A., Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1996) quoted in Osmer, 154.

⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁴Osmer, 154.

⁹⁵Ibid.

stressing Graham's attitude: "Ethics and politics therefore becomes processes and practices, rather than application of metaphysical ideals."⁹⁶ He maintains his support as he describes Graham's "central arguments about transforming practice in the Christian community,"⁹⁷ and how such a practice "generates new knowledge and values that cannot be formed in any other way."⁹⁸ Noted: "such practice is oriented to human freedom and love and struggles to overcome structures of domination, including the oppression of women;"⁹⁹ and, "transforming practice discloses God and offers a model of transcendence that is compelling to many people in our postmodern context."¹⁰⁰ These are equitable arguments to consider, as we take into consideration the rising temperature of corrupt global political behaviour, disdainful capitalist and economic practices, threatening environmental concerns, and how these agendas may be influenced by acedia.

Graham tends to prefer the term pastoral theology to that of practical theology. As such, I began to adopt a similar practice. However, I do vacillate between the two terms, noting a very subtle difference between the two, and would somehow even suggest a fusion of these two theologies. Pastoral theology is about care of the soul – understanding the soul, along with understanding areas of concern that may prove detrimental to the health of the soul. I see practical theology as an extension of pastoral theology. As it represents the faith and the values considered while taking up the necessary action as the plight of a soul is voiced, and where the soul's needs need to be addressed. Both require engagement with 'the other' in order to function as a theology grounded in love, and ethics.

⁹⁶Ibid.

⁹⁷Ibid., 155.

⁹⁸Ibid.

⁹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

Though there is an upcoming section dedicated to theology and the arts, I mention here the possibilities of an abstract voice expressed through art may elicit the soul's particular wisdom when it comes to the alienated feminine; a use of language beyond patriarchal and colonized mindsets. Furthermore, moving beyond even feminism, 'alterity' needs to be considered as a deepening reality of how we practice theology.

In order for practical theology, or as Graham would prefer – pastoral theology – to continue to develop into a sound contemporary movement of mutual regard, 'alterity' needs to be acknowledged as the way forward: a common, mutual respectful and dignified regard for the other, as we recognize we are powerless in the light of otherness. Graham insists: "that the key hermeneutical criterion for a reconstructed Christian practice is the 'disclosure' of *alterity*."¹⁰¹ She suggests that 'in practical terms,' this stance "would favour strategies that encourage empathy and solidarity with others, open up enlarged horizons of understanding and commitment and foster pastoral encounters that engender new perspectives on human experience and Divine reality."¹⁰² Convergence of art and spirituality warrants consideration as a pastoral encounter, such as mentioned by Graham, for it is inspiring, stimulating and generative. This method has the power to 'piece together fragments,' heartens toward compassion, potentially sparking common and harmonious ground. The distinctive, expressive voice of 'person,' fosters humility, vulnerability, recognition, and intimacy as the case study speaks phenomenologically – offering first-hand outlooks on the 'human experience and Divine reality.' This expression of the authentic self is muted when suffering with acedia: no alterity.

¹⁰¹ Elaine L. Graham, *Words Made Flesh – Writings in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, (London, UK: SCM Press, 2009), 154.

¹⁰² Ibid.

Graham expands her reference to alterity as it may function in community. She makes reference to Jürgen “Habermas’ idea of ‘ideal speech communities’ as holding out the possibility of a ‘communicative ethic’ that is inclusive and pluralist yet which commands sufficient respect for rational agreement.”¹⁰³ She explains how Habermas’ argument about “the communicative ethic informs liberative public policy,”¹⁰⁴ finds its core in the application of ‘conversational practice.’¹⁰⁵ These connections bring ‘values of truth, beauty and emancipation’¹⁰⁶ to the surface, as they are “engaged in common tasks of transformation and action.”¹⁰⁷ The voice of otherness, when in dialogue, is a humble and sacred reminder we are powerless of the other. The elements of conversational engagement within the context of this study offer place and space to consider one’s own ‘values of truth.’ One may find the appropriate action to liberate themselves from challenges such as acedia, as they may encounter the possibility of transformation, and action in the common arena of artistic expression, and communication.

Theological reflection

Bearing in mind the variety of hermeneutical methods as well as a call to consider the development toward the movement of alterity, we too can look at what norms our traditions speak of and can be reclaimed. And what needs to dissolve away so we may move further toward the goal of convergence, as a pathway toward possible

¹⁰³ Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 1, *Rationality and Rationalization*, trans. T. McCarthy, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 1, *Rationality and Rationalization*, trans. T. McCarthy, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), quoted in Graham, *Ibid.*, 158.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

transformation. It is in the exploration of converging, not only art and spirituality, but also converging the many designs of practical theology new *praxis* may arise.

To be considered is the role of theological reflection in the adaptation and formalization of *praxis*. According to Graham, Walton and Ward, theological reflection is the space, which “enables the connection between human dilemmas and divine horizons to be explored, drawing on a wide range of academic disciplines including social sciences, psychotherapeutic and medical disciplines and the arts.”¹⁰⁸ The invitation into the realm of theological reflection, framed as contextual theology, is a ‘grace-full’ one and yet demanding of commitment, perseverance, patience, and holy listening, for it is potentially about identity formation. Say Graham, Walton and Ward: “Together with Charry, we would wish to argue theology has always been contextual and is best understood as possessing a practical function: to nurture, to inform identity, to communicate.”¹⁰⁹ How the *praxis* undertaken for this research becomes an adaptable ‘synthetic’ model of theological reflection is to be considered.

Synthetic – as it is a ‘synthesis’ shaped out of various standards of theological reflection. Rooted in an understanding of maintaining a gospel message, the model similarly abides within the structure of contextual circumstances. The convergence of art and spirituality allows the model to intercept with a variety of theological facets along the way. Whether it is during an oral conversation, within a gospel passage, consideration for the power of prayer and meditation, or during subsequent reflections on the sharing and witnessing of the art. Consideration can be given to the generous space that such a model provides to a participant who is faced with the possibility of revisiting what their personal

¹⁰⁸Elaine Graham, et al., *Theological Reflection: Methods*, (London, UK: scm press, 2005), 6.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, 10.

theology may actually call them to address. Indirectly, it also addresses the various learning styles we come across when a group of people are gathered.

A synthetic model is not an ‘artificial model,’¹¹⁰ says Bevens, but rather: “The word *synthetic* functions in several other ways as a description of a particular model of theological reflection. In the first place, this way of doing contextual theology looks to a *synthesis* of all the other models described in this book.”¹¹¹ Bevens explains:

This is the model that tries to balance insights of each of the three models presented so far... and reaches out also to insights from other people's contexts – their experience, their cultures, and their ways of thinking. Like Laurel in writing his diary, it makes creative use of whatever is at hand.¹¹²

This particular model of theological reflection gives enough space to challenge the parameters of both abstract and structure as various facets of identity, providing a necessary tension so out of the ‘synthetic’ we may find pathways toward transformation.

Says Bevens: “What is important for the synthetic model is to emphasize *both* uniqueness and complementarity, since one’s identity emerges in a dialogue that includes both.”¹¹³ To complement the context of this research, Bevens, while noting the ‘complexity of the model,’¹¹⁴ nevertheless affirms: “the procedure is much more like producing a work of art than following a rigid set of directions.”¹¹⁵ And though we know there is a range of tasks to organise in producing artwork, Bevens reminds us that the ‘place of emphasis’¹¹⁶ is “on message at one point, while at another point one needs to

¹¹⁰Bevens, 89.

¹¹¹Ibid.

¹¹²Ibid., 88.

¹¹³Ibid., 90.

¹¹⁴Ibid., 92.

¹¹⁵Ibid.

¹¹⁶Ibid.

emphasize cultural identity,”¹¹⁷ pointing to the power of convergence as we meld identity with agency, through creative and spiritual efforts.

In relationship to these criteria, and the criteria of this research, we must consider the role of spirituality as part of the make-up of theological reflection, and that of practical theology. For this let us turn the thoughts of Claire Wolfteich.

Practical theology and spirituality

“There is growing understanding of the ways that theology and spirituality mutually inform one another, and how each is impoverished without the other.”¹¹⁸

While sitting in a chapel in Auckland, New Zealand, Wolfteich, in a research report, *Animating Questions: Spirituality and Practical Theology* describes what she would define as a spiritual experience. She was quite aware of how she was being moved in the moment, taken by the symmetry of the architecture of the holy place and its interplay with the space and the light. As a result, Wolfteich, being engaged with the nature of spirituality and in the field of practical theology, began to question the relationship between spirituality and practical theology.

The author noted such an experience – aligned with her education – reflected questions drawn from her own culture, church, context and tradition. Wolfteich began to draw upon the common denominators of both fields. She offers up a background of practical theology and its relationship to spirituality, and why it is important to define spirituality as we use it in both our context, and in relationship to practical theology. This

¹¹⁷Ibid.,

¹¹⁸Claire Wolfteich, *Animating Questions: Spirituality and Practical Theology, research report*, Citation Information: International Journal of Practical Theology, Volume 13, Issue 1, Pages 121–143, ISSN (Online) 1612-9768, ISSN (Print) 1430-6921, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/IJPT.2009.7> (accessed December 2015).

is the essential arena of this research as both of these contributing factors are used to determine a pastoral practice to discern acedia in our lives. For acedia – *the soul thief* – has the capacity to rob us of both our spirituality and our moral agency. In other words: our authentic identity.

Wolfteich makes it clear: “there is a need for more sustained dialogue and structured reflection on the relationship between spirituality and practical theology.”¹¹⁹

Her defense:

This dialogue and reflection is critical for several reasons. First, any theology is impoverished when separated from the lived experience of faith and from critical study of that experience. Practical theology, if it is to be theology, must attend to spirituality and must develop methods appropriate to that subject matter.¹²⁰

If we bare in mind the aforementioned criteria regarding alterity, then as suggested by Wolfteich: “practical theologians have some responsibility to address issues that are important for faith communities and wider culture. The widespread and diffuse use of the term ‘spirituality’ in popular culture points to an interest in matters of the soul, cutting across religious traditions.”¹²¹ Of course, it is determined a definition of spirituality would be in order. However in defining spirituality, and furthermore art, – noting the convergence of the two – it is imperative to maintain their relationship with pastoral theology. For it is in the very act of convergence the essential of theology is embodied. “Faith seeking understanding,”¹²² said Anselm.

¹¹⁹Ibid., 122.

¹²⁰Ibid.

¹²¹Ibid.

¹²²Often referred to as *Anselm’s motto*: fides quaerens intellectum. Saint Anselm of Canterbury, 1033 – 1109, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/anselm/#FaiSeeUndChaPurAnsThePro>, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (accessed November 3, 2018).

Defining spirituality

Wolfteich argues the question of defining spirituality is “in fact a practical theological question.”¹²³ She goes on to share an experience she had at a retreat centre on the outskirts of Sedona, to bring the statement into perspective. As she describes all of the various services the centre had to offer, Wolfteich addresses “the diversity of spiritualities in contemporary society,”¹²⁴ affirming what we already know: “the term spirituality’ is used now by many religious communities and speaks to many individuals who resists institutional religion.”¹²⁵ Wolfteich is transparent about the ambivalence she experiences, questioning her role as a ‘Roman Catholic’ when participating in ‘other’ forms of religious and spiritual expression. No doubt her concerns are familiar to others.

Although “scholars have not agreed upon any single definition of spirituality,”¹²⁶ Wolfteich recognizes it is “useful to distinguish between spirituality as experience or practice and spirituality as the study of that experience or practice.”¹²⁷ She summons a range of scholarly referrals to defend the position that ‘academic discussion about definition’¹²⁸ may have some merit. She addresses McGinn’s ‘first-order,’ and ‘second-order spirituality,’¹²⁹ and speaks to Principe’s concept of ‘three related levels of spirituality:’ “first, the ‘real or existential level;’ second, the formulation of a teaching about the lived reality,’ ... and third, the scholarly study of the first and second levels, that is the discipline of spirituality.”¹³⁰ Wolfteich argues: “practical theology must attend both to the animating center of lived faith as well as to the scholarly discipline of

¹²³Ibid., 124.

¹²⁴Ibid., 125.

¹²⁵Ibid.

¹²⁶Ibid., 126.

¹²⁷Ibid.

¹²⁸Ibid., 125.

¹²⁹Ibid., 126.

¹³⁰Ibid.

spirituality.”¹³¹ This is a valuable statement in support of this research, as the study in question does attend to both the enlivened core of self, while providing the means in which to engage with educational forums. It speaks to the ‘common denominators of both fields’ Graham has suggested: predominantly, the ethical arena.

Before gathering a summary of Wolfteich’s argument, let us turn for a moment to the text *Living Beyond Loss, Death in the Family*, edited by Froma Walsh and Monica McGoldrick. Although the text is about the experience of mourning, these authors address the defining of religion and spirituality, citing descriptions of several authors. Highlighting the reference of Doherty in particular, they write: “spirituality involves an active investment in an internal set of moral values and judgments of right and wrong, which may be based on religious teachings or on more universal ethical principles of fairness, decency, and compassion.”¹³² The statement continues:

At its worst, intolerant religious dogma can lead to extrusion of members of a faith community.... has also fuelled hatred, forced...At its best, spirituality invites an expansion of consciousness and personal responsibility for and beyond oneself, ...Moral or ethical values can spur compassion and actions that transcend personal suffering and loss to alleviate the suffering of others and to prevent other tragic losses.¹³³

Establishing an agreement with this outlook, let us turn back to Wolfteich.

Wolfteich speaks of diverse areas in support of her cautions: “These various contextual discussions about spirituality and liberation, spirituality and public life, and spirituality and ecology, should be noted by practical theologians, who too often assume that spirituality focuses primarily on the individual’s personal journey of faith.”¹³⁴ Such

¹³¹Ibid.

¹³²Froma Walsh, & Monica McGoldrick, editors, *Living Beyond Loss – Death in the Family – second edition*, (London: W.W. Norton & Company Ltd., 2004, 1991), 184.

¹³³A.D.V. Perry, and J.S. Rolland, *Spirituality expressed in community action and social justice: A therapeutic means to liberation and hope*. In F. Walsh (Ed.), *Spiritual Resources in family therapy* (pp.272-292). (New York: Guilford, 1999), quoted in Walsh and McGoldrick, 184, 185.

¹³⁴Wolfteich, 129.

is not the case with the objectives of this research. There is no assumption here, as part of the focus is on the soul's purpose – how we are called to serve the world.

What we know of religion in today's world may die, as may our present attitude and biases toward religion. However, I trust it will be redefined in some other fashion, and spirituality will be a mainstay element in which to negotiate its transformation. Support from Wolfeich: "There is growing understanding of the ways that theology and spirituality mutually inform one another, and how each is impoverished without the other. The relationship between spirituality and theology is not a one-way dialogue but rather an interdependent, symbiotic connection."¹³⁵ This 'symbiotic connection' is what speaks to the core of my theology, as both a practitioner, and artist while also imploring the question: Is not spirituality ultimately about having recourse toward a distinct political statement? I don't mean as a partisan of any particular governance or party, but rather to bear the responsibility as a citizen, both communal and global.¹³⁶

I close this passage with reference to the conclusion of Wolfeich's report. The author points out that: "While spirituality may be seen as a sub discipline of practical theology, it is better positioned as a lively dialogue partner and integrally related field of study that may breathe life into the work of practical theology."¹³⁷ She argues: "that spirituality is the heart of all theology."¹³⁸ This claim is the premise of my own practice and research. This is not intended to mount a credulous obligation toward spirituality, "just the opposite,"¹³⁹ Wolfeich contests. It pushes us to consider the seriousness of spirituality and encourages us to delve deeply into the many facets that we encounter

¹³⁵Ibid., 134.

¹³⁶Pope Francis' encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si* comes to mind as a substantial example. <https://laudatosi.com/watch>, accessed January 21, 2019.

¹³⁷Wolfeich, 142.

¹³⁸Ibid.

¹³⁹Ibid.

when engaged with the richness of the subject matter. Wolfteich declares: practical theology “brings its own expertise in the critical and transformative study of contemporary contexts to the study of spirituality.”¹⁴⁰ She also reminds us of the contributions that spirituality makes to practical theology,¹⁴¹ suggesting: “understanding of itself, as theology, as pedagogy, and as transformative discipline.”¹⁴² Keeping in mind the power of “mutually informing dialogue,” Wolfteich ends her argument with: “We stand to learn much about what it means to practice theology.”¹⁴³ To converge a practical theology with spirituality as ‘a dialogue partner,’ invites a practical theology and the arts, as the other voice at the table. It encourages transformation, as its creative elements can affect the parameters of transformative leadership. We now move into defining art in relation to theology – theology and the arts.

A Pastoral theology and the arts

For theologians looking at art, an area more traditionally connected with aesthetics, there are lessons to be learned. Art is a way to communicate things that cannot be said with words, and is therefore a particularly useful medium to convey religious feeling. Perhaps art provides its own ‘points of access to the holy’?¹⁴⁴

As I question whether the convergence of art and spirituality – a pastoral theology and the arts – can serve as a means of discerning acedia, how does theological aesthetics play a role in the healing component of acedia’s despair? Aesthetics is in this case viewed

¹⁴⁰Ibid.

¹⁴¹Ibid.

¹⁴²Ibid.

¹⁴³Ibid.

¹⁴⁴Ruth M. Bancewicz, *Theological Aesthetics, science + belief, exploring the positive interactions between science and faith*, <https://scienceandbelief.org/2012/06/21/theological-aesthetics/retrieved>, June 21, 2012 accessed October 2, 2018.

as a passage between the reasonable and the beautiful; a place where the voice of the mystical appropriates a cause for transformation.

As we look for a simple definition of aesthetics, online citations describe aesthetics as a ‘branch of philosophy’ dealing with concepts of the beautiful, the exalted, the dreadful, and the comical, and how most often it is applicable to fine arts. Further investigation moves us toward the relationship between aesthetics and principles, which direct us toward critical discernment, judgment, and how the role of the senses, the emotions and the mind are relative to what we would decree as beauty. As we are reminded of Farley’s statement, is it possible the convergence of art and spirituality could serve as an admissible habit of faith – *habitus* – bringing us closer to such a self-disclosing God?¹⁴⁵ Does the sufferer of acedia wilfully disengage from such a possibility? When we are struck with apathy, how is it we can engage with the world?

Authors Viladesau and Illman and Smith, demonstrate the vital importance of the notion of convergence itself. Illman is succinct in her observation of Viladesau: “Viladesau contends that art ‘embodies revelation.’”¹⁴⁶ Viladesau himself elaborates:

A theological aesthetics might also be conceived as an aspect of ‘practical theology.’ ‘Praxis’ is by its very nature intimately connected with ‘poiesis.’ A practical theological aesthetics would explore the place of imagination, beauty and art in motivating Christian morality and action in the world.¹⁴⁷

We hear Cahalan express similar thoughts: “Knowledge for transformation must include the imagination, and in theology this means creating imaginative forms of poetry, metaphors, new symbols, and narratives.”¹⁴⁸ The imagination evidently plays a key role in bridging the gap, between our inner and outer realities. Kathleen Fischer, author of *The*

¹⁴⁵Farley, 1983, quoted in Swinton and Mowat, 26.

¹⁴⁶Illman and Smith, 57.

¹⁴⁷Richard Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics – God in Imagination, Beauty, and Art* 1999, Oxford University Press, 52.

¹⁴⁸Kathleen A. Cahalan, *Three Approaches to Practical Theology, Theological Education, and the Church’s Ministry*, *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 9, no.1 (2005) 64-94, 84.

Inner Rainbow, The Imagination in Christian Life refers to the ‘significance of the rediscovery of the imagination for the Christian faith,’¹⁴⁹ as she points to how vital it is to participate with the all of who we are, as we link our imagination with our faith.¹⁵⁰ She remarks: “works of art are the fruit of the imagination”¹⁵¹ and talks about how integrative the process of imagination is, and deems the imagination to be ‘the inner rainbow,’ bridging God’s creativity to the endeavours we are called to live out, as a way of fulfilling our purpose.

Fischer makes several pertinent connections with the ultimate importance of expression. Her first inclination is to call in the promise of what engaging with the imagination can accomplish: “The imagination not only shows us a possible future; it evokes the energies needed to participate in the coming of that future.”¹⁵² Fischer kneads the connection with the language of the imagination: “The attempt to hold meaning and mystery together, to move from what we know to the less known or unknown, makes all language of the imagination basically metaphorical.”¹⁵³ Based on Fischer’s comment that “the imaginative vision of the prophets, Jesus and Paul continues to present us with alternate possibilities for our own existence,”¹⁵⁴ I would suggest the imaginative is the prophetic, and furthermore, Fischer’s lean and yet pithy thesis suggests an important insight that must be considered: that acedia is the antagonist of narrative and imagination.

Fischer expounds on the connection between revelation and symbolic language, and its kinship with imagination: “Symbols reveal truth by inviting us to enter in imaginatively. They evoke our entrance into worlds different from our own, and

¹⁴⁹Ibid., 1.

¹⁵⁰Ibid., 13.

¹⁵¹Kathleen R. Fischer, *The Inner Rainbow, The Imagination in Christian Life*, (N.J.: Paulist Press, 1983), 51.

¹⁵²Ibid., 24.

¹⁵³Ibid., 16.

¹⁵⁴Ibid., 136.

challenge us to new, sometimes even foreign, horizons.”¹⁵⁵ Along with this, Fischer offers a supportive assertion as she speaks of the importance of the artist’s role within religiosity.

Fischer accentuates how the artist helps us conceive of our selves and our role in ‘our universe.’¹⁵⁶ Fischer reminds us how essential the role of artists is to the ‘Christian existence’¹⁵⁷ with four essential decrees. She describes artists as “makers of form,”¹⁵⁸ participating in “incarnation and embodiment of spirit in matter.”¹⁵⁹ She tells of how the artist “works with the materials of the world and reveals the qualities inherent in commonplace things.”¹⁶⁰ Fischer details how artists “respect the limits,”¹⁶¹ of creativity, acknowledging that it is certain restrictions which set it free.”¹⁶² And Fischer claims that artists, “offer us the order of beauty as key to the unity and harmony we seek.”¹⁶³ These detailed insights about artists give credence to both the potential skill necessary to facilitate a context that includes a practical theology and the arts, and may also influence participants to find their own harmonic structure toward their creative and artistic merits.

Fischer contests that “artists are essential to faith because without them we cannot truly see ourselves or our universe.”¹⁶⁴ She refers to novelist Robert Penn Warren to help support her argument. He “calls this link between the life of art and of religion ‘humility’: ‘Both (art and religion) depend on revelation, and both recognize that revelation comes from a prayerful reverence for the truth, especially from an unscared reverence for the

¹⁵⁵Ibid., 31.

¹⁵⁶Ibid., 53.

¹⁵⁷Fischer, 53.

¹⁵⁸Ibid., 60.

¹⁵⁹Ibid.

¹⁶⁰Ibid., 60.

¹⁶¹Ibid.

¹⁶²Ibid.

¹⁶³Ibid., 64.

¹⁶⁴Ibid., 53.

shockingness of inner truth.”¹⁶⁵ She goes on to clarify: “Art confronts us with this truth in several ways, and it requires humility to take it in. Artists are capable of revealing us to ourselves with relentless clarity.”¹⁶⁶ The convergence of art and spirituality as a practice of discernment may help guide us toward humility as we are called to face our personal challenges of acedia.

Part of the challenge is leading the sufferer of acedia to prayer, for convergence of art and spirituality is prayer: an organic, living prayer, imbued with spontaneity and improvisation. Fischer is one of the artists that hint at a method that can help support such claims: “Openness to the arts is itself an act of the imagination, a way in which our imagination is educated. However, artists also challenge us as individuals and communities to create our own moulds and play of forms, to be, as Nietzsche says, ‘the poets of our lives.’”¹⁶⁷ This is similar in tone to the testimony of Taylor as mentioned here by Lincoln who claims: “In particular, however, Taylor wants to stress the importance of the aesthetic dimension, and especially poetry, as a way of opening up the immanent frame to a transcendent source. Poetry has the power to create worlds, to bring about a shift of register opens up new possibilities.”¹⁶⁸ He details Taylor’s concept of ‘the imaginary’ as a “way people imagine their lives and their world and ‘this is often not expressed in theoretical terms, it is carried in images, stories, legends, etc.’”¹⁶⁹ Lincoln goes on to describe how: “It involves an embodied, affective, intuitive and pre-cognitive sense of how things are and of what is appropriate in our dealings with others and the

¹⁶⁵Forward to *Christian Faith and the Contemporary Arts*, ed. Finley Eversole (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962) Fischer, 53, 54.

¹⁶⁶Ibid., 54.

¹⁶⁷Ibid., 63.

¹⁶⁸A. T. Lincoln, *Spirituality in a Secular Age: From Charles Taylor to Study of the Bible and Spirituality*, <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/actat/article/viewFile/72911/61818>, 11, accessed October 10, 2018.

¹⁶⁹Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*.(Cambridge, MA. and London: the Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007) quoted in Lincoln, Ibid., 75.

world that is collectively experienced. It stands in a dialectical relationship with ideas or beliefs on the one hand and practices on the other.”¹⁷⁰ Lincoln highlights the ‘significance that this brings to our world as it is: “constituted by the symbols, images, pictures that fuel the imagination – hence Taylor’s stress on language and poetry... In regard to ethical practices, the social imaginary is at work not so much in the conscious following of moral norms but in the underlying sense of knowing what is possible and how it might be brought about.”¹⁷¹ My research is inspired by the people who are willing to engage with formats that include practical theology and the arts, as they may beckon forth a new world initially expressed in the arena of the arts, with symbols, images, metaphors, and poetry of all kinds.

Lincoln provides a question that is relevant to this research: “Is there a link here with the roles of wisdom and discernment in biblical perspectives on spirituality, where the emphasis is not on intellectual knowledge but on a deeper sense of knowing what is fitting?”¹⁷² Does acedia rob us of our living poetry? Converging art and spirituality is a gentle and compassionate way which provides us with ‘a deeper sense of knowing what is fitting’ for our communities and ourselves. It speaks to the beautiful within. The soul speaks of one’s true identity: our purpose, thus our beauty.

If acedia has the potential to rob the soul of one’s identity, how in turn might this affect one’s imagination, and as significantly, its reversal, how the loss of imagination might affect ‘the beautiful?’ The antidote for poison is to render a toxin inert. Entrusting and engaging with the power of imagination and beauty as a force that may repel acedia must be considered as a reasonable approach to something that is out to destroy the very

¹⁷⁰Ibid.

¹⁷¹Ibid., 75.

¹⁷²Ibid. 75, 76.

voice of the Spirit. According to Viladesau, we look to aesthetics as a simple directive to what we mean by ‘the arts’ in this context. Viladesau, in his considerable text *Theological Aesthetics ~ God in Imagination, Beauty, and Art* introduces a variety of concepts dealing with “the term ‘aesthetics,’” beginning with the Greek root: “meaning ‘perception by the senses.’”¹⁷³ He continues to share various ideologies on the subject, as he moves toward Hegel’s comments regarding the term to mean ‘the study of the beautiful.’¹⁷⁴ Viladesau also makes mention of Schiller’s “the aesthetic.”¹⁷⁵ He concludes that ‘aesthetic’ means “the area of integration of the human faculties: it designates the condition of spirit (*das Gemüt*) in which sensation and reason are active at the same time.”¹⁷⁶ I would add the tension between the sensate and reason invites integration, thus transformation. It is for this reason aesthetics deemed theological, offers a visceral, palpable experience that is not God, yet seizes the inquiries about God; moving the participant away from only cerebral notions to the much more brazen landscapes of image.

Viladesau then makes his own claims about art, religion and theology suggesting: “In their origins, religion and art formed a unity, and even in the subsequent differentiation of consciousness a great proportion of religious consciousness remains embodied in nonconceptual symbolic form.”¹⁷⁷ He continues the conversation with a reminder that art is ‘in many ways’ very similar to religion.¹⁷⁸ He prompts the reader: “the history of art constitutes a frequently neglected ‘text’ that reveals a dimension of faith that is necessarily missed if theology attends solely to doctrine and abstract

¹⁷³Viladesau, 6.

¹⁷⁴Ibid., 7.

¹⁷⁵Ibid.

¹⁷⁶Ibid., 7.

¹⁷⁷Ibid. 16.

¹⁷⁸Ibid.

conceptualizations.”¹⁷⁹ This speaks to a symbiotic process that should not be overlooked or undermined as the synergetic quality of the two environments offer up a space in which the Mystery of the Spirit may be experienced by the senses.

Viladesau reminds us of the hermeneutic inquiry that is recognized amongst practical theologians, which brings us to the concept of Heidegger’s hermeneutical circle. The circle speaks to a way of how to detail a problem. The undercurrent of the problem is examined; as how it correlates to other fields of study. The interpretive meaning suggests how to identify what needs to happen; and how to prescribe the means and the method to design a *praxis* that illuminates the possibilities toward transformation. It also speaks to a manner of understanding, including an understanding of one’s self. Quoting Heidegger’s description:

This circle of understanding is not an orbit in which any random kind of knowledge may move; it is the expression of the existential *fore-structure* of Dasein itself....In the circle is hidden a positive possibility of the most primordial kind of knowing....The ‘circle’ in understanding belongs to the structure of meaning, and the latter phenomenon is rooted in the existential constitution of Dasein – that is, in the understanding which interprets.¹⁸⁰

Dasein being Heidegger’s reference to ‘the self.’

Osmer suggests: “It is helpful to conceptualize, these four tasks with the image of a hermeneutical circle, which portrays interpretation as composed of distinct but interrelated moments.”¹⁸¹ As practical theology and the arts perpetuate the possibility of engagement on many levels, I question if there could be a fifth part of the hermeneutical design: an empty circle. A circle that floats and lands when needing a reminder that practical theology is an organic phenomenon, and functions as a principle of engagement

¹⁷⁹Ibid.,

¹⁸⁰Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 1962, (U.S., UK, Australia: Blackwell Publishing, 1962), 195.

¹⁸¹Osmer, 10.

for all concerned. An empty circle representing promise and vision for the future, when hope is expressed in the form of imagery. A circle at times filled with risk and vulnerability, as it is expressed artistically, and the circle that carries humility in its back pocket. An empty circle inviting Christ into the centre. Viladesau shares: “Hence the theological-aesthetic appreciation of a work of art involves a complex hermeneutical interaction among the artist, the work, and the viewer or hearer, along with the life-context of each.”¹⁸² It is in the witnessing that we see the most power and principles of engagement. The empty circle becomes filled, although there is always a risk, as it is a vulnerable, intimate space to occupy.

Furthermore, Viladesau, while investigating various definitions of art looks to quote Frank Burch Brown’s *Religious Aesthetics – A theological Study of Making and Meaning*.¹⁸³

Brown therefore defines ‘art’ as ‘any and all of the creative skills, informed practices, and primary products manifest in the making of publicly recognizable aesthetica’; and a work of art is ‘anything that is at least partially artificial in origin, that reflects creativity, skill, or know-how, and that in large measure is, or could be, something appreciated by a public attentive to aesthetic factors such as form and style, and responsive to aesthetic effects such as those we regard as intrinsically interesting, expressive, or beautiful.’¹⁸⁴

As clear as this definition is, I disagree with it in part, namely the ‘publicly recognizable aesthetica,’ and how it needs to be named as skilful or appreciative of public attention. An example; if we understand the narrative, and the essence of meaning of a five-year olds’ stick person having witnessed or experienced brokenness, we might be moved to be sympathetic, and empathetic as we come to understand more. We might be so moved to deem it beautiful, and name it art. As it speaks to a truth, with an innocent disregard to

¹⁸²Viladesau, 147.

¹⁸³Frank Burch Brown’s *Religious Aesthetics. A theological Study of Making and Meaning*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989) 86.

¹⁸⁴Ibid.,145.

skill or public appreciation, it nonetheless, through the expression of such truth, becomes art. As such, the art becomes a tool of interpretation of the narrative. It helps bridge the gap, which is part of a primary function of practical theology.

Rather than be concerned with what would perhaps be defined as a classical definition of art or art style, this particular method of pastoral practice is more closely related to the field of art therapy. We can borrow some of the testimony of art therapist Cathy A. Malchiodi to clarify the stance of art in this context. In the third chapter of her book *The Art Therapy Sourcebook*, Malchiodi opens the chapter with a quote from Pat. B. Allen: “Art is a way of knowing what we actually believe.”¹⁸⁵ This is indicative of art being prophetic – telling us what we already know. She voices some of her own preliminary experiences with art therapy: “The focus on the importance of ‘drawing from within’ and the emphasis on the process of self-exploration rather than creating a technically perfect product provided a refreshing and meaningful direction for both my art and my own journey of self-discovery.”¹⁸⁶ She believes: “that all people have an innate capacity to be creative through art. In art therapy, people’s worth, dignity, and self-direction are respected and supported.”¹⁸⁷ This is a common theme hopefully rooted in the beliefs of practical theologians. Malchiodi stresses the importance of the act of creation itself, as opposed to judging one’s artistic merits, when looking at art from the lens of a therapeutic journey. I would say the same applies for pastoral care. Though there is a ‘place for these critics,’ she emphasizes it is not the place to be critical of self: “In art therapy, the way an image looks is less important than the pleasure and gratification one derives from creating it – a capacity that is available to everyone in one

¹⁸⁵Pat B. Allen, *Art is a Way of Knowing*, (U.S.: Shambhala Publications, 1995), as quoted in Cathy A. Malchiodi, *Art Therapist Source Book*, (U.S.A.: McGraw-Hills Books, 2007), 47.

¹⁸⁶Ibid., 50.

¹⁸⁷Ibid., 56.

way or another.”¹⁸⁸ Judgment of one’s art is a re-occurring issue when presenting this work. This issue needs to be addressed compassionately, with emphasis on the joy of creating, and the journey itself, and not on the quality of the piece. Quality and meaning arises when the expression is communicated, and witnessed.

Malchiodi contributes: “I believe that making art cannot hurt people....Art expression serves as a buffer between our inner and outer worlds, and images often come before we can express our thoughts and emotions in words.”¹⁸⁹ She contends expression of ‘powerful images’ is much more favourable than keeping things repressed inside – a way that is ‘harmful’ to one’s emotional health.¹⁹⁰ On the contrary, are we perhaps hard-wired to draw or express ourselves through imagery? Stone believes so: “It may be that we have, at our center, a ‘will to image’ that explains the apparent universality of art-making – of sensory and sensual creativity – in human history.”¹⁹¹ The author reinforces the idea that even as we come together from different places, denominations, beliefs, etc. we can communicate with images: “People who seem to be worlds apart socially, culturally, educationally, racially, religiously, who do not even speak the same language, can share their common experience through images.”¹⁹² She affirms that the language of ‘history and pre-history’ has been a ‘language of image.’¹⁹³

Stone expands upon the idea that God extends God’s Self via ‘language’s abstract signs:’ “but also – and perhaps more completely – in *images* that are grasped by the senses, are seen, touched, smelled, heard, and tasted.”¹⁹⁴ And: “Art at its best makes concrete, what language and especially religious language cannot: that intangible, private

¹⁸⁸Ibid., 59.

¹⁸⁹Ibid., 61.

¹⁹⁰Ibid.

¹⁹¹Karen Stone, *Image and Spirit – Finding Meaning in Visual Art*, (U.S.A.: Augsburg Fortress, 2003), 4.

¹⁹²Ibid., 7.

¹⁹³Ibid.

¹⁹⁴Ibid., 10.

or communal moment when we encounter being.”¹⁹⁵ As she speaks to the personal and intimate involvement when working with images, she explains how such ‘intangibility’ may be comprehended through what she declares as: “the image of *depth*.”¹⁹⁶ Along with this, the author addresses the contours of art as communication.

Stone develops the idea that artwork is not solely the act of the artist, but also how the role of “the viewer is an essential element of the artwork.”¹⁹⁷ She leans on a quote by one of the “most influential artists of the twentieth century,”¹⁹⁸ Marcel Duchamp: “The creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act.”¹⁹⁹ This lead indicates the sharing and witnessing part of the various modules in the case study are significant, and may be part of what stirs the cathartic moments that are at times prevalent when doing this work both in private practice and in group work.

Stone also particularizes “art as practical theology,” as her argument states: “academic theologians have tended to value the theoretical over the practical, and words over images and deeds.”²⁰⁰ She describes practical theology:

It is an embodiment and a re-enactment of the mystery, and of the event of God’s intervention into human life. It is reflection on and response to that event. Surely art is a part of that response. Rather than explain meanings for us, it helps us to form meaning, embodies meaning, is itself an act of meaning. In that respect, it can be seen as practical theology.²⁰¹

Stone indicates ‘modern life is bankrupt of images and symbols.’²⁰² She addresses the

¹⁹⁵Ibid.

¹⁹⁶Ibid., 11.

¹⁹⁷Ibid.

¹⁹⁸Ibid., 12.

¹⁹⁹Marcel Duchamp, quoted in Duane and Sarah Preble, *Artforms*, (New York: Abrams, 1987), quoted in Stone, Ibid.

²⁰⁰Ibid., 8.

²⁰¹Ibid., 19.

²⁰²Ibid., 28.

superficiality of ‘technique and surface images,’²⁰³ and how “even the word *image* has come to mean *façade*: one’s public image may bear little resemblance to one’s inner reality.”²⁰⁴ She goes on to reference Ira Progoff, who in turn references Carl Jung, and how he:

Recognized the growing hunger for meaningful symbols...it is the deadening of images which once had a vital power that lies at the source of the confusions in modern consciousness’ having ‘only a morgue of symbols to supply them with the meaning of life...confusion, paralysis of spirit, and ultimate breakdown are bound to result.’²⁰⁵

As previously mentioned, *The Art of Soul Care* Retreat was in part inspired by the idea of Jung’s active imagination technique, and how when we are engaged with the symbols of our art expression, we have opportunity for psychic movement. As we engage with theological practice, we have opportunity for transformation. To counteract the momentum of acedia, the use of images and symbols in a pastoral setting may be a powerful counterpoint.

In summary Stone concludes: “To this inadequacy of symbols, art replies. Certainly it is not the answer; art is neither substitute for nor variant of religion. It does not necessarily convey ultimate meaning.” She describes variations of art: “Some art simply combats joylessness: it is sensual delight. Some art is self-indulgent. Some art is literal: academic, didactic, propagandistic, a substitute for words. Some art is trivial: bric-a-brac and little more. *Art is.*”²⁰⁶ In her summation, she reiterates the possibilities that art offers the field of practical theology as it ‘embodies,’ and ‘reenacts.’ And how “art is unique in that it unifies the material with the spiritual. There is no way to perceive the

²⁰³Ibid.

²⁰⁴Ibid.

²⁰⁵Ira Progoff, *The Symbolic and the Real*, (New York: Julian Press, 1963,) 292, quoted in Stone, 28.

²⁰⁶Ibid., 29.

spiritual without the material; conversely, without spirit the form yields no lasting truth. Art's form is material, yet it deals with inner reality. It is embodiment. In art, we encounter and re-form images by our own participation with them.”²⁰⁷ Art as practical theology, or in giving both elements some breathing room – practical theology and the arts – the infusion is palpable. Converging art and spirituality is pastoral medicine. In the course of its engagement, it may very well be part of a prescription for *acedia*, the *malaise*, in addition to a specialized discernment practice. As we have heard of ‘embodiment’ once again, let us turn back to Viladesau.

Viladesau offers a section in the first chapter, dedicated to “The Phenomenology of Art and its Connection to Revelation.”²⁰⁸ He presents the works of Gerardus Van der Leeuw, a “Dutch theologian, philosopher, religious historian, musician and statesman...best known for his volumes on the phenomenology of religion.”²⁰⁹ He notes Van der Leeuw’s take on aesthetics is ‘Hegelian:’ “the study of art, particularly the fine arts. His ‘theological aesthetics’ – or ‘aesthetical theology,’ a term he uses interchangeably – seeks the ‘path from art to theology and from theology to art.’”²¹⁰ Viladesau outlines der Leeuw’s argument reflecting on “the historical relation between the arts and the sacred, and subsequently to outline a theological synthesis based on these data.”²¹¹ He brings attention on how der Leeuw’s ‘treatment’ is an ‘attempt’ to “arrive at a phenomenological description of each art form, concentrating particularly on its ‘comprehensible associations’ with the sacred.”²¹² As a phenomenological case study is the most appropriate methodology for this research, these supportive statements are most

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Viladesau, 24.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Van der Leeuw, *Sacred and Profane Beauty. The Holy in Art*, trans. By David E. Green (New York: Holt, Reinehart and Winston, 1963), quoted in Viladesau, 24.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid.

apt.

Echoing Farley's 'self-disclosing God,' Viladesau goes on to explain how der Leeuw's work "attempts to connect 'the essential core of the art in question' with God's revelation in Christ. He attempts to indicate the 'theological significance' of each form of art – how it conveys religious (not necessarily theological) meaning, and what 'points of access' it provides to the holy."²¹³ Borrowing from this notion, the convergence of art and spirituality in the context of this research may provide 'points of access' that convey theological implications, yet not necessarily religious ones – where faith seeks reason – regardless of denomination or insignia of faith.

Coalescing these ideas, a point of note is Viladesau's summary of der Leeuw's effort, aiming directly to the symbiosis between theological aesthetics and theology and the arts. Viladesau points to how Leeuw "begins by giving a theory of the relation of the arts to each other: their unity, specific differences, and interdependence."²¹⁴ He considers Leeuw's suggestion that "the theological understanding of the arts must begin with soteriology: specifically, with the notion of Christ as the image of God: 'The doctrine of the image of God includes the entire theological aesthetics or aesthetical theology.'"²¹⁵ Viladesau summarizes Leeuw's arguments: "It is the fact that God has represented God's self in history that gives art and religion their common essence as answers to God's call. Both share in the task of 'representation' that is made possible and necessary by God's self-revelation."²¹⁶ A practitioner has the responsibility to help bridge the gap of interpretation. For a representation of 'God's self' might be of the simplest

²¹³Ibid., 25.

²¹⁴Ibid.

²¹⁵Ibid.

²¹⁶Ibid., 25 Viladesau footnotes Leeuw's work. Gerardus Van der Leeuw, *Sacred and Profane Beauty. The Holy in Art*, trans. By David E. Green. (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1963), quoted in Viladesau, 265.

renditions. God may reveal God's self in the expression of anything from a tree to a stick person climbing that tree. We must consider leaving enough room in the arena of practical theology for the 'un-theological,' so as to be considerate of inclusivity and diversity – and alterity. With these considerations in mind, let us move toward the validity of art in education, and also touch on the significance of the icon. Consideration will also be given to the ethics of care.

Correlating – art and education, icons, ethics of care

Throughout the course of my research, as per the nature of practical theology, measures were taken to find correlative material that would not only support theology and the arts as a practice of discernment, but to also provide support for this practice to be considered as a legitimate means of education. Given the pastoral nature of these studies, and with acedia being defined as the 'absence of care,'²¹⁷ it was also important to correlate material that would validate the significance of an ethic of care. Furthermore, as we have determined the importance of the arts as it is related to practical theology, it is best to at least highlight the significance of an icon as it relates to this practice.

Art and education

Greene offers insights on how educational systems need to design and re-design innovative curricula, as she calls forth the appeal to enhance adaptive teaching methods encouraging the wildness of the imagination. She offers almost excessive amounts of examples citing poetry, literature, and film, as a way of enriching the meaning of

²¹⁷To be investigated further in the next chapter on acedia.

education: and the education of meaning. The author isolates the ‘absence of care’²¹⁸ time and time again, as she guides us through historical portals of literature as backdrops of truth, and sages of narrative. Acedia too has been defined as the absence of care.

Though Greene’s main focus is on the educational system, her authority may serve as correlative material for practical theology and the arts. She blends the lines of difference between education and theology, and makes way for the voice of theology to impress the importance of narrative, and its equipoise with suffering: “I recall Martin Buber speaking about teaching and about the importance of ‘keeping the pain awake.’”²¹⁹ Expressions of the truth as they are mirrored in the story of the other are integrative and fundamental aspects, which Greene does not deny: on the contrary – the imagination resonates with the magic of clarity and substance. She clarifies:

We are appreciative now of storytelling as a mode of knowing (Bruner, 1986, pp. 11ff.), of the connection between narrative and the growth of identity, of the importance of shaping our own stories, and, at the same time, opening ourselves to other stories in all their variety and their different degrees of articulateness.²²⁰

Greene is keen and inspiring as she continuously emphasizes how the imagination extends itself into the world of oppression and demands its rightful responsibility as the agent of change, and redemptive grace.

The author’s material serves as a suitable reference for the complex vicissitudes of the imagination and how such complexities are the hallmark of innovation. She encourages the development of new testimony, new language and is consistently reminding the reader we have a responsibility and are beholden to carve out space for the

²¹⁸Maxine Greene, *Releasing the Imagination – Essays on Education, the Arts, and Social Change*, (U.S.A.: Jossey-Bass, A Wiley Imprint, 1995), 66.

²¹⁹*Ibid.*, 113.

²²⁰*Ibid.*, 186.

yet created, but yet so direly needed invocations of change. Greene, extremely well read, exudes her enthusiasm for the literary imagination to a fault. However, sometimes personal creative development needs to be nurtured out of a simple mound of clay, or a blank piece of paper and a crayon, especially when dealing with the imaginative - impoverished suffering of acedia.

Like Greene, Eisner also addresses curricula. His main focus is to establish relevancy between the teaching of art alongside the 'growth of mind',²²¹ and how curricula can be organized accordingly, and to demystify the myths surrounding art's 'unintelligibility.' He elaborates on the effects of the arts expressed as vistas of our emotional cartography, and how these might relate to who we are as individuals. He suggests: "Work in the arts also invites the development of a disposition to tolerate ambiguity, to explore what is uncertain, to exercise judgment free from prescriptive rules and procedures."²²² As Eisner remarks when it comes to the arts, "the locus of evaluation is internal."²²³ As a result, he encourages the idea to "direct our intention inward to what we believe or feel. Such a disposition is at the root of the development of individual autonomy."²²⁴ He continues to explore the use of art as a means to give understanding to the nature of our identities: "Finally, the arts are means of exploring our own interior landscape. When the arts genuinely move us, we discover what it is we are capable of experiencing. In this sense, the arts help us discover the contours of our emotional selves. They provide resources for experiencing the range and varieties of our responsive capacities."²²⁵ But what about functionality of the art form?

²²¹Elliot W. Eisner, *The Arts and the Creation of Mind*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press,2002), xi

²²²*Ibid.*, 10.

²²³*Ibid.*

²²⁴*Ibid.*, 10.

²²⁵*Ibid.*, 11.

Eisner clarifies three significant methods on how ‘representations’ may “affect how meanings are conveyed.”²²⁶ He first speaks to the power of mimesis: “By mimetic I refer to forms that look or sound like what they are intended to represent.”²²⁷ This statement provides support for my claim that the imagery arising out of the context of my work doesn’t need to be elaborate or functionally professional. It is designed to simply get to the heart of the matter, whatever the soul is speaking. It is not my task to teach art in the context of my work. It is not an art class. However, knowing about these approaches can serve my role as facilitator, helping the participants relax about their competency. It’s not about technical astuteness, it is about meaning. Says Eisner: “Mimesis, however, need not achieve a high level of verisimilitude. Consider signage designated.... Indeed, in this situation a simplified image is preferable: it communicates more easily than one that is individualized through detail excessive for its function.”²²⁸ Though Eisner refers mostly to children, these points are of significance for adults as well.

Second on Eisner’s list is what he refers to as ‘*expressive form*.’²²⁹ Noted:

The representation of feeling is achieved in many ways. Perhaps the most important is the way in which visual form – line, colour, shape, value, texture, all aspects of form – is composed. According to Gestalt theory, the forms that artists create generate fields of energy that are picked up by our nervous system, which in turn creates a resonance in the perceiver.²³⁰

This reference yet another tool to encourage the participants to engage at a deeper level; what their imagery is ‘expressing’ of themselves. And what ‘acedia’ may look like, feel like, and how it might stand in the way of the light of whom they truly are.

²²⁶Ibid.

²²⁷Ibid., 15.

²²⁸Ibid., 16.

²²⁹Ibid.

²³⁰Ibid., 17.

Icons

I am particularly interested in his third approach, as Eisner speaks to the topic of ‘iconology.’²³¹ This is where Eisner and O’Donohue might share something in common. Eisner’s statement: “The study of conventional signs in the arts is the focus of a field called iconology. Iconologists study symbols that do not necessarily look like what they refer to or represent but that nevertheless refer to them: the golden fleece, the mirror, the cross, the key, the lantern all have iconographic meaning.”²³² He does go onto explain that artists actually do engage in all three methods when working. This information can prepare the facilitator to help guide those into the meaning of their work without unnecessarily burdening the participants with too much technical jargon. O’Donohue also speaks of the icon.

O’Donohue cuts to the chase as he speaks of the essence of presence and iconic motion, and how this reverence can impact our lives: “It is the nature of humans to be present in a way that impinges on and engages others. Human presence is never neutral. It always has an effect. Human presence strikes a resonance.”²³³ He speaks about the reverence of the sanctuary of the human body. When someone is suffering with *acedia* do they ignore the sacred consecration of their own life, and that of other?

O’Donohue continues to reflect:

The human body longs for presence. The very structuring and shape of the body makes it a living sanctuary of presence. When a thing is closed, we only encounter its outer shell...The body is one of the most open and manifest presences in the world...The human body is a language that cannot remain silent. The countenance is an intense and luminous icon of presence.²³⁴

He continues to express about how the eminence of the ‘human face’ is divine: “The

²³¹Ibid. 18.

²³²Ibid.

²³³O’Donohue, 58.

²³⁴Ibid., 58, 59.

human face is a miniature village of presence.... All the aspects of the face combine to bring one individual life to expression. The face is the icon where all the atmosphere, feeling, and thought of an individual life assemble visually.”²³⁵ Icon, as an embodiment of the Divine self, is in full contrast to the idol. Acedia is about idolatry – idolatry of self.²³⁶

Idolatry neither fashion expression of self, nor is indicative of any movement, creation or a co-creative environment. It lacks subjectivity, and honour and humility. In turn it is condescending of empathy, choosing to vest its time inwardly, but insularly, cut off from the vulnerability of the human condition. There is no care, or consideration of moral agency. To expand on the idea of the ethics of care, I now turn to Nel Noddings, Professor of Child Education – Emerita, at Stanford University.

Ethics of care

Noddings ‘characterizes’ care as “always a move away from self.”²³⁷ Regardless of the many descriptions on how to approach care, and the varied kinds of care, Noddings insists: “At bottom, all caring involves engrossment. The engrossment need not be intense nor need it be pervasive in the life of the one-caring, but it must occur.”²³⁸ As acedia is ‘rooted in *philautia*, meaning self love,’²³⁹ we understand acedia being in opposition to the nature of caring. Noddings doesn’t name acedia directly, but then again maybe she has: “When we say of someone, ‘he cares only for himself,’ we mean that, in

²³⁵Elizabeth Scalia, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/the anchoress/2013/07/11/acedia-and-the-help-of-saint-benedict/> accessed February 6, 2015.

²³⁶Ibid.

²³⁷Nel Noddings, “Caring – A Relational Approach to Ethics and Moral Education.” Second edition – update. 2013, (Los Angeles, U.S.A. UK: University of California Press, Berkeley, 2013), 16.

²³⁸Ibid., 17.

²³⁹Bunge, 133.

our deepest sense, he does not care at all.”²⁴⁰ Noddings does determine a difference between this self, that may be considered a false self as opposed to a true, moral self: “This caring of self, for the *ethical* self, can emerge only from a caring for others.”²⁴¹ It is indicative of relationship, and a consideration of our moral agency. We turn briefly to Martin Heidegger, for he illustrates the relationship between care and conscience.

Heidegger approaches care as a call, and that call is a call to self and yet beyond self: “The call comes *from* me, and yet *from beyond me*.”²⁴² As Dasein is ‘called,’ Dasein – the self is called into being. This being, Heidegger equates with conscience and care as one and the same. In the section *Conscience as the Call to Care* he is emphatic: “The call of conscience – that is, conscience itself – has its ontological possibility in the fact that Dasein, in the very basis of its Being, is care.”²⁴³ Can we equate that Being and Conscience are one and synonymous with care? In contrast lies acedia. If conscience is a call to self, then acedia is a call away from self, therefore a ‘lost self.’ Or at least a self in crisis, for there lacks the relational component to bring self to fruition as an ethical self. It lacks the conscience of being called to care – of being one’s self: fulfillment of vocation, fulfillment of purpose.

‘Relational’ is a strategic word, emphasizing Nodding’s argument and her philosophy toward what has come to be known as ‘the ethics of care.’ She initially asks the question: ‘why care about caring?’ and then moves into introducing and formulating a model of reciprocal care. Noddings sparks particular interest in the dynamics between the ‘one-caring’ and the ‘cared-for,’ focusing on what may initially seem as the surprising weight and power of ‘cared-for,’ as the lines of existence are delineated and yet

²⁴⁰Noddings, 15.

²⁴¹Ibid., 14.

²⁴²Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, (U.S., UK, Australia: Blackwell Publishing, 1962), U.S., UK: Australia, 320.

²⁴³Ibid. 322, 323.

threatened. She notes: “To be treated as though one does not exist is a threatening experience, and one has to gather up one’s self, one’s presence, and place it in a safer, more welcome environment. And, of course, it is the way of generosity.”²⁴⁴ These ideas tie in once again with the emphasis on self and its relationship with care, in direct contrast to the character of acedia.

Noddings links care with existentialism: “the receptive mode is at the heart of human existence.”²⁴⁵ Her voice is reminiscent of Heidegger’s invitation of how being is synonymous with care – and care is a further extension of the self as an authentic identity.²⁴⁶ Noddings demonstrates the philosophical emphasis on the nurture of ethical care and being and the angst of the human condition – aloneness. Here Noddings offers an acute insight into the mechanics of care: “We feel that we are, on the one hand, free to decide; we know, on the other hand, that we are irrevocably linked to intimate others. This linkage, this fundamental relatedness, is at the very heart of our being.”²⁴⁷ We see how having choice is a central element in understanding who we are as agents of care. In our freedom, we are capable of rejecting the ‘impulse to care.’²⁴⁸ However, the author cautions “I enslave myself to a particularly unhappy task when I make this choice.”²⁴⁹ She is poetic in her moving statement:

As I chop away at the chains that bind me to loved others, asserting my freedom, I move into a wilderness of strangers and loneliness, leaving behind all who cared for me and even, perhaps, my own self. I am not naturally alone. I am naturally in a relation from that which I derive nourishment and guidance. When I am alone, either because I have detached myself or because circumstances have wrenched me free, I seek first and most naturally to re-establish my relatedness. My very individuality is defined in a set of relations. This is my basic reality.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁴Noddings, 19.

²⁴⁵Ibid., 35.

²⁴⁶To be discussed further in the chapter on acedia.

²⁴⁷Noddings, 51.

²⁴⁸Ibid.

²⁴⁹Ibid.

²⁵⁰Ibid.

A pronounced understanding of the ethics of care and how that corresponds with ‘relatedness’ is a critical factor when tending to the education of acedia, as it is defined as the absence of care; and how such education may play out when dealing with the ethical standpoint of practical theology and the arts.

Noddings’ emphasis on joy as part of our ‘basic reality’²⁵¹ and how we are affected with and by joy as we care is noteworthy. She determines:

Feeling joy in relatedness – whether in relation to persons, other living things, or ideas – encourages growth in the ethical ideal. Our joy enhances both the ideal and our commitment to it. We want to remain in direct contact with which brings us joy, and, somehow, with that joy itself.²⁵²

Joy is the marked spiritual territory of those surviving the onslaught of the noonday demon, suggesting that being engaged, being in ‘relatedness’ is a primary source of what establishes belonging.

Noddings makes use of “the expression of ‘aesthetical caring’” as an insightful method to embrace the gifts of ‘things and ideas.’²⁵³ Combine this with Maxine Greene’s call for the design of curricula that provides space for the adaptation of abstract ideas through the arts,²⁵⁴ along with Merriam’s emphasis of using art as a means of expression and communication rather than judging the quality of the art itself, and we have a positive argument for the use of arts and theology – not only as a sound method, but also a sound methodology. Merriam writes:

Many researchers make use of arts based approaches more as part of their data collection methods, to a lesser or greater extent, and sometimes in the presentation of the findings to clarify a point. In these instances the studies’ purposes are not

²⁵¹Ibid., 147.

²⁵²Ibid., 132.

²⁵³Ibid., 21.

²⁵⁴Greene, Ibid.

really about the art of the image; the images in this sense are more typically used as an elicitation device during interviews.²⁵⁵

She continues with an important point of distinction: “In these uses of arts based approaches as data collection, the studies are about the subject itself and typically not primarily about the images per se.”²⁵⁶ Whereas a participant’s artistic expression may play an important role in the discerning of acedia, it may also serve as an expression of meaning as determined by a phenomenological methodology: serving in both capacities as method and methodology.

Illman and Smith pull together various areas of philosophy and theology: “postmodern, post-secular, feminist, liberation, and dialogical/dialectical,”²⁵⁷ as they concentrate on how a practical theology of the arts helps in the “interpreting and understanding of the nature of communities and their members.”²⁵⁸ They investigate “the stories of communities around the world that have engaged in transformational practices, through a specific art form, investigating communities from Europe, the Middle East, South America, and the United States.”²⁵⁹ They explore a wide variety of faith groups, including “Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Druze, indigenous, and sometimes agnostic subjects, involved in visual art, music, dance, theatre, documentary film, and literature.”²⁶⁰ As mentioned by Graham, Illman and Smith present a similar argument to her: “that the challenges of a postmodern and post-secular context require a fundamental rethinking of theology that focuses on discrete practices of faithful communities, rather

²⁵⁵Sharan B, Merriam, Elizabeth J. Tisdell, *Qualitative Research, A guide to Design and Implementation*, fourth edition, (John Wiley & Sons, Inc.,2016), 66 Note - this is the most recent edition – 4th edition of Merriam’s work, and has dedicated a specific section to arts based research.

²⁵⁶Ibid., 68.

²⁵⁷Illman and Smith, pre-introduction.

²⁵⁸Ibid.

²⁵⁹Ibid.

²⁶⁰Ibid.

than one-dimensional theories about religion.”²⁶¹ This may provide the possibility of transformation occurring as a result of engagement with theology and the arts bridging the gap between religious, spiritual and secular societies.

Introducing the idea of ‘*rethinking theology and the arts*,’ Illman and Smith offer their key argument:

A central thesis developed in this book is that the arts can provide support for and a mechanism that enables the emergence of a practical theology in which *habitus* can, once again allow all persons of faith to practice theology. The aim of the study is therefore to create a critical and creative approach to the study of theology in order to meet the challenges set by our contemporary circumstances.²⁶²

To meet these criteria the authors provide in-depth analysis of six *etudes*, six different artistic narratives from around the world, including fabric arts, literature, storytelling, film, music and dance. The authors affirm the *etudes* meet particular criteria for the field of practical theology and the arts and list them as such:

Each is defined by a specific time, spatial context, and practice, each setting engages in critical intersubjective dialogue; each project begins with a contextual examination of the stories of that specific community or dialogical practice; each engages in praxis by focusing its work on the practices implied by theological and philosophical reflection; each set of stories demonstrates a community that listens intently to the voice of the other; each integrates a specific form of the arts as a means of personal and community transformation; and each chapter showcases a community in which attention to the emergence of truth through the arts also leads to a greater sense of personhood for those who have served as partners in a shared dialogue.²⁶³

This passage emphasizes the necessities that can no longer be overlooked in the field of practical theology. In hindsight, the voice of these authors inspired in part not the shape of the context of this phenomenological case study, but rather the intent and the means of

²⁶¹Ibid.

²⁶²Ibid., 5.

²⁶³Ibid.,10.

a method, a style if you will, of facilitating. To necessitate engagement, and yet remain open to being stirred, to be vigilant of the spontaneous movement of the Spirit, and to allow both the theology of the moment and the art of the moment resonate for everyone involved. The voice of reciprocity is an invitation toward alterity.

Illman and Smith, like other notable practical theologians, build their reasoning on concepts previously mentioned; Aristotle's *praxis*, Farley's *habitus*, and Gadamer's *fusion of horizons*. The development of their approach enhances the field as they "contend that practical theology and the arts share a commitment to the belief that truth and meaning emerge from committed dialogue between persons and communities."²⁶⁴ Furthermore, they state: "the arts are the 'work and witness' of relationships that take form in the realm of 'the between,' as Martin Buber contends."²⁶⁵ The design of the context in question speaks to both 'work and witness,' as participants work to express their inner world, and to also share and provide witness for the other. One of the elements of the final module is to come together in 'micro community' to express one's gifts, and to build some form of expression together; in silence.

The authors in detailing the structure of their book highlight the immediacy of their work. They move through many of the influential teachers of practical theology, along with other eminent voices, such as Buber, 'Gadamer Habermas, Levinas, and Friere,'²⁶⁶ introducing many of the common practical theology terms as many other authors do. Illman & Smith address this important issue: "We also give attention to the impact of postmodern, feminist, and liberation theology on the development of contemporary philosophy of the arts and aesthetics, and argue that the arts become a

²⁶⁴Ibid., 6.

²⁶⁵Ibid.

²⁶⁶Ibid., 11.

dynamic partner in the dialogue of practical theology.”²⁶⁷ Being able to cross boundaries and bridge gaps with practical theology and the arts is evident in this statement about dance:

In each example, the uniting of body and spirit in dance transforms the space in which dance is performed into a *sacred space*. The transformation of space that is made visceral in the merging of body and spirit through dance overcomes the Western, modern prejudice toward the intellectual and dogmatic claims of faith – regardless of the kind of faith one might intend.²⁶⁸

Here we have a parallel example of how the fusion of art and spirit offers the possibility to move beyond one’s self, beyond dogma, beyond decree.

Testimony and analysis is shared with every *étude*. Citing one more example, we see additional evidence in the making of the *cuadros*, an art form that is of the Peruvian identity:

The *cuadros* – embroidered and appliquéd fabric wall hangings – produced by collectives of women in the shanty towns that surround the capital city of Lima, Peru, present vividly colored expressions of the work of transformation being undertaken in communities like Pamplona Alta, Peru.²⁶⁹

We learn about how expressions of ‘life’s harsh situations’ can be depicted with ‘simple materials’²⁷⁰ and how “the wisdom of the arts as a practice of transformation that we claim is characteristic of a practical theology of the arts.”²⁷¹ Illman and Smith refer to one of Bonnie Miller-McLemore statements: “If one of the goals of practical theology is to foster transformation, then the heart of practical theology lies as much with imagination as with interpretation, even though we have largely failed to anticipate the relationship between practical theology as a hermeneutical discipline and practical

²⁶⁷Ibid.

²⁶⁸Ibid., 160.

²⁶⁹Ibid., 81.

²⁷⁰Ibid.

²⁷¹Ibid., 90, 91.

theology as art.”²⁷² Practical theology and the arts have the capacity to cross various types of boundaries. Regardless of geography, denomination, or political plight, it may encourage the energy necessary to move beyond our present perceptions. We are reminded of the voice of Miller-McLemore, Sally McFague and many others: “the arts present a powerful way of arresting our attention. The arts suspend our self-absorption. They help us ‘pay attention to something other than ourselves’ and connect us with the particulars of the other *as other*.”²⁷³ This speaks of alterity. Theology and the arts may serve, not only a discernment tool for acedia, but also as an antidote.

As Illman and Smith remind us of the nature of ‘engaging faith’ as the title of the book suggests, we are called to absorb the potency of the arts in accompaniment with ethics. In this case, poetry as suggested by Løgstrup. The authors are referencing from his book *The Ethical Demand*: Løgstrup dedicates a chapter to the analysis of poetry and ethics. He claims that the transformative power of poetry lies in its ability to make the world, nature, and the other present in a new and different way: “The contradiction in our existence, which poetry reveals, is that we are blind and deaf to the world we live in.”²⁷⁴ The authors illuminate: “It is especially interesting to examine how the poetry and the ethical are related. The timbre and rhythm, beauty and precision of poetic expression not only serve the purpose of filling an aesthetic need.”²⁷⁵ And as they address beauty in the art form: “The beauty experienced in poetry, and other forms of art as well, is ‘revelation and nearness’ – the very antithesis of triviality and clearly ethical in nature.”²⁷⁶

²⁷²Ibid., 90,91 The authors footnote the quote: Miller-McLemore, “Aesthetics, Hermeneutics and Practical Theology, 19.

²⁷³Ibid., 96.

²⁷⁴Ibid., 44.

²⁷⁵Ibid.

²⁷⁶Ibid.

As we are witness to the ‘beautiful’ in various art forms, and to what may be ‘the ethical in revelation,’ we need to enter into the framework of what these authors suggest as ‘dialogical understanding.’ With this idea in mind, to correlate the ideas of curricula as it may relate to the arts, and in turn theology and the arts has merit. These are appropriate measures to take if practical theology and the arts are to be taken seriously. How the imagination can play a significant role, as a way to bridge the gap, or to provide a stabilizing force as we consider the importance of convergence art education with the study of the ethics of care, is also of significance. How the icon is viewed as a holy interpretation of our selves and God within has been underlined to bring substance to the value of artistic merit as it speaks to the holiness within.

We must be trained and prepared to educate, taking on the yolk of leadership; a leadership which is transformative, that addresses the unjust, expresses the true, and inspires action and engagement toward liberation. To conclude this chapter, let us move into the work of Palmer, Parks, and Bolman and Deal.

Leadership

Parker Palmer, as he reflects on ‘authority’ asks a relevant question: “How can I develop the *authority* to teach, the capacity to stand my ground in the midst of the complex forces of both the classroom and my own life?”²⁷⁷ He goes on to describe a significant difference between power and authority: “Power works from the outside in, but authority works from the inside out.”²⁷⁸ I stand by this statement as being also true for an expression of any art form. He simplifies: “The clue is in the word itself, which has

²⁷⁷Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach, Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher’s Life*, (Jossey Bass, 1998, 2007), 34.

²⁷⁸Ibid.

author at its core.”²⁷⁹ He associates authority and its presence: “Authority comes as I reclaim my identity and integrity, remembering my selfhood and my sense of vocation. Then teaching can come from the depths of my own truth – and the truth that is within my students has a chance to respond in kind.”²⁸⁰ Converging art and spirituality may serve as an extension of this self-awareness, both for the facilitator and the participant. Pastoral theologians need to find their authentic voice in order to lead pastorally; to invite the other into one’s own framework of sacred living.

Shalon Daloz Parks speaks of art and the imagination, artists and leadership, confirming many of the aforementioned ideas:

Understood in the light of this model of imagination process, there is a strong resonance between the process that artists undergo, the practice of adaptive leadership, and case-in-point teaching. For in the end, both the artistry of leadership and the artistry of teaching recognize the opportunity within the *conflict* – the gap between how things are and the needs and aspirations of the social system – the adaptive challenge.²⁸¹

This resonates with the accuracy in which the hermeneutical circle, mentioned above, defines challenges and needs, and how in practical theology we too, as practitioners are asked to design and create transformative practices to bridge the gap.

As Parks describes the type of redeeming space, which may encourage transformation, I imagine the contemplative practices of art while sojourning with nature as such a redeemable space. She notes: “The process of this deep transformation in the relationship of self and world requires a strong holding environment. There needs to be a sturdy, trustworthy space that can hold the difficult and intimate work of changing’s one mind.”²⁸² This is not only relevant to the space offered as part of my context, but also in

²⁷⁹Ibid.

²⁸⁰Ibid.

²⁸¹Sharon Daloz Parks, *Leadership Can be Taught* (U.S.A.: Harvard Business School Publishing Corporation, 2005), 226.

²⁸²Ibid., 56, 57.

tune with part of the monastics prescription of staying in the cell when dealing with acedia. As Parks reminds us: “Silence, understood as a complement of language and a communicator in its own right, is also endured as a powerful element in the ongoing practice of leadership.”²⁸³ Both the monk’s cell and the environment of *the Art of Soul Care* offer place and space to reflect, and to connect, with both self, and Self; and to contemplate how to engage with the other, and to engage with deep listening, narrative, and action. But where lies the Spirit in the role of leadership? Let us turn to Bolman and Deal’s *Leading with Soul*.

The impact of converging two words at the onset of Bolman and Deal’s text sets the tone for their principal message: “Soul. Spirit.”²⁸⁴ The authors speak to the energy of these words despite hindrances: “But soul and spirit are vital companions whenever we ask what life is about and where our path is taking us.”²⁸⁵ It is this pathway that feeds the central theme of their work: “Answering that poignant call for enlightenment and leadership at work is the goal of this book.”²⁸⁶ As they extend the invitation for the reader to become ‘co-authors,’²⁸⁷ they make the observation “that signs of spiritual hunger and restlessness are everywhere.”²⁸⁸ One of acedia’s key symptoms is restlessness.

As readers and participants we are encouraged to take up the quest because the authors “hope that this book will stimulate a journey in search of your leadership gifts.”²⁸⁹ As practical theologians, it is with vital necessity we understand what our gifts

²⁸³Ibid., 130.

²⁸⁴Lee G. Bolman, Terrence E. Deal, *Leading with Soul – an Uncommon Journey of Spirit*, (, John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2011), 4.

²⁸⁵Ibid.

²⁸⁶Ibid.

²⁸⁷Ibid., 8.

²⁸⁸Ibid.

²⁸⁹ibid.,9.

are, and establish the ground of our moral agency, so we are able to offer the necessary space for others as they seek the pathways toward spiritual renewal and transformation.

As we keep company with ‘Steve,’ and his encounter with a spiritual director, we are encouraged to reflect on the many questions that arise in the telling of his story. The challenges he is called to address are symptomatic of the common plight of many those in positions of leadership. We are reminded by the voice of Maria the spiritual director: “The heart of leadership is in the hearts of leaders. You have to lead from something deep inside.”²⁹⁰ We are reminded of the authenticity of the vulnerable heart and that “control is an illusion.”²⁹¹ We are also reminded of how control and its relationship with power, contradict the true nature of authority.

Though the word *acedia* is not used, there is nonetheless a mention of a ‘malaise:’

The malaise that has brought Steve Camden to Maria is widely shared. Albert Schweitzer called it a ‘sleeping sickness of the soul.’ Its symptoms are loss of seriousness, enthusiasm, and zest. When we live superficially, pursue no goals deeper than material success, and ignore our inner voices, we stunt our spiritual development. Today’s stressful and turbulent world compounds our risk of shrunken souls and spiritual malaise.²⁹²

The authors continue, writing: “the resulting restlessness and discontent inevitably leak into workplaces.”²⁹³ This description could be applicable to what we have come to know of *acedia*. Many leaders of the Church and other institutional and political leaders, could very well be experiencing *acedia* without being able to name or describe their malaise.

Bolman and Deal introduce the reader to the four gifts of leadership as Steve continues his journey. We are first introduced to the gift of authorship, and how “it’s the feeling of putting your own signature on your work. It’s the sheer joy of creating

²⁹⁰Ibid., 22.

²⁹¹Ibid., 33.

²⁹²Ibid., 40.

²⁹³Ibid., 41.

something of lasting value. The reward of adding something special to the world.”²⁹⁴ In turn, to encourage the same authorship in others rather than ‘shield them from responsibility.’²⁹⁵

The second gift of leadership is highlighted as the gift of love. To try and see people as they are, as they understand themselves, as opposed to imposing conditions, and ‘to make them more like us.’²⁹⁶ We are reminded by ‘Maria’ that at times we may feel ‘burdened’ “because you haven’t given enough.”²⁹⁷ How does that work with power? The third contribution speaks to the gift of power. Not power as in demanding or fighting for control, but rather how we approach empowerment of the other: “Caving in doesn’t empower people. You set a good example. You went to the plant. You listened. You were opened. You didn’t lean on your authority as their boss...you can give power away and wind up with more.... Hoard power, dampen spirit.”²⁹⁸ In creating something of our own, in showing our love with care through engagement and action, and in giving away our power, so we may empower others, all speak of the voice of the Spirit, and the authenticity of the soul.

The last gift of leadership Bolman and Deal speak of is ‘significance.’ When we do not exercise our creativity, when we do not care, when we fail to empower others, in turn we may feel insignificant, as do the others we are trying to control. We are reminded: “You can’t impose significance. People have to create it together. Exactly.

²⁹⁴Ibid.,80.

²⁹⁵Ibid.,86.

²⁹⁶Ibid.,90

²⁹⁷Ibid.,93.

²⁹⁸Ibid., 102.

Significance comes from doing something worth doing, making a difference in the world.”²⁹⁹ All of these elements address the significance of community and engagement.

In summation, Bolman and Deal emphasize: “Leading is giving. It is an ethic, a gift of oneself to a common cause.”³⁰⁰ We are not to confuse “giving tangible things or even inspirational visions,” but rather “it is offering oneself and one’s spirit,”³⁰¹ and how we must ‘freely give of ourselves,’ and that “leaders cannot give what they do not have.”³⁰² As leaders we are called to find our true self,³⁰³ to:

Return home to give your gift to help transform the kingdom – and in the process your own life. The quest is replete with dangers and pitfalls, but it offers equivalent rewards: the capacity to be successful in the world, knowledge of the mysteries of the human soul, and opportunities to find your unique gifts, and to live in loving community with other people.³⁰⁴

This style of leadership is very much akin to what should be that of a practical theologian, as we are called into loving action, to care for the world, to care for the other, and to empower those to whom we have been entrusted. We are called not to help or fix the world, as those are co-dependent notions.³⁰⁵ We are called to serve the world, and to serve the people who serve the world.

²⁹⁹Ibid.,106.

³⁰⁰Ibid.,122.

³⁰¹Ibid.

³⁰²Ibid.

³⁰³Ibid.,123.

³⁰⁴Ibid., 123, 124.

³⁰⁵This thought comes from an ethics class taught by Professor Marilyn Legge, at Emmanuel College, 2012. She suggested that ‘helping and fixing’ were co-dependent thoughts, and that the ground of ethics is in service.

Conclusion

The focus of this research is to examine and extend the role of pastoral theology into the arts and how this practice – applicable to a particular context – may serve as a tool of discernment for acedia. In order to do so it was necessary, not only to detail the mechanics of practical theology, but to also engage in the premise of theology and the arts. To incorporate all of the elements of the topics, examination of the subjects of spirituality, art and education, and ethics were relevant. The impetus of practical theology and its relationship to ethics must be made visible, and acknowledged, as does the quality of leadership that is needed to educate and empower the possibility of transformative action.

The examination of various concepts has led to clarify an understanding of practical theology as ‘a multi-dimensional theology,’ as initially introduced. As practical theologians we are called to witness the challenges and needs of others, and to participate in the creation and design of transformative practices that address these challenges. Ideas, concepts, and actions that will ‘bridge the gap,’ between the various challenges we face in the world, as we seek to move closer to the realm of spiritual renewal and transformation. We do this by correlating with the wisdom of the human sciences, and other relevant fields.

In examining how this is possible, we have looked at *habitus*, *praxis*, and the *fusion of horizons*, and how these well-grounded concepts are adaptable to a practical theology and the arts. Furthermore, the conceptual framework of beauty and the imagination, what it means to be an artist, how to define art in this context, how to define spirituality in this context, and what it means to educate, and what it means to care, and

to be a leader of worth in the world – all play a significant role in the formation of this research.

As leaders and teachers we are called to develop a philosophy that encourages deep listening, reciprocity, critical engagement, and trust in the development of the imagination of the faithful. I stand on the ground of empathetic reasoning, and encourage depths of discovery while placing my trust in seeking the vista of unknown horizons, while allowing the practice of theology and the arts to provide a distilling agent for the anxious and restless heart. We now move into a description and literature review of acedia.

Chapter Three: Acedia

Introduction

This research seeks to provide a reasonable forum in which to discuss acedia, as its discernment is part of the core tenet of this project. Authors much more versed in the topic have provided in-depth accounts of acedia, and continue to do so. It is nonetheless important to deliver an understanding of the character of the malaise, and provide the necessary information so the perimeters of the *praxis* that have been put into place may be understood.

We will examine acedia's trajectory, its history, dangers, and consequences, and its many descriptors. Key facets to consider when speaking of acedia are the many varied definitions of acedia, its manifestations, and implications, as well as pathways to healing. Highlighted is supportive literature to consider acedia as a causality of identity crisis. Additionally accented are the healing components deemed essential for recovery. An examination of acedia rooted in the fear of suffering, and the recommendation that acedia may be associated with what is known as a complex is also investigated. Additionally, in order to grasp the perils that acedia may cause the soul, it is also important to highlight the nature of the soul.

As we trace acedia's leading components, it is also necessary to stipulate that a detailed recital of the full arc of acedia's history would overtake the overall goal of the thesis. To offer a small example of what is meant by this statement, realize that there appears to be over one million citations of this spiritual illness on Google search alone.

To hold the tension between opposing end points would be to consider that the validity of the information provided as part of this investigation would invite and encourage further exploration, and scholarship. It is possible nonetheless to provide a comprehensive historical account of the ‘noon-day demon;’ as would be the case within the constraints of time for the actual case study project itself.

Although the systematic mechanics of acedia are attributed to fourth century Christian monk Evagrius of Ponticus, this does not mean that acedia does not affect those who are not Christian, or even religious for that matter. Like any other vice, we are all susceptible to its power, regardless of our beliefs. However, it is important to establish the historical philosophical system as Christian, from which acedia was first recognized and eventually systemized. For it is within the confines of this system that acedia is fundamentally understood. Concurrently, it is equally important to understand the core on which any philosophy is built – in this case, not only the Christian belief system but also more to the point – the medieval Christian monastic movement. For it is within the boundaries of the monastic life that acedia was noted to be most prevalent, as the monk battled the many scourges of the mind on his quest toward the purity of stillness.

We have seen in the past few years a resurgence of interest in the topic of acedia. Contemporary writers such as Kathleen Norris, Gabriel Bunge and Jean-Charles Nault to name a few, have presented candid, personal and scholarly advice on the issue, and its affect on the soul. There are countless numbers of authors though speaking from their varied professional and sometimes personal points of perspective, still offer the reader the medieval monastic assessments of acedia. For it is here we find the primary sources of material on acedia, otherwise known as the ‘eighth deadly sin.’ We have also the

development of positions around thoughts and demons, and passions, and how these affected one's spiritual health and wellbeing. There was the progression of the ideas and subsequent language determining the 'aliveness' and purpose of the soul. Though vice and virtue may now have become universal concepts, I question if the history of the nature of the soul is lost in today's world, beyond the doors of Catholicism.

We have Old Testament biblical references to acedia³⁰⁶ along with other ancient references, though of most importance is the material referencing the teachings of Evagrius. He defines the malaise as "despondency,"³⁰⁷ to be despondent, in contrast to being responsive and responsible. Although there were monks who preceded Evagrius who have also made mention of acedia, Gabriel Bunge suggests it was Evagrius that brought the thesis of acedia to light.³⁰⁸ Not only does he systemize the condition, as he passes on his 'knowledge,' he also speaks humbly of 'his own tormented experience of acedia.'³⁰⁹ It is out of these writings that spring forth many of the additional thoughts and concepts on the topic of acedia.³¹⁰ Bunge does not fail to realize the immense importance of this monk's contributions, and neither should we.

Although there will be other references to Evagrius for herein lies the historical foundation regarding the crux of acedia, Bunge makes a point about draining the historical details of acedia:³¹¹ "Since for us it is not a matter of giving an exhaustive historical description of the phenomenon 'acedia' but of exploring a specific spiritual teaching than can be of benefit to modern man, [sic.] it seems permissible to restrict

³⁰⁶ Often noted, and now commonly known and referred to in Psalm 91:6 is "the destruction that wasteth at noonday."

³⁰⁷ Bunge, *Despondency, The Spiritual Teachings of Evagrius Ponticus on Acedia*. (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, , 2011), 18.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 18, 19.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Ibid.

ourselves to the writing of Evagrius.”³¹² Though I won’t be restricting myself solely to the writings of Evagrius, I do agree for the purpose of this research, it is not essential to exhaust historical minutiae, but rather bring to light the consequences of this rude and raucous demon, and how it may be affecting our modern world. Particularly, how acedia may have rooted itself within our contemporary psyche, as we consider its 17th century etymology: ‘*the absence of care*.’³¹³

It is noted that many of the details of Evagrius’ life and his writings are difficult to piece together for evidence has been destroyed and his writings most likely tampered with as they have been handed down for generations and through many translations.³¹⁴ We know he lived a short life relative to today’s standards, (c.345-399) and as a result of some ‘scandalous’ event combined with an almost fatal illness he found himself ‘banished to the desert’ as a monk in mid-life.³¹⁵ It is important to note he was an astute, genius ‘psychologist’ with formidable powers of observation. Bunge comments: “Evagrius owes his unusual knowledge of the human soul to solitary introspection and to innumerable confessions of the heart.”³¹⁶ Evagrius had but one goal as a monk: purity of heart.³¹⁷ Why is this important and what relationship does it have to acedia? And demons? Bunge states:

Evagrius’ justly famous ‘psychology’ has one aim only: to make the human being capable of loving again, and thereby capable of God. But this is not possible without overcoming the distortion of human existence and the passions that kill love. In turn, this overcoming is not possible without a specific knowledge of the working mechanisms of these passions and of their accomplices, the demons.³¹⁸

³¹²Ibid.

³¹³ Various searches dealing with the etymology of the word acedia, fashions its development out of 17th century Greek. ‘A,’ meaning without, *kedia*, meaning care. Kathleen Norris also makes reference to this etymology. Norris, Kathleen, *Acedia & me – A Marriage, Monks, and a Writer’s Life*, (Penguin Group U.S.A, Inc. 2009) 3. The idea will be further developed in later sections of this chapter.

³¹⁴Bunge, 12.

³¹⁵Ibid., 14.

³¹⁶Ibid., 16.

³¹⁷Ibid., 17.

³¹⁸Ibid.

As a result of Evagrius' work, the understanding of acedia is steeped in early Christian monasticism, as the *malaise* became rooted as a profound disdain to the monk's way of life, a 'demon' that threatens the mind with compulsion.

Worldview

It is important that a phenomenon be understood in its primary context. As we address it from within the context of its particular worldview, it allows for personal contextual movement, as we come to understand relative factors of the phenomenon that may affect us. If people understood the context in which the phenomenon of acedia is discovered, there is opportunity to correlate the disease within the context of our own lives.

Of significance from the Christian mantle, is a relationship with God, and the healing grace of God's Power, as it relates to temptation. As daunting as it may be, we need to ask if this language can be transferable to the present day, even to the vernacular of secularism. For we all have a mind, and we are all at some point led into temptation. Noted by contemporary author of *Acedia and me*, Kathleen Norris: "The early Christian monks taught that every person has a primary temptation, or 'bad thought' that is likely to cause trouble in one's life. This makes sense to me. When I start to go off track, acedia is usually the root cause of the problem."³¹⁹ We strive to understand our 'reality,' and 'being,' 'purpose,' and self, and Self; and authenticity, and integrity, and inherent worth and wisdom regardless of the shape of our faith lens.

³¹⁹Kathleen Norris, *A Conversation with Kathleen Norris*, Spiritual Practice, Resources for Spiritual Journeys, website: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/books/features/view/18373/a-conversation-with-kathleen-norris> (accessed December 25, 2018).

The medieval Christian monastic viewpoint, particularly that of Evagrius' interpretations, and subsequent scholars such as John Cassian and Thomas Aquinas, offers historical data that is based not only on personal experience, but also extensive years of observation, reflection, and scholarly application, as a predominant philosophy. These studies offer us a legacy of both spiritual and psychological therapies from which we can still presently benefit from, as compulsion can be referred to both our spiritual and psychological identities. Norris observes: "Nowadays the people who work in 'spiritual formation' or counseling are likely to have education and training in psychology; some are psychiatrists."³²⁰

Regardless of our various faith perspectives, in understanding acedia's trajectory, it becomes evident that it is not solely a 'Christian' disease, even though systemized within a Christian context. The key healing facets involve a reverent regard toward solitude and silence. We are witnessing a percentage of our society turning toward 'mindfulness' as a means of practicing clarity of mind. It might be wise to consider not only the 'demons' that could potentially cause obstruction along the way, regardless of belief systems, but also the healing components that can be contextualized and re-ordered depending on one's given framework of faith. For this, we need to consider not only the historical Christian worldview, but also specifically the medieval life of the monastic. For as Norris states, 'monastic spiritual practice,' offers 'stability to an unstable world.'³²¹

For some, revisiting the ancient lore of monastic life and the impediments and dangers that potentially thwart spiritual development may not appear high on the list of contemporary reading material for both spiritual or psychological well being. On the

³²⁰Ibid.

³²¹Ibid.

other hand, there does not appear to be another dominant historical approach in which to name a convergent or divergent line of thinking. Current research of contemporary authors – whether it be the philosophy of Charles Taylor³²² or the psychotherapy of David MacQuarrie³²³ to name a few, still reference the value of the medieval monastic philosophy, choosing to adapt these historical norms as a springboard into their contemporary arguments. Such investigation may lead to a convergent or divergent line of thought, however their references still remain rooted within the primary medieval discoveries of acedia.

Regardless of the generation of new ideas, the clues that may foster innovative approaches to the disease are found rooted in medieval Christian monasticism as its primary worldview, and serves as our point of entry, for the monastics have honed their craft for over sixteen hundred years;³²⁴ their wisdom continues to offer us the means in which to secure a healthy mind. To bring their teachings into the contemporary light offers us new possibilities and opportunities for growth in many areas. Understanding the ground of acedia may help us to manifest new foreground when considering the workings of depression for example, or suicide. However, before understanding how the soul may be afflicted with acedia, it is important to first lay some groundwork as to the nature of the soul.

³²²Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, (U.S.A.:The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007) to be subsequently referenced in the chapter.

³²³David MacQuarrie, *Acedia: The Darkness Within*, (Bloomington, IN.,U.S.A.: AuthorHouse, 2012) to be subsequently referenced in the chapter.

³²⁴Norris, *Conversation with Norris*, inspired by Norris' remark: "And they've been doing it for seventeen hundred years."

The nature of the soul

Preliminaries

The word ‘soul’ these days is often used very loosely to describe many ‘things,’ without consideration to the immensity of purpose that is designated to the soul. We hear of ‘soul’ used to describe marketing strategies such as that of a compact car or to enhance the possibility of a ‘soulful’ and enchanted evening with a favourite ‘soul mate.’ As we consider how the nature of soul may be affected with spiritual ailments, it is essential to understand the ways in which the soul actually functions. Again, speaking to the Christian worldview, and to establish a fixed point of reference, taking into consideration the teachings of Evagrius on acedia, it is wise to first consider his testimonies regarding the nature of the soul.

Robert E. Sinkewicz, professor of Eastern Christian studies at the University of Toronto, and author of *Evagrius Ponticus – The Greek Ascetic Corpus* offers an illuminating translation of the body of work written by Evagrius. Sinkewicz does inform the reader that “although most of the surviving works of Evagrius of Pontus have been known in the West for almost two centuries, there is still no complete English translation for the entire corpus.”³²⁵ And, “Indeed, for some works there is no English translation at all.”³²⁶ Similar to the challenges facing biblical scholarship and interpretation there are the possibilities of writings being ‘tainted,’ along with challenges of discerning the authenticity of ‘authorship.’³²⁷ Nonetheless, with the aid of several centuries of key translations, along with his own scholarly interpretations, Sinkewicz presents a

³²⁵Robert E. Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus, The Greek ascetic Corpus* (Oxford, UK, NY.: University Press, 2003) viii.

³²⁶Ibid.

³²⁷Ibid.

condensed and thorough translation of Evagrius' major works, some for the first time.³²⁸

He offers an in-depth introduction and explanation to each of the chapters overseeing the various themes per chapter, so the reader can avoid falling into the translation headfirst.

We are introduced to Evagrius' style of writing that was "for the most part not systematic in their presentation of a teaching on the ascetic life, but rather are composed of short sentences grouped around individual themes or of more detailed and extended discussions of particular topics."³²⁹ Key points thus become evident while in conversation with Evagrius as we search for clues that provide us with the details that are pertinent to the sustainability of a still mind. However, this style of writing also presents challenges for research, as evidence needs to be minutely compiled, with details acquiescing with each other, which is not always the case with Evagrius' texts.

There are also contradictions in some of his arguments, especially as it relates to the nature of 'demon,' and 'thought.' At times they are viewed as separate, other times they are considered to be one and the same. For example: "Beyond each thought there stood a demon at work, to the extent that Evagrius would frequently use the terms 'thought,' 'demon,' and 'evil spirit' interchangeably."³³⁰ Sinkewicz explains "the primary focus of the *Eulogios*"³³¹ and how:

For Evagrius, the 'thoughts' stand as the symbol of the old self formed by the world of the dominant society and imbued with the sin of Adam. The monk takes an agonistic stance towards the thoughts: he must struggle with them and against them in order to effect a profound reformation of the inner self and the construction of a new subjectivity.³³²

³²⁸Ibid., ix.

³²⁹Ibid., xxi.

³³⁰Ibid., xxv.

³³¹Ibid., 21.

³³²Ibid.

And here we have division between the idea of demon and thought: “Further, the monk must beware of the mysterious forces of the demons that lurk in the shadows of all his thoughts.”³³³ We need to arrive at a reasonable conclusion given these incongruent statements of what we may consider to be ‘demon’ or ‘thought.’ Allowing some space between the two, I would imagine ‘demon’ to be an actual source of evil energy itself – personified – not frayed or altered through the passages of time or history, evil as a pure thing if you will.

Whereas thought becomes disruptive when ‘demon’ becomes one’s own: tempered to occasion, experience, situation and relationship. Thought becomes specifically behavioural and destructive according to our susceptibilities and circumstances. Dr. Jean-Claude Larchet is an “Orthodox patrologist, and theologian, holds doctorates in Humanities, Theology and Philosophy.”³³⁴ He borrows from the memory of St. Maximus: “Evil is the mismanagement of the innate faculties’ action toward their end and absolutely nothing else. Additionally, evil is the irrational movement of the natural faculties toward something other than the end, according to an erroneous judgment.”³³⁵ Regardless, either one – ‘demon,’ or ‘thought’ – may offer up temptation as an unyielding path of descent toward the demise of the soul. However, I do question if the language of antiquity plays a role in our lack of present day understanding of the issue of acedia.

Noted historically, many of these monks suffered extreme conditions to rid themselves of ‘demons.’ For example: “When Evagrius was tempted by fornication, he spent the entire night praying while standing naked in a cistern of water in mid-winter,

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ Dr. Jean-Claude Larchet, *Therapy of Spiritual Illnesses, An Introduction to the Ascetic Tradition of the Orthodox Church, Volume One (of three volumes)*, (Canada: Alexander Press, 2000), back cover.

³³⁵ Ibid., 67.

and on another occasion when he was tormented by a spirit of blasphemy he spent forty days in the open air till his body was covered with vermin.”³³⁶ One has to wonder how these pervasive types of behaviours actually accented true asceticism – it begs the question as to how we are to relate to these drastic measures in today’s contemporary world as we seek entry into a life of contemplation.

Despite the harshness of what was perhaps an experimental approach to combat temptation, Sinkewicz nonetheless speaks of how Evagrius’ thinking was “highly ordered in its understanding of the ascetic life”³³⁷ and how he offered teachings “as a progression of stages that the monk must pass through in order to attain the ultimate goal of the knowledge of God.”³³⁸ Such teachings were only offered when the novice was ready to receive them as part of his vocational development.

Sinkewicz also points to the clarity of Evagrius’ mission and how ‘*Hesychia*’ is the “principal topic of *Foundations*, and *Eulogios*,”³³⁹ two ‘treatises’ dealing with the initiate stages of ‘a monk’s training.’ The author has translated *Hesychia* as “ ‘stillness or as ‘the practice of stillness; it refers to a state of calm or tranquility, resulting from the avoidance of all external circumstances that might upset the internal balance and equanimity of the mind.’ ”³⁴⁰ And how such a practice ‘for the new initiate’ must be “pursued and protected.”³⁴¹ Furthermore, in order to maintain such an equilibrium of mind, of the utmost importance is “the withdrawal from all circumstances that give rise to anxieties, worries and concerns: the ascetic must seek a life free from anxieties, what

³³⁶Sinkewicz, xx.

³³⁷Ibid., xxi.

³³⁸Ibid.

³³⁹xxii.

³⁴⁰Ibid.

³⁴¹Ibid.

Evagrius calls *amerimnia*, a close synonym for *hesychia*.³⁴² Evagrius' teachings lead us more toward what may affect the soul, as opposed to lengthy descriptions of the nature of soul itself.

I mention all of this for, from the very onset of this text, we are warned of the danger acedia presents to the monk, novice or otherwise: "He must be wary of the ever present danger of acedia that will inspire within him a kind of boredom, a feeling of the tedium of ascetic practice and ultimately dissatisfaction with his cell and his current circumstances."³⁴³ Acedia is characterized often by its anxious and restless nature. Immediately following, we also read how acedia is dealt with: "Acedia is countered with the regularity of manual labour and the firm commitment to 'remain seated in one's cell.'"³⁴⁴ As lay people, how are we to interpret 'one's cell' today? As acedia is noted as such a danger, how does it affect the nature of the soul? In order to understand the question, we need to understand the make-up of the soul – from the medieval Christian monastic point of view.

The soul

Sinkewicz is quick to point out Evagrius' understanding of the soul, and how he aligns himself with Plato's concept of the soul. He doesn't appear to diminish or elaborate on this concept: "Evagrius accepts the commonplace Platonic tripartite division of the soul and locates the passion in the 'passionate part' with its two components, the concupiscible and the irascible. The passions derive their source material ultimately from the perceptions of the sensible world, and when they are active in the soul they impede

³⁴²Ibid.

³⁴³Ibid., xxiii

³⁴⁴Ibid.

the mind in its natural activity of spiritual knowledge.”³⁴⁵ As we address the nature of the soul in relation to acedia we read how Evagrius “defines acedia as a relaxation or loss of the soul’s tension.”³⁴⁶ We are informed that what is meant by this is “a loss of a sense of commitment or dedication to the goal of the ascetic life and the exercises necessary to reach that goal.”³⁴⁷ As ‘dedication to the goal’ represents a call to vocation, how can we contextualize these statements in today’s world, as many seek to address the question of their own vocation and purpose; in other words: who am I? To demonstrate how the psychology of monks can help us improve the well being of our spiritual lives today let us turn to contemporary author Dennis Okholm.

Okholm is a professor of theology, and a former minister of the Presbyterian Church for 28 years; most recently ordained as an Anglican priest. He too describes the nature of the soul as ‘tripartite,’³⁴⁸ ‘borrowed’ from the Platonic philosophy. A monk’s journey is “twofold,” filled only with a life striving virtue, which he names as the active life, and a life of prayer, which is the contemplative life.³⁴⁹ Okholm expresses the historical John Cassian: “the monk seeks ‘purity of heart,’ which is penultimate and proximate to the ultimate and post-mortem goal of ‘the Kingdom of God.’”³⁵⁰ Even a non-believer can hope for peace within, and peace on Earth. To live out this life the three parts of the soul must intertwine to work in harmony.

Okholm describes the two first parts of the soul as those which give rise to the passions – desires in the body. We experience this as an “appetitive part where gluttony,

³⁴⁵ Ibid., xxv.

³⁴⁶ Ibid., 72.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ Dennis Okholm, *Dangerous Passions, Deadly sins, - Learning from the Psychology of Ancient Monks*, (MI., U. S.A.: Brazos Press, 2014), 182.

³⁴⁹ Ibid., 181.

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

lust and greed thrive.”³⁵¹ Okholm reminds us the first part calls us to learn about ‘abstinence and moderation.’³⁵² He then describes the second part of the tripartite; the emotional seat. Here we find: “anger, sadness, (*tristitia*,) and despondency (*acedia*).”³⁵³ Finally, he addresses the third part – the treasure of the soul, relegated to ‘the highest part – the realm of the Spirit.’ This is the home of ‘courage, patience, and meekness.’ He notes *acedia* actually ‘sits on a tension point between parts two and three.’

This treasure is where we find the ‘logistikon’ – the intellect of the soul. The breeding ground for vainglory, pride and envy.³⁵⁴ An important distinction is made here:

Insight and knowledge are sought at this level. We humans are essentially mind or intellect (somewhere between the Triune God and animal existence), and our natural state is to be in prayer – in the contemplation of God. It is this (the contemplation of God) from which the *nous* (the intellect, sic.) has fallen such that we must regain this ‘knowledge’ to be what we were intended to be.³⁵⁵

Okholm assures us the ‘passionless’ state known as *apatheia* is imaginable: “an inner tranquility of the soul – a feeling of deep peace that makes undistracted prayer possible,”³⁵⁶ as opposed to the ‘restlessness,’ ‘the extreme states of anxiety,’ and ‘vagabond’ nature that Gabriel Bunge describes³⁵⁷ when having fallen to the temptation of demons. We must find our way back to reasoning with humility, as a practical wisdom – what Aristotle named as *phronesis*. For here lies the promise that our quest for spiritual renewal can be cultivated with joy! It is here we are called to become – as we face the *Imago Dei*. We also see *phronesis* as part of the endgame for the practical theologian as we seek practical wisdom and the possibility of transformation in the design of new

³⁵¹ Ibid.

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ Ibid., 183.

³⁵⁷ Bunge, 67-70.

practices geared toward the enhancement in the contemporary context of our spiritual and religious lives.

Similarly, revisiting Evagrius, Sinkewicz shares that “Evagrius will assign most demonic thoughts to the two passible parts of the soul, the concupiscible, and the irascible.”³⁵⁸ A lengthy but noteworthy summation from Evagrius’ *Praktikos*, this passage provides the reader with details of the various complexities of vice and virtue as they are assigned to the individual parts of the soul ending with the soul’s ultimate mission: justice.

If according to Plato the soul is taken to be tripartite, prudence is the virtue of the rational part, gentleness and courage that of the irascible part, temperance and abstinence that of the concupiscible part, and justice, liberality and magnanimity that of the entire soul. The vice of the rational part is folly, that of the irascible part is irascibility and cowardice, that of the concupiscible part is licentiousness and intemperance, that of the entire soul is injustice, servility, and pusillanimity. Prudence is the virtue of the rational part, which prepares those who are striving for happiness. Gentleness is the virtue of the irascible part, according to which they are moved with difficulty by anger. Courage is the virtue of the irascible part, according to which they can hardly be terrified by fears concerning death. Temperance is the virtue of the concupiscible part, according to which they are without desires for the enjoyments of base pleasures. Abstinence is the virtue of the concupiscible part, according to which they restrain by reason the desire that impels them to base pleasures. Justice is the virtue of the soul that distributes proportionately. Liberality is the virtue of the soul that is lavish unto the good. Magnanimity is the virtue of the soul, according to which one is able to bear good and bad fortune, honour and dishonour.³⁵⁹

As the dimensions of the soul become united, we have the pinnacle of the servant’s call – humility:

Humility is a thankful acknowledgement of God, a true recognition of one’s nature, a forceful confession of one’s weakness, a fortress for love, a refuge from hatred, an unfallen acropolis, a parting of the diabolic waves, flight over the snares of the enemy, the natural overthrowing of Satan, a pleasing life, praise of enemies, a philosophy provided by God, and true friendship with wisdom.³⁶⁰

³⁵⁸Sinkewicz, 138.

³⁵⁹Ibid., 260.

³⁶⁰Ibid., 65.

To be humble, meek, and to recognize the integrity of our authentic selves, as we are called to serve God's work is the antipode of acedia. Let us now turn to examine acedia's history and trajectory.

History and trajectory

Gabriel Bunge, "a Russian Orthodox priest and a schemamonk of the Russian Orthodox Church living in a hermitage in Switzerland,"³⁶¹ has also done extensive research on the Christian 'desert monk - psychologist' whom we have come to know as Evagrius. Bunge's presentation is clear, reasonably understood and presented with sound theology. In his book *Despondency, The Spiritual Teachings of Evagrius Ponticus on Acedia*, he focuses on the origins of Evagrius' understanding of 'despondency.' "Now, precisely what does Evagrius understand by *despondency*? One definition will lead us forward: 'You will not be afraid...of the assault of the noonday demon': The noonday demon, it is said, is the demon of *acedia*."³⁶² The word 'despondency'³⁶³ used by Evagrius as demonstrated in Bunge's works provokes an understanding of failure to respond and to take responsibility for who we are, and ignores the meaning of our mission: who are we called to care for?

Another key historical figure that refers to acedia as a demon is John Cassian. Cassian, also a Christian monk and theologian, lived in the same era as Evagrius, (c.360-435) and was one of his students. Cassian is best known for two major spiritual works:

³⁶¹ Bunge, back cover.

³⁶² Ibid., 46.

³⁶³ Ibid. Despondency was the definition that Evagrius' applied to what we now identify as acedia.

the Conferences and the Institutes,³⁶⁴ one dealing with the bearings of the monastic life, the other about the purifying of one's heart.³⁶⁵ From the Institutes of John Cassian we find the section 'The Spirit of Acedia – From the Institutes of John Cassian.'³⁶⁶ Here we find both demon and Psalm references again: "Lastly, there are some of the elders who declare that this is the 'midday demon' spoken of in the ninetieth Psalm."³⁶⁷ So what is the relevance of the imagery of a demon when speaking of acedia?

The concentration on demons I believe to be a source of energy, personification, an image of 'bad thought.' Do not fear bad thought, says the psalmist, and says Evagrius. Bunge offers some insight into the connection between demons and thoughts:

The anchorites, on the other hand, who have given up not only material things, but largely also association with others, are tempted mostly by 'thoughts,' that is, by all the images, representations, and so forth that are inevitably left behind in their memories, not only of material things but also of inter-human connections and their problems. These 'thoughts' or memories represent the passions in their purest form, so to speak, detached from any direct concrete occasion. Evagrius declares pertinently that this struggle, 'man against man,' is by far the toughest, since no human being can be as malicious as a demon.³⁶⁸

This passage would lead one to think that demons are thoughts. I introduce Margaret Funk, O.S.B and her reference to Cassian.

Funk refers to Cassian's acedia as a 'thought about a thought.' She also links the idea of thought as a demon: "Cassian's teaching on acedia identifies it as a secondary thought rather than just 'a thought,' because it is a thought about a thought: Why am I doing all this? Why should I do this hard work on the spiritual journey? The psalmist

³⁶⁴ John Cassian, *Conferences and the Institutes*, http://desertfathers.blogspot.ca/2010/11/john-cassianconferences-and-institutes_24.html (accessed August 17, 2014).

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ John Cassian *The Spirit of Acedia the Institutes of John Cassian*. <http://www.pathsoflove.com/acedia/cassian-acedia.html> (accessed August 17, 2014).

³⁶⁷ Ibid., Chapter I, 3.

³⁶⁸ Bunge, 24.

refers to this thought as the ‘noonday devil...fear the terrors, etc.’³⁶⁹ Referring to Cassian’s idea of secondary thought being associated with acedia, if the primary thought is ‘I don’t care,’ could the following thought be a rude admonishment against one’s spiritual and moral life? I.e. I don’t care, and I don’t care that I don’t care.’

We have more clarification from contemporary author, and physician - psychotherapist Dave MacQuarrie. In his publication *Acedia: The Darkness Within (and the darkness of Climate Change)* he quotes Joest (2004). In keeping to the aforementioned worldview, Joest references Evagrius: “With *acedia* especially, Evagrius emphasized that the demons ‘act without intermediaries. What Evagrius means by this is that they fight by means of the thoughts [*logismoi* or bad thoughts]’ (p. 131)”³⁷⁰ *Logismoi* is what defines the compilation of the thoughts that Evagrius speaks of.³⁷¹ This suggests that Evagrius is of the mind that thoughts are transmitted by demons, so indeed they are separate organisms, bad thought created by the presence of an evil force, ‘acting without intermediaries.’ We find a mild contradiction of understanding in the primary source translated by Sinkewicz.

Sinkewicz notes in the introduction to his chapter covering Evagrius’ *thoughts*, that each and every vice, with ‘exception to sadness,’ include some ‘attachment to pleasure.’³⁷² He goes on to describe a variety of experiences when ailing with a particular vice, including physical manifestations that may occur when the demon is conquered. Testimony differs – though perhaps presented with the intention of the same outcome –

³⁶⁹ Mary Margaret Funk, *Thoughts Matter*, (NY: Continuum, 1998) 94.

³⁷⁰ MacQuarrie, 42.

³⁷¹ *Logismoi* is not only ‘a bad thought,’ but is accompanied with a five-step process as indicated on the Orthodox Wiki website. <https://orthodoxwiki.org/Logismoi> (Retrieved April 19, 2019.) This would include the initial ‘assault’ on a ‘person’s mind.’ Followed by interaction, as one begins to ‘dialogue’ with the thought. Subsequently, there is ‘consent, defeat, and obsession.’ As important as it is to pursue the historical elements of acedia, to go into the full depth of description to characterize *logismoi* might fall under the dangers of going to far astray with historical detail. I would, however invite further thought, discussion or research on the system and how it relates to acedia. Particularly how the mid-point of consent plays as a backdrop to acedia’s anxiety and restlessness.

³⁷² Sinkewicz, 142.

when Sinkewicz details the ‘affect of demonic thought.’³⁷³ “First of all, Evagrius explains, the demons cannot act directly upon the human soul, but must do so through the intermediary of mental representations or *noēmata*.”³⁷⁴ In other words, through something that is perceived.

Despite the contrasting testimony, by intermediaries or not, if vices are associated with pleasure, are we talking the senses? Confirms Sinkewicz’s translation of Evagrius’ *Praktikos*: “The passions are naturally set in motion by the senses.”³⁷⁵ The variations on a theme are complicated, especially if we are void of historical understanding of language, concepts, and dogma. Sinkewicz breaks down the course of action: “All the demonic thoughts introduce into the soul mental representations of sensible objects, impressed by these, the mind carries about within itself the forms of those objects; and then, from the object in question, the mind recognizes the demon which made its approach.”³⁷⁶ This would imply that there is cognizance of the nature of these images – for those who are properly trained and disciplined.

Bunge introduces the word ‘passion’: “In the texts here quoted, the discourse deals mostly with passions, thoughts, and demons. The thoughts are the carriers of the passions, and the demons are the authors of both. Without attempting to develop completely here the ‘demonology’ of the desert fathers, or that of Evagrius in particular, the following observations are presented for consideration.”³⁷⁷ Why is the distinction between ‘thought and demon’ so important? Bunge is insightful here:

As a pseudo-existence, evil has no continuous existence in itself, nor has the evil one. His wickedness is of a secondary nature, for ‘God has not created anything

³⁷³Ibid., 145.

³⁷⁴Ibid.

³⁷⁵Ibid., 104.

³⁷⁶Ibid., 154.

³⁷⁷Bunge, 26.

evil. Even ‘the devil is not evil by nature,’ but only on account of his misuse of freedom. Therefore, when we inveigh against the demons, for example in order to keep them from our neck during prayer, we do it not on account of their nature, but on account of their wickedness.

Evagrius draws the same distinction for sinful human beings. Man may be hateful on account of his ungodliness, as the psalm say; but as an image of God he is and always remains worth loving. Consequently, there can be no justified anger against a fellow human being.³⁷⁸

Both the passages of Sinkewicz and Bunge justify acedia as idolatry – a wilful choice – as opposed to the suffering of a depression, which in the simplest of contrasts, is not a chosen fate. Those with acedia most likely face some form of depression, caused by a lack of vocational fulfillment, but those who are depressed are not necessarily suffering with acedia. A misunderstanding often arises between the two and so deserves clarification, which will be covered in the following section. But first let us consider some of the many descriptions of acedia, and the possibility of acedia being a causality of identity crisis. Out of these highlights we segue into the topic of depression.

Descriptors, and as a causality of identity crisis

Bunge presents Evagrius’ acedia in the light of a contemporary world: “Progress in the spiritual life does not consist in what is understood today as ‘apathy!’”³⁷⁹ As we are able to consider acedia as a causality of identity crisis, we hear Bunge state that this ‘apathy’ ‘speaks of ‘depersonalization’: “Even more serious is the growing inability – hardly noticed as such – to become aware of one’s own personhood. We are indeed witnessing a far-reaching process of depersonalization which ultimately threatens modern

³⁷⁸Ibid., 27.

³⁷⁹Ibid., 43.

man himself in his very ‘being human.’”³⁸⁰ Pope Francis may agree, as he thought it relevant enough to make mention of it in the previously mentioned *Evangelii Gaudium*:

Others, because they have lost real contact with people and so depersonalize their work that they are more concerned with the road map than with the journey itself. Others fall into acedia because they are unable to wait; they want to dominate the rhythm of life. Today’s obsession with immediate results makes it hard for pastoral workers to tolerate anything that smacks of disagreement, possible failure, criticism, the cross.³⁸¹

These outcries leave me questioning whether acedia is so dangerous as to be a social and cultural contagion.

Bunge referring to John Cassian: “Our sixth combat is with what the Greeks call *acedia*, which we may term tedium or anxiety of the heart.”³⁸² This ‘tedium’ has the power to ultimately destroy the root of the Christian’s ideal of *agape*, as suggested by Dennis Okholm as he address the antithesis of acedia – *apatheia*: “*Agape* is the progeny of *apatheia*. *Apatheia* is the very flower of *ascesis*. *Ascesis* consists in keeping the commandments.”³⁸³ *Apatheia* is a state of being the contemplative strives for, which speaks to the heart of our true identity. Says Okholm: “More specifically, humility requires an *awareness* of our true nature.”³⁸⁴ I question acedia as a causality of an identity crisis, suffering from the lack of ‘awareness of our true nature,’ and the denial of our self. Herein lies the lack of humility.

Kathleen Norris, author of, *Acedia & me – A Marriage, Monks, and a Writer’s Life* too makes a statement about acedia’s danger regarding one’s identity as she points to Bunge:

³⁸⁰Ibid., 28, 29.

³⁸¹Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 25.

³⁸²Bunge, 45.

³⁸³Okholm, 23.

³⁸⁴Ibid., 176.

Disgust with life often has to do with the life one has chosen, and when the bad thought of acedia attacks one's very identity, it causes great pain. The Benedictine monk Gabriel Bunge has noted that doubts about the validity of one's vocation may start small, and only slowly creep into the consciousness. But 'with the passage of time [they] erode one's inner certainty, like constant dripping on a stone.'³⁸⁵

As we speak of identity crisis, anxiety, and depersonalization, there is a specific 'other' in which identity is constructed and parsed: our relationship with time.

Pope Francis expressed the concern that when pastoral leaders and lay people alike are asked to "undertake some apostolic work," that "they seek to avoid any responsibility that may take away from their free time."³⁸⁶ He notes:

That people feel an overbearing need to guard their personal freedom, as though the task of evangelization was a dangerous poison rather than a joyful response to God's love which summons us to mission and makes us fulfilled and productive. Some resist giving themselves over completely to mission and thus end up in a state of paralysis and acedia.³⁸⁷

He talks about how they lack 'motivation, become tense, burdensome and dissatisfied,' "even leading at times to illness."³⁸⁸ Noting the aforementioned comment by Pope Francis about waiting, here is Kenneth C. Russell's argument:

Acedia is characterized by a de-temporalization, which lifts the person above the concrete reality of daily life into dreams of a better place and a more ideal situation. The disconnectedness of acedia sets the individual adrift like an untethered balloon. Its victims expend all their energy in escaping from the burden of time. They wander from one thing to another without ever buckling down to anything.³⁸⁹

To be 'like an untethered balloon escaping from the burden of time' is indicative of the anxiety and restlessness often accompanying acedia as mentioned by Cassian. Does this

³⁸⁵Norris, Kathleen, *Acedia & me – A Marriage, Monks, and a Writer's Life*, (New York, U.S.A. Penguin Group U.S.A. Inc., 2009), 148, 149.

³⁸⁶Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 25.

³⁸⁷*Ibid.*

³⁸⁸*Ibid.*

³⁸⁹Kenneth C. Russell, *Healing the Heart, Desert Wisdom for a Busy World*, (Canada: Novalis, Inner Journey Series, 1993), 71.

anxiety have the power to disturb the ‘temporality’ of self, thus creating the forum for a crisis? Russell offers the counterpoint: “When a hermit stays in his cell and does the work that is in front of him, he takes up the burden of time.”³⁹⁰ He is in relationship with, engaged with time. Whereas Evagrius’ victim is ‘despondent’ – non-responsive, or disconnected from cell, and self – lack of relationship or dysfunctional relationship with time defines anxiety.

This may be preceded by what Russell refers to as a “de-eternalization,”³⁹¹ as one falls prey to the sadness that he speaks of in reference to Cassian: “Sadness is essentially a stalling in the temporal. It is a slackening of the forward thrust which gives meaning to life. It is a loss of perspective or a ‘de-eternalization’ which drowns the individual in the miseries, discomforts, and disappointments of the present.”³⁹² Russell reminds us that Cassian “believes that sadness is properly provoked by regret for our sins, one yearning for a perfection which continually eludes us, and by our desire for a beatitude which is not yet ours.”³⁹³ We are at risk of becoming ‘discontent.’³⁹⁴ And such discontent could lead to acedia.

Referring to an online etymological reference of ‘despondency’ will format the next argument. Though Evagrius lived in fourth century AD, the etymology of the word despondency only traces back to the 1670’s. Quoting the online Etymology Dictionary:

Despondent condition, a sinking or dejection of spirit from loss of hope or courage in affliction or difficulty, 1670s, from Latin *despondere* ‘to give up, lose, lose heart, resign, to promise in marriage’ (especially in phrase *animam despondere*, literally ‘give up one’s soul’...*Despondency* is a loss of hope sufficient to produce a loss of courage and a disposition to relax or relinquish

³⁹⁰Ibid.

³⁹¹Ibid., 63.

³⁹²Ibid.

³⁹³Ibid.

³⁹⁴Ibid.

effort, the despondent person tending to sink into spiritless inaction. *Despair* means a total loss of hope; *despondency* does not. [Century Dictionary, 1897]³⁹⁵

It appears to be a refinement of a set of abstract ideas, but nonetheless still pointing to a horrific loss: the loss of soul, the loss of self – causality of identity crisis? As the nature of despair is described I now turn to Christopher B. Barnett's work *From Despair to Faith – The Spirituality of Søren Kierkegaard*. Though acedia is never mentioned in the text, I question whether Kierkegaard's despair is the dark path that leads to acedia's ultimate consequence: suicide. Or are they one and the same? Is moving from despondency to despair part of acedia's trajectory? Can the self-awareness of acedia present the sufferer with a precipice of choice?

Of note is Barnett's leading contingency toward Kierkegaard's description of self, as he introduces Kierkegaard's "pseudonymous treatise *The Sickness unto Death*."³⁹⁶ As Anti-Climacus, Kierkegaard sets out to orient the reader toward the calamities of despair as infractions against the self and in turn self-realization, and how such despair is sharpened as sin. Noted as a re-occurring theme is the correlation between self and aesthetics, listing the crux of the challenge lay not in the 'role' of the aesthetic, but rather 'how' the self is relative to the aesthetic: which would determine an iconic or idolatrous relationship with self.³⁹⁷

Bunge informs us that indeed vices are rooted in idolatry of the self:

Acedia is a vice, a *passion*, from which man *suffers* in the truest sense of the word, as from all passions or diseases of the soul. And, like all passions, it has its secret, invisible roots in self-love (*philautia*), that all-hating passion, which manifests itself in a thousand ways as a state of being stuck in oneself that renders one incapable of love. Its secret driving forces are anger, aggressiveness, and that

³⁹⁵ Online etymology dictionary, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/despondence> (accessed April 5th, 2014).

³⁹⁶ Christopher, B. Barnett, *From Despair to Faith – the Spirituality of Søren Kierkegaard*, (U.S.A.: Fortress Press, 2014), 7.

³⁹⁷ Ibid. 78.

irrational desire which distorts all creation in a selfish way. Because it is unnatural, this wayward desire cannot, in its essence, find fulfillment.³⁹⁸

Facing the choice of shaping one's moral compass, as we view acedia as a sin, how is it that identity crisis is to be defined? I'm in favour of Barnett's take of Kierkegaard's reasoning as he investigates the nature of nature:

According to Kierkegaard, this question presses the onlooker to study nature more deeply, and, in turn, to reconsider the words of Jesus: 'No one can serve two masters.' These words, he points out prevent persons from merely dreaming about the lilies and the birds. Instead, they underline that the upshot of contemplation is a *krisis*, a decision to rest in God rather than in the world.³⁹⁹

As the 'secret of nature is revealed,'⁴⁰⁰ and we are contemplatively made conscious of the life and death cycle, we are presented with the choice of which to serve: God or 'mammon.'⁴⁰¹ Nature is the reflection of the wisdom we seek – iconic: acedia – idolatrous. We fear the 'loss of self.' In so doing we are at risk of destroying our relationship with Self – ironically and tragically, we stand to lose both.

Bunge too in a summation stipulates the potential consequence of the erosion of identity:

When we look back at what has been said up to now, it becomes clear in what the complex nature of despondency consists: it is the tangible expression of a deep-seated inner *disintegration* of the human personality as a consequence of sin. For this reason, Evagrius in one place describes despondency striking with these words:

While the other demons, like the rising or setting sun, affect only one part of the soul, the 'noonday demon' is in the habit of embracing the entire soul and of suffocating the intellect.' This 'suffocating' of the intellect, which is in fact where the image of God and the capacity for God are found – in other words, the *person*, indicates quite clearly the psychological effect of despondency.⁴⁰²

³⁹⁸Bunge, 133.

³⁹⁹Barnett, 114.

⁴⁰⁰Ibid.

⁴⁰¹Ibid.

⁴⁰²Bunge, 60.

Acedia as a causality of identity crisis, we grieve not the loss of our truth, our spirit, our natural being, the image in which we are created. We mourn not the loss of sorrow, or empathy or compassion – or care. We are thus void of our natural self. Aquinas would agree.

Aquinas tackled the topic of acedia in what is known as the *Summa Theologiae*. Written between 1265-1274, it is his most esteemed work covering the depth of Catholic philosophy. It became quite clear that as a result of appreciating ‘all human beings made to live in relationship with God,’⁴⁰³ that the possibility of being afflicted with acedia can affect all persons. He defines acedia as a vice that ‘opposes charity,’⁴⁰⁴ thus a sorrow, where a lack compassion and empathy develops, for oneself, and for the other; a lack of care. This immobilizes the soul. Borrowing from Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung’s research:

At its core, then, the moral life involves personal transformation. Vices, according to Aquinas, are the personal habits that thwart this transformation; virtues are the traits by which we take on the character of Christ.... This teleological picture of the moral life as a project of personal transformation stands behind Aquinas’s characterization of *acedia*.’ It counts as a vice because it threatens (from within) the process of human perfection and its *telos*, a relationship with God that Aquinas will call charity.⁴⁰⁵

DeYoung affirms that Aquinas exemplifies charity “primarily as a relationship with God.”⁴⁰⁶ And he too speaks of the senses and the intellect:

Sorrow can manifest itself as a passion (located in the sensitive appetite) or an aversion of the will (the intellectual appetite). In the latter case, it looks more like disgust or contempt than the emotion of sadness typically associated with the term. Aquinas will be concerned primarily with the movement of the intellectual appetite in his definition of *acedia*.⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰³Konyndyk DeYoung, 1.

⁴⁰⁴Ibid. 4.

⁴⁰⁵Ibid., 5.

⁴⁰⁶Ibid., 7.

⁴⁰⁷Ibid., 8, 9.

As Aquinas spoke of vices, and Bunge references vices as idolatry, reflecting on such underlines acedia as an idolatry of the self. Is this the ‘sorrow’ that is often mistaken for depression?

Acedia and depression

As we read testimony of authors such as Aquinas describing ‘sorrow’ it is not to be confused with sorrow, as in the sadness of depression, but rather a spiritual sorrow of the soul, where commitment is lacking, and as such the soul remains unfulfilled in his or her mission to serve God’s world. Sinkewicz translates the details of Evagrius’ passage in the *Eulogios*, clarifying the details of the ‘two types of joy and sadness.’⁴⁰⁸ In its simplest terms, there is the ‘demonic joy’⁴⁰⁹ that is evil’s delight when we are moved away by temptation, and the sorrow experienced by the ‘demon’ when we are not.

In turn, there is the joy experienced by the soul when fulfillment of nature is accomplished, and the sadness the soul experiences when misaligned and distracted from authentic purpose: “he who rejoices in injustice will lament in good will, and he who endures sadness in suffering unjustly will experience a radiant gladness, for the future will be the opposite of the present.”⁴¹⁰ These variants are to be determined as a means of discerning the true call of one’s soul. Specifically to acedia, “sadness is one who dwells over loss...a kinsman of acedia...”⁴¹¹ whereas joy “is the destruction of sorrow and thanksgiving for misfortunes...”⁴¹² the state of being that leads us to being a “partner in

⁴⁰⁸Sinkewicz, 142.

⁴⁰⁹Ibid., 34.

⁴¹⁰Ibid.

⁴¹¹Ibid., 35.

⁴¹²Ibid.

patience,”⁴¹³ and doubt the forbearer of humility. The ‘demon’s joy’ and the lack of the soul’s fulfillment can indeed appear to be ‘depression,’ but not as we would venture to name the depression that we so heavily medicate today.

Dr. Ryan Lamothe, a Professor of Pastoral Care and Counselling, argues: “That a revised concept that a revised concept of acedia can be helpful to differentiate between the lack of care that derives from depression and the lack of care that results from splitting off desire, need, and passion.”⁴¹⁴ He continues to explore the ‘etiology’ of acedia:

The traditional depiction of the etiology of acedia has been the devil, which is reinterpreted as the relational (developmental and cultural) dynamics that involve (a) a lack of recognition of the one’s desires and needs, (b) the submission of the person to the needs and desires of the powerful other, (c) the lack of mutual generation of experience that is meaningful, and (d) the fear of repairing relational disruptions. These dynamics are manifested in the felt lack of transference and the concomitant countertransference efforts to imagine and recognize the patient’s desires, needs, and passions.⁴¹⁵

Lamothe adds this distinction to his argument: “Given this brief survey, I define acedia as a lack of care and motivation for a recognized good. A person’s capacity for agency or will and his capacity to construct meaning are intact, but distorted, as a result of being unable to experience any desire or emotion toward the good.”⁴¹⁶ What we have here is a distinction between acedia and depression as opposed to a similarity. For those who are depressed, though they may be temporarily unmotivated or feel incapacitated toward good action, do not necessarily forgo an understanding of a ‘recognized good.’

Lamothe clarifies a significant difference between acedia and depression:

The etiology of depression is complex, but research has clearly identified physiological components that often respond well to medication. While acedia is

⁴¹³Ibid.

⁴¹⁴Ryan Lamothe, *An Analysis of Acedia*, Pastoral Psychology, (2007) 56:15-30, 26

⁴¹⁵Ibid.

⁴¹⁶Ibid.

similar in that there is a marked lack of desire or interest, there are no clear symptoms of insomnia, difficulty concentrating, or fatigue in acedia. Finally, there is no deep sense of worthlessness or even inappropriate guilt. More importantly, a depressed person will usually respond to medication, feeling more energetic and able to concentrate, while a slothful person will not experience any change in symptoms.⁴¹⁷

And he continues to note: “People who suffer from depression often find it difficult to muster any energy to care about themselves or others. A criterion of depression in the DSM-IV (1994) is ‘diminished interest or pleasure in all, or almost all, activities most of the day, nearly every day (p. 327).’”⁴¹⁸ In listing various symptoms of depression, such as ‘fatigue, and insomnia,’ to name but a few, the author indicates that there are accompanying feelings such as ‘worthlessness or inappropriate guilt.’ He further mentions how the “etiology of depression is complex,” though, that “research has clearly identified physiological components that often respond well to medication.”⁴¹⁹ Though acedia marks:

A similar lack of desire or interest, there are no clear symptoms of insomnia, difficulty concentrating, or fatigue in acedia. Finally, there is no deep sense of worthlessness or even inappropriate guilt. More importantly, a depressed person will usually respond to medication, feeling more energetic and able to concentrate, while a slothful person will not experience any change in symptoms.⁴²⁰

I waver with disagreement with Lamothe’s statement that there is no ‘deep sense of worthlessness or even inappropriate guilt’ when describing acedia. Given the denial of beauty, the anxiety, and the restlessness, I wonder if a question of worth makes the heart more susceptible toward acedia. That said Lamothe’s explanation is helpful in distinguishing between acedia and depression. Not to say that someone suffering with

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.,18

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.

⁴²⁰ Ibid.,18.

acedia cannot also suffer with depression, and vice-versa, which makes it even more difficult to dismantle.

He also asks: “One might wonder what would motivate a slothful person to seek therapy. Who would seek help if one is without care or indifferent?”⁴²¹ He continues his argument suggesting: “The very act of asking for help seems to suggest some level of grief or need that motivates a person. Perhaps what motivates a person has nothing to do with what she is slothful about, but something else she cares about.”⁴²² He cites an example of a person who began therapy as a result of experiencing the death of a child: “Her grief screened, for a time, the more pervasive lack of desire and motivation, as well as the lack of subjective and intersubjective meaningfulness.”⁴²³ Lamothe elaborates on the postmodern perceptions of the identity, as one reason why acedia may not be shaping the all of one’s character:

I accept modern renditions that point to the influence of dominant cultural narratives in extinguishing one’s desire and distorting one’s agency. Finally, distortion of the will and the corresponding lack of desire and emotion may be pervasive or partial/contextual and manifested in ennui, passivity, or busyness. In other words, acedia need not be considered solely in terms of a person’s character—shaping all his behavior and relationships—but rather as aspects of oneself, which fits with postmodern notions of the self (cf., Aron 1996; Mitchell 1993).⁴²⁴

This ‘notion of self’ as presented in our postmodern world, also serves as a supportive element toward the argument of acedia as a causality of identity crisis – the fragmented self.

Kathleen Norris’ take on the difference between acedia and depression is a bit simpler, and yet speaks to a similar comparison: “At a basic level, depression is an illness that will respond to medical intervention, and acedia is a temptation that may be resisted.

⁴²¹Ryan Lamothe, *An Analysis of Acedia*, Pastoral Psychology, (2007) 56:15-30, 26.

⁴²²Ibid.

⁴²³Ibid.

⁴²⁴Ibid.,18.

The big problem is trying to discern which affliction we're dealing with, and what we need to do about it. Being willing to seek help is always of primary importance."⁴²⁵ Norris makes this basic point: "One reason I am certain there is a difference between acedia and depression is that for monastic people depression is not a given, but acedia is. Everyone goes through it. As one Benedictine sister put it, acedia for a monk is as unfair, inopportune, and inevitable as acne for a teenager."⁴²⁶ She continues to share:

Another Benedictine commented that like acne, acedia can also leave permanent scars. Benedictines in charge of formation for new members know the importance of discernment in trying to determine whether someone is struggling with acedia, or suffering from depression. If it is the latter they do not hesitate to refer the person to a physician.⁴²⁷

And Norris also addresses the issue of discernment:

This matter of discernment is of concern to psychiatrists as well. In my book I cite a physician who worries about the danger of over-diagnosing mental illness, and medicating people who are not ill, but suffering from what he termed 'a normal sadness response' to loss. But he is also aware of the danger of overlooking what could be a treatable depression.⁴²⁸

With both of these testimonies we see there is difficulty determining the difference between acedia and depression.

In the medieval days of monasticism, as well as in today's monasteries there are teachers as well as the abbot or abbess to help the monk discern the difference between the two. Nonetheless it is noted that Evagrius offers this in the *Praktikos*: "All the generic types of thoughts fall into eight categories in which every sort of thought is included... Whether or not all these thoughts trouble the soul is not within our power, but

⁴²⁵ Kathleen Norris, *A Conversation with Kathleen Norris*, Spiritual Practice, Resources for Spiritual Journeys, website: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/books/features/view/18373/a-conversation-with-kathleen-norris>, accessed December 25, 2018.

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

⁴²⁸ Ibid.

it is for us to decide if they are to linger within us or not and whether or not they stir up the passions.”⁴²⁹ Though we may have spiritual and/or clinical guidance to help us sort out our acedia or depression, ultimately it is a choice we are faced with as to whether we choose to treat either disease – or not. As we look at the rise in suicides, we perhaps need to consider that a broader education of the disease of acedia be considered as part of this challenging epidemic.

Bunge offers a critical difference between psychology, as we know it today, and ‘classical’ psychology:

Meanwhile, free will stands opposed to all such machinations in that it *decides* whether we incline toward good or evil. The greatest difference between classical and modern psychology probably lies in the former’s heavy emphasis on free will. Like all classical antiquity, Evagrius does not know the modern concept of a ‘child,’ which for him counts only as a little adult. He therefore does not know, either, the problem of heredity, or of early childhood formation. For this reason, his portrait of the human being appears a free and responsible being with a wholly natural, that is, indestructibly created, goodness, which is a person’s existential reference to God. The entire goal of the demons is to warp and distort this goodness.⁴³⁰

Considering not that acedia has outgrown itself, but rather the possibility of the dangerous truth: that it continues to gain power – striking at the heart of the vulnerable across age ranges, ‘distorting the formation’ of those less informed, less prepared, creating crisis of identity, in both our personal selves, and in our world.

As we take a deeper look at both spiritual sorrow and acedia it is noted that both are aligned with anger. Notes from Evagrius’ *Praktikos* once again: “Sadness sometimes occurs through the frustration of one’s desires, or sometimes it follows closely upon anger.”⁴³¹ As we look back in this text, we see there are several references to anger and

⁴²⁹Sinkewicz, 98.

⁴³⁰Bunge, 39.

⁴³¹Sinkewicz, 98.

its link to acedia, demonstrated as a frustration for being where one is at, as desire fans the flame of an insatiable appetite. If left unchallenged, this anger is toxic leading to violence, against oneself, and the other as when it is denied, and projected outwardly. Which brings me to the impact of contemporary philosopher Charles Taylor: “Idolatry breeds violence.”⁴³² Acedia breeds violence. Violence breeds destruction. Destruction is perilous.

Let us now explore the introductory remarks of Taylor’s discourse *A Secular Age*,⁴³³ continuing with his address of acedia as part of his “account of the development of contemporary secularity,”⁴³⁴ in the 8th chapter – *The Malaises of Modernity* – of the same book.

Other voices

In the introduction, Taylor refines his argument and his curiosity about the undeniable changes reflected in today’s society.⁴³⁵ As he speak about experiences situating “a place of fullness to which we orient ourselves morally or spiritually, they can orient us because they offer some sense of what they are of: the presence of God, or the voice of nature, or the force which flows through everything, or the alignment in us of desire and the drive to form,”⁴³⁶ he suggests such experiences may serve to “help define a direction to our lives.”⁴³⁷ He also suggests such a ‘sense of orientation,’ has ‘its negative slope:’

⁴³²Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, (U.S.A.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007) 769.

⁴³³*Ibid.*

⁴³⁴*Ibid.*, 299.

⁴³⁵*Ibid.*, 25, Taylor presents his opening argument in Chapter 1 *The Bulwarks of Belief*, asking: “why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God in, say, 1500, in our Western society, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy, but even inescapable?”

⁴³⁶*Ibid.*, 6.

⁴³⁷*Ibid.*

Where we experience above all a distance, an absence, an exile, a seemingly irremediable incapacity ever to reach this place; an absence of power; a confusion, or worse, the condition often described in the tradition as melancholy, ennui, (the ‘spleen’ of Baudelaire). What is terrible in this latter condition is that we lose a sense of where the place of fullness is, even of what fullness could consist in; we feel we’ve forgotten what it would look like, or cannot believe in it any more. But the misery of absence, of loss, is still there, indeed, it is in some ways even more acute.⁴³⁸

Taylor’s reference to Baudelaire is about acedia. Capping the exhaustive list of definitions, I place here Norris’ extensive historical glimpse of the many terms in which acedia has come to be known as, including her mention of Baudelaire:

But acedia has been called by many names. To the ancient Greeks it was the black gall; to the fourth-century monks it was a vicious and tenacious temptation to despair. Petrarch called it the nameless woe, and Dante named it a sin. It became known to Robert Burton and others in the Renaissance as melancholy. In Shakespeare, it is the boredom of Richard III, arguably as responsible as ambition in triggering his monstrous violence, Jonathan Swift and Alexander Pope called it spleen; to Baudelaire, and to many writers in the years to follow, it was ennui. To Kierkegaard it was the soul turned into a Dead Sea, over which no bird can soar without falling to its death. To the nineteenth-century French, it was the *mal du siècle*, or the illness of the age. To twentieth-century playwrights – Chekhov, Ionesco, and Albee among them – it fuels the acrimony that underlies domestic relationships, making us suspect that relationship itself is absurd and unworkable. Acedia is the place where we wait for Godot, and it is the state of waiting. It is the fashionably negative pose of ironic detachment, of valuing life as ‘less than zero.’⁴³⁹

This wide-range of historic definitions offers reasonable support as to why it may be so difficult to define acedia. Where does that place us in the light of today’s maelstrom of acedia’s activity? Taylor offers his insights.

As Taylor speaks to “development of contemporary secularity,”⁴⁴⁰ he lays out his concept of what he terms as the ‘nova effect,’ along with the idea of a ‘buffered self.’

The ethic of freedom and order has arisen in a culture which puts at its centre a buffered self. This term, as I’ve been using it, has in fact a complex meaning. The

⁴³⁸Ibid.

⁴³⁹Norris, 46.

⁴⁴⁰Ibid., 299.

phenomenon has, as it were, objective and subjective sides. To be a buffered subject, to have closed the porous boundary between inside (thought) and outside (nature, the physical) is partly a matter of living in a disenchanted world.⁴⁴¹

Part of the focus of this disenchantment is notably “a sense of invulnerability,”⁴⁴² where: “the buffered self is no longer open, vulnerable to a world of spirits and forces which cross the boundary of the mind, indeed, negate the very idea of there being a secure boundary.”⁴⁴³ And though he is not defining this phenomenon of the buffered self as *acedia*, he does claim *acedia* as a precursor state: “There was indeed, a predecessor condition with some analogies to this one, and that was ‘melancholy,’ or ‘*acedia*.’”⁴⁴⁴ Taylor names *acedia* as a “specific condition, one might say, a spiritual pathology of the agent himself,”⁴⁴⁵ though he does not attribute *acedia* directly to the current disorder: “It cast no doubt on the ontic grounding of meaning. But this ontic doubt about meaning itself is integral to the modern malaise.” I disagree. I would suggest that today’s ‘modern malaise’ is a page out of the same book – the next chapter.

If I understand correctly, in simple terms, ontic describes what is, and ontological is about the nature of ‘the what is.’ Martin Heidegger’s *Being and Time* extensively highlights the role of care and its ‘beloved’ relationship to self, and home,⁴⁴⁶ as he reflects on the synonymous relationship between being and caring. Being, thus ‘what is,’ and care, being the ‘nature of what is?’ Therefore, ‘to be’ means to care. The ‘how’ we care would define the ‘nature.’ The aspects of the choice of sentient being determines form, the distinct its shape. For example, we care for animals would be form. The horse, or dog, or lion would be the shape.

⁴⁴¹Ibid., 300.

⁴⁴²Ibid.

⁴⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴⁴Ibid., 303.

⁴⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁴⁶Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, (U.S., UK., Australia: Blackwell Publishing, U.S., UK., 1962), 242.

If we are to reflect on Taylor's 'buffered self,' and a loss of meaning while also forging an abstract relationship with Heidegger's 'Dasein,' can we address meaning as care? Says Heidegger: "The existential condition for the possibility of 'the cares of life' and 'devotedness', must be conceived as care, in a sense which is primordial – that is ontological."⁴⁴⁷ He continues: "When fully conceived, the care-structure includes the phenomenon of Selfhood. This phenomenon is clarified by interpreting the meaning of care; and it is as care that *Dasein*'s totality of Being has been defined."⁴⁴⁸ According to Heidegger's argument, is it safe to say that if acedia has been defined as the absence of care, it is thus the absence of being?

While Taylor's arousing statement about 'the buffered self' is perhaps a metastasis of acedia's malignancy rather than a separate entity, Heidegger's statements reflect a sympathetic relevance, supporting 'uncaring' as perhaps the link between acedia and identity crisis. If there is no caring, there is no relationship, no intimacy. No other. No alterity. Thus crisis. We are reminded of Graham's argument in the previous chapter of how empathetic approaches foster initiatives that boost the opportunities for connection and care, as we become more aware of how alterity defines itself. We are also reminiscent of the previous chapter's definition of care, and how via both Heidegger⁴⁴⁹ and Noddings⁴⁵⁰ our relational provisions to care, and care as Being, and conscience itself define us.

Evagrius believed "the existence of evil is therefore not only secondary, but also finite."⁴⁵¹ If evil is finite, so is acedia, and healing is a possibility, though not necessarily

⁴⁴⁷Ibid., 244.

⁴⁴⁸Ibid., 370.

⁴⁴⁹Ibid. 320, 322, 323.

⁴⁵⁰Noddings, 14, 15, 16, 17.

⁴⁵¹Bunge, 26.

a probability. This is an indication of its danger, for the malaise maintains an air of unpredictability. The pathway to purity of heart is the ‘renunciation of our mindless thoughts,’ says Funk.⁴⁵² It has been historically established that acedia is caused by a demon and provokes bad thought. So as not to derail ourselves while delving into historical tidbits about demonology, best we stay on track with the idea of dealing with ‘bad thought.’ That said, wherein lies the danger of this bad thought? Part of the answer is in the character of the disease itself.

The list of qualifying characteristics for acedia as we have seen is nothing short of astounding: apathy, torpor, despondency, ennui, restlessness, sloth, laziness, sadness, sorrow, etc. Many of the authors researched share a similar vocabulary, and chose to describe acedia as a dark, fowl presence, corrupting the soul, but with each their own twist. MacQuarrie features the description of several authors. Though his description is exceptionally lengthy, I share it here, as there is no need to re-invent the wheel while describing the enormity of the illness. As with Norris’ description, this account provides us with an accurate summary detailing more than adequately the narrative of nuances we need to be made aware of while encapsulating acedia’s leading tendencies:

Concerning *acedia*, other authors indicate that most descriptions do not convey its complexity. Norris (2008) uses words such as apathy, boredom, and torpor, as well as escapism, commitment phobia, and enervating despair. Joest (2004) refers to ‘grief, rage, resignation, boredom, weariness, despair, disgust, and self-pity.’ (p. 135) Folsom (1984), in quoting John Cassian, (see below), uses descriptions such as ‘disgust...disdain and contempt...lazy and sluggish...unreasonable confusion; as well as ‘the children of *acedia* will be his constant companions: laziness, sleepiness, rudeness, restlessness, wandering about, instability both of mind and body, chattering and inquisitiveness’ (p. 233). Nault (2004), citing a source in French, notes: ‘*Acedia*...is a complex and contradictory phenomenon...It is a vice, a passion, which ‘blends frustration and aggressiveness in a particular way. It abhors what is there and fantasizes about what is not.’ (p. 240) Nault also suggests: ‘Moroseness, lassitude, dejection, sadness,

⁴⁵²Funk, 94.

discouragement, disgust with life, melancholy, boredom, depression...The list could continue indefinitely.’(p. 248) Further, he indicates that: “one of the daughters of *acedia*, according to St. Thomas, is pusillanimity [contemptible fearfulness]’ (p. 251). Many other words presented in Greek and Latin, especially by Joest (2004), refer to further characteristics of *acedia*, but, unfortunately, I am not enough of a scholar to discern the possible subtleties.⁴⁵³

And he continues:

In these descriptions, I find many references to laziness; this is not unexpected, because a major cognate of *acedia* has always been sloth. I also find significant suggestions of fearfulness (escapism, commitment phobia, fantasies about what is not, discouragement, pusillanimity, unreasonable confusion, and restlessness) and possibilities of self-righteousness (rage, disgust, aggressiveness, abhorrence of what is there, disdain and contempt, rudeness, wrathful, ire, and violent throes). From this, I have chosen to remain with *acedia* as my major descriptor, and consider its major manifestations in our present culture as some combination of laziness, fearfulness, and self-righteousness.⁴⁵⁴

Though I too have decided to ‘remain with *acedia*’ as the principle caption of this phenomenon, I also wish to tease out two particular foci mentioned above: commitment and fear, in order to open up an avenue of possibility on how one might consider *acedia*’s core. For this I wish to return to Sinkewicz.

I am revisiting Sinkewicz’s introduction to Evagrius *thoughts*: “This unrelenting struggle may at times lead to weariness and *acedia*, the temptation to abandon one’s commitment.”⁴⁵⁵ Accompanying this statement is one of Evagrius’ reflections: “Fear is the abandonment of help against thoughts.”⁴⁵⁶ Would this not suggest that fear is a subjective quality of isolation or rebellion? Or both? Derived from this statement is that fear is nestled at the crux of *acedia*: fear of seeking help. Is it aloneness or a lack of faith? For if we are dealing with identity crisis as a lack of relationship, Barnett confirms:

With its roots in Latin verb *fidere* ‘to trust,’ ‘faith is an inherently relational term. It concerns a way of knowing, which does not rely on empirical

⁴⁵³MacQuarrie, 34.

⁴⁵⁴Ibid., 35.

⁴⁵⁵Sinkewicz, 145.

⁴⁵⁶Ibid., 212.

proof or logical verification but, rather, on a resolution to trust in someone....Faith involves the whole person, her deepest longings and hopes. In short, it is a *spiritual* quality, which, in Christian terms, encourages the person 'to relax into the surprise of being loved by God.'⁴⁵⁷

Those who are suffering with *acedia* and its anxiety and restlessness, do not 'relax.' Faith conjures up the inevitable statement: God loves me. Conversely, *acedia* as a thesis of despair, and despondency revokes trust, faith, and relationship, is rooted in fear as the driving factor – 'fear not the noon-day demon.' Trust your God, trust the image in which you were created: trust yourself. Which brings me to what I believe the crux of the matter to be. *Acedia* is defined as the absence of care. Imaginably, is it really saying: I am afraid of suffering? And given what we've learned about *acedia*: am I afraid of your suffering?

Undoubtedly, the concept could apply to all of the sins, for as Evagrius counselled in his *Eulogios*: "because through every evil there is also *acedia*,"⁴⁵⁸ which would offer an explanation that the fear of suffering is associated with every sin. We defer back to the aforementioned quote of Bunge, where he tells us of 'philautia' – self-love – as the 'root' intertwined with the passions.⁴⁵⁹ However, the topic of interest being *acedia*, leads me to the question: Does every sin carry as its burden a lack of empathy? Perhaps this question may be held while speaking to the immediacy of danger while suffering with *acedia*.

Norris provides the reader with the etymology from which the word *care* stems: "At its Greek root, the word *acedia* means the absence of care. The person afflicted by *acedia* refuses to care or is incapable of doing so."⁴⁶⁰ Note: 'or is incapable.' She continues: "When life becomes too challenging and engagement with others too demanding, *acedia* offers a kind of spiritual morphine: you know the pain is there, yet

⁴⁵⁷Barnett, 55.

⁴⁵⁸Sinkewicz, 35.

⁴⁵⁹Bunge, 133.

⁴⁶⁰Norris, 3.

can't rouse yourself to give a damn.”⁴⁶¹ ‘Knowing the pain is there’ assumes awareness; morphine is a painkiller. Pain is suffering, awareness of suffering. I suggest that acedia is laden with fear: the fear of suffering. And when we deny suffering, we contradict ourselves. We numb ourselves with acedia – ‘spiritual morphine.’ Norris’ testimony speaks to the notion presented in Chapter Two that perhaps indeed a sufferer of acedia does wilfully disengage.

Norris emphasizes: “That it hurts to care is borne out in etymology, for *care* derives from an Indo-European word meaning ‘to cry out,’ as in a lament.”⁴⁶² She considers that “Caring is not passive, but an assertion that no matter how strained and messy our relationships can be, it is worth something to be present, with others, doing our small part.”⁴⁶³ Norris addresses the ‘daily routines,’ that may disintegrate as cause of acedia: “Care is also required for the daily routines that acedia would have us suppress or deny as meaningless repetition or too much bother.”⁴⁶⁴ Care is about engagement. Therefore, acedia is about disengagement: from God, from self, from other, from relationship, from commitment, from responsibility. Above all else: from love. Acedia is about nothingness. Norris again:

But Evagrius soon discovers that this seemingly innocuous activity has an alarming and ugly effect, for having stirred up a restlessness that he is unable to shake, the demon taunts him with the thought that his efforts at prayer and contemplation are futile. Life then looms like a prison sentence, day after day of nothingness.⁴⁶⁵

I am reminded again of Okholm’s consideration about *apatheia* as opposed to apathy, as previously mentioned by Bunge. *Apatheia* is known to be a state of being that is freeing,

⁴⁶¹ Ibid.

⁴⁶² Ibid., 4.

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

where we no longer suffer the emotional and/or physical trials of the passions. It is the antecedent of *agape* – the deepest of love. Apathy, on the other hand, as its etymology tells us, is to be void of feeling, without *pathos*.⁴⁶⁶ We avoid what we fear. We are in extreme danger if we come face-to-face with acedia's ultimate consequence.

Ultimate consequence

Acedia can be dangerous and life threatening, as we are reminded by Norris: “This indolence exacts a high price. Esther’s desire to ‘do everything once and for all and be through with it’ has all the distorted reasoning of insanity. It is a call to suicide.”⁴⁶⁷ As stated by Jean-Claude Larchet: “St. John Climacus consequently notes that ‘for the monk, despondency is a general death,’ and St. Symeon the New Theologian as well concludes that it is the death of the soul and the mind.”⁴⁶⁸ Our fear of suffering, our lack of courage to care, can ultimately lead us to what I have named as an identity crisis, with the ultimate consequences of insanity and suicide; loss of mind, loss of soul. As a result of such a multifaceted character, an illness that is emancipated with chaos, and wildly erratic with anxiety and foreboding of time, I would recommend future study to examine acedia potentially as a ‘complex.’

⁴⁶⁶Etymonline.com <https://www.etymonline.com/word/apathy>, accessed January 1, 2019.

⁴⁶⁷Norris, 14.

⁴⁶⁸Larchet, 201.

Acedia as a complex and possibly related to trauma?

Many quotes by many authors characterizing acedia, its manifestations and consequences are filled with clustered descriptions. To cite a few examples: Norris – “fear, self-distrust, or self-misunderstanding,”⁴⁶⁹ Bunge – ‘despondency, slackness of soul, anxiety.’⁴⁷⁰ We also have read several examples in this chapter. I have questioned since almost the beginning of this research, and continue to question whether these clusters are symptomatic of the characteristics of what is psychologically known as a complex, as ‘a complex is a cluster of emotions with a core cause.’⁴⁷¹

Looking back on this review, we see the mention of the word ‘complex’ several times, indicative of how complicated it is to define, describe and declare the nature of acedia. There is Bunge speaking to the ‘complex nature of despondency,’ and how one’s character can become fragmented. We have Taylor’s mention of ‘complex meaning’ when addressing the buffered self. MacQuarrie reminds us that many authors believe that many accounts of acedia do not ‘convey its complexity.’ He borrows from Nault’s testimony of a French source again stating that acedia is a ‘complex and contradictory phenomenon...’ Supplementary investigation with correlative data may serve to determine whether this is a possibility to explore and broaden both theological and psychological horizons.

Though we all have complexes, when left unattended, they can cause considerable disruption in and to our lives. A complex, especially when ‘unconscious,’ may govern and disturb one’s behaviour, and sometimes merits cause for panic. Although it is sometimes suggested that acedia may affect us at random times in our lives (as is the case

⁴⁶⁹Norris, 23.

⁴⁷⁰Bunge, 106, 89, 48 respectively.

⁴⁷¹Vivianne LaRiviere, *first introduced the idea in my contextual analysis report – reflection #1*, summer 2014, Practicum I, summer, Professor Whatley, a common definition widely quoted on internet search.

with most sin), Funk noted it can have a much more crucial effect at mid-life and beyond: “Acedia comes at midlife, whereas dark nights occur only after achieving a refined, delicate, deep relationship with God in the interior life. Dark nights are trials of those already spiritually proficient.”⁴⁷² This strategy correlates with Erikson’s model of personal development where the mid-life years can swing either toward generativity or stagnation and presents the virtue of ‘care’ as the positive focus of this stage of development.⁴⁷³

Finally, and consequently, trauma and its relationship with acedia could provide other reasons for the awakening of the negative aspects of a complex, and the avoidance of suffering. Let us look at MacQuarrie’s psychotherapeutic thoughts on the matter: “On the side of *acedia* is our basic biology as pain avoiders together with the multiple traumas we experience as children and adults; I group these as self-deprecation, familial-relationship issues, and cultural trauma.”⁴⁷⁴ He continues further on as he describes the set-up of his book: “I will then expand on the dynamics and management of trauma, suggesting that the many forms of trauma underlie our patterns of *acedia*.”⁴⁷⁵ MacQuarrie points to the idea that acedia is self-willed: “As a result of the exploration underlying this book (to be described later), I have come to believe that the basic process of avoidance occurs as a result of how we traumatize ourselves, intrapsychically, interpersonally, and culturally.”⁴⁷⁶ He insists: “Modern *acedia* occurs because we are

⁴⁷²Funk, 109.

⁴⁷³Images of Erik Erikson’s model of personal development.

https://www.google.com/search?q=erikson+stages&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwj_0M73vYDgAhVIwFkKHZRA CukQ_AUIDigB&biw=1127&bih=881#imgrc=FDjU8LxWmCXluM: (accessed January 21, 2019).

The stage referencing generativity and stagnation could easily mirror acedia’s character. (See appendix H)

⁴⁷⁴MacQuarrie, 26, 27.

⁴⁷⁵Ibid., 32.

⁴⁷⁶Ibid., 93.

pain avoiders, and we are traumatized.”⁴⁷⁷ MacQuarrie goes onto describe ‘dehumanization,’ and that it is “simply another word for the outcome of trauma.”⁴⁷⁸ Can we assume a connection between MacQuarrie’s ‘dehumanization’ and Bunge’s ‘depersonalization?’

In summary, I deliver support for the ‘complex suggestion’ with two simple quotes. The first from Larchet:

No other demon follows close upon the heels of this one,’ affirms Evagrius who explains elsewhere: ‘The thought of acedia is not followed by any other thought, first because it lingers, and then because it contains within itself almost all thoughts.’ St. Maximus likewise says that acedia ‘excites practically all the passions together.’⁴⁷⁹

Neuroscience research is leaning toward emotional impact – especially unconscious emotional determinants – as that which precedes thought. Offering this supportive statement is David D. Franks, a professor Emeritus of Sociology, from his paper *The Neuroscience of Emotions*, as he quotes a colleague, sociologist Douglas Massey:

Because of our evolutionary history and cognitive structure, it is generally the case that unconscious emotional thoughts will precede and strongly influence our rational decisions. Thus, our much-valued rationality is really more tenuous than we humans would like to believe, and it probably plays a smaller role in human affairs than prevailing theories of rational choice would have it.⁴⁸⁰

Studies such as these in the widening field of neuroscience continue to shed more light on the vicissitudes of thought. But in the meantime, I question: If we have a thought containing all thought, is it preceded by an emotion containing all emotions, i.e. a cluster?

Moving into Sinkewicz’s translation of one of Evagrius’ reflections in the *Praktikos*:

Through the thoughts the demons range themselves for battle, sometimes moving desires, sometimes anger, and at other times in the same moment irascibility and

⁴⁷⁷Ibid., 212.

⁴⁷⁸Ibid., 97.

⁴⁷⁹Larchet, 200.

⁴⁸⁰David D. Franks, *The Neuroscience of Emotions*, <file:///Users/viv/Downloads/9780387307138-c2.pdf>, 2, accessed December 27, 2018.

desire, through which arises the thought that is called complex. But this happens only during a time of acedia, whereas the other thoughts follow one another in succession at intervals.⁴⁸¹

Albeit of limited sustenance, I suggest these reflections warrant sufficient reason to consider acedia a complex, and to urge further research. As such, additional investigation might provide enough cause for considering the malaise and its relationship to trauma, and perhaps more so linked to our emotional feed than history has demonstrated. Though the field of neuroscience could perhaps benefit from the monastic claims about temptation and its association with the senses, these views are to be referred to future recommendations. Regardless, what needs to be considered is the healing arc of acedia, for it is possible to move toward joy.

Healing of acedia

Though there are many aspects of the contemplative life that can be touched upon – a return to prayer, time in the cell – there is one that most authors consistently touch upon time and time again, namely perseverance. What do the contemplatives say about healing? Let's start with Bunge:

Since the characteristic manifestation of evil is an inclination to flight in all conceivable forms, the specific remedies which Evagrius prescribes are reduced basically to one: sheer *persevering*! In this standing fast, the general healing of this diseased root of self-love is accomplished. To persevere also means to resist the urge of the irrational desires.

And...

This waiting is not a blind suffering, but a conscious *waiting for God*. There is only one way out of the vicious circle of acedia – when the human being breaks through the prison walls of his 'I,' of hopeless isolation, and reaches real personhood, a transparency towards the other, and thereby also true love, finding

⁴⁸¹Sinkewicz, 251.

himself in the surrender to the other's 'You.'⁴⁸²

Bunge has managed to summarize the equinox of healing, for indeed perseverance is 'thee' quality of Love, as we are reminded by St. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians.

Though not directly suggesting perseverance, Funk reminds us that 'time in the cell cannot be stressed enough....'⁴⁸³ She also suggests to heal the idleness a return to manual labour, constant prayer, and to let ourselves weep, for "tears soften us and prepare us to begin again, as if in our first fervor."⁴⁸⁴ Nault too moves us toward perseverance: "In the end, the strategy we must use against the demon of acedia may be summed up as follows: joyful perseverance."⁴⁸⁵ A word on perseverance from Norris: "The monks and mystics of my faith all teach that persevering in a spiritual discipline, especially when it seems futile, is the key to growth."⁴⁸⁶ And a final word from primary source Sinkewicz:

Perseverance is the severing of acedia, the cutting down of thoughts, concern for death, meditation on the cross, fear firmly affixed, beaten gold, legislation for afflictions, a book of thanksgiving, a breastplate of stillness, an armour of ascetic works, a fervent work of excellence, and example of the virtues.⁴⁸⁷

I would like to close with a passage of David Perrin's as his statement emphasizes the crucial role that the ascetic model can provide, as we come to grips with our personal areas of acedia. In particular, he refers to how elements of an integral self are significantly related to choice and how such relativity is transformative:

The ascetic task is to enhance the integration of the self through life-giving choices that respond to all of the self and not only one part of it. This is the task of asceticism: to work out an acceptable balance. The goal of asceticism is to strive

⁴⁸²Bunge, 136, 137.

⁴⁸³Funk, 106.

⁴⁸⁴Ibid.

⁴⁸⁵Jean-Charles Nault, *Acedia: Enemy of Spiritual Joy*, p. 255 <http://www.secondspring.co.uk/media/NaultFormatFinal.pdf> (accessed August 19, 2015).

⁴⁸⁶Norris, 261.

⁴⁸⁷Sinkewicz, 64.

to realize the deepest aspiration (passions) of human nature by the selective choices people make in everyday life. Asceticism is thus understood as the wilful practical choices that guide the transformative process that leads toward ultimate goals in life. This is true for all of humanity; not just those who adhere to some spirituality of one kind or another.⁴⁸⁸

It is possible to apply these luminous principles into a transforming practice. In the case of this research, I am suggesting that this might be achieved by converging art and spirituality, though these principles in and of themselves do not provide us with transformation, but act as a ‘guide’ toward the ‘transformative process.’ These tangible steps will be investigated in the subsequent chapter on methodology and research design.

Conclusion

We have considered valuable reasons as to why it is critical to understand the history and trajectory of acedia including its dangers, and consequences and the many ways it is defined and described, principally as a causality of identity crisis. Moreover, accented were the healing components deemed essential for recovery. Examination of acedia rooted in the fear of suffering, and the recommendation that acedia may be associated with what is known as a complex, and trauma, I believe to be vital components for future study and research.

Though it is important to understand the past in order to move forward, we need to consider contemporary means of dealing with acedia, contextuality playing a prominent role. The number of monastics and monasteries are on the decline, and many people today do not seek the guidance of spiritual direction, opting for the more favourable brand-du-jour style of life coaching. As such, it is presently difficult to name

⁴⁸⁸Perrin, 246.

and define acedia, let alone observe acedia's manifestations in our contemporary daily lives. What is lacking in the literature is application; present-day pastoral care praxis is missing – thus presenting a leading concern. The practice of converging art and spirituality when used for the purpose of discernment for acedia, also has the power to illuminate the awareness – *apatheia* – that Okholm speaks about,⁴⁸⁹ tilling the heart for the cultivation of *agape*, empathy, and joy. In so doing, such a practice provides an opportunity for discussion as well as the practical means in which to educate participants about the spiritual *malaise* of acedia, and what can be done about it.

Outside of the cloistered life, there appears to be lacking a number of educated practitioners versed enough in the symptomology of the disease who can provide a specific practice in which to pastorally aid sufferers with their personal discernment. This is another valid reason to emphasize the philosophical merits of applying the tenets of practical theology as a means to bridge the gap, between the worldview of the medieval systemization of acedia and a contemporary understanding of the disease.

A practical theology of the arts can help us not only to understand the nature of acedia, but also to discern how acedia is wreaking havoc on our identity, and our relationship with the Divine. The convergence of art and spirituality may provide an awareness of acedia: its manifestations, its dangers and consequences and healing pathways. Given the lack of pastoral care, this awareness must be an awareness that is discernable, and identifiable, in turn offering insight into one's personal challenges with acedia. In order to accomplish this, we need to find or create opportunities where acedia can be discussed. It is relevant that, as we deliver an understanding of this illness, that we provide the education necessary to make reasonable decisions around our own

⁴⁸⁹Okholm, 183.

discernment, and to seek out help as necessary. Especially perhaps when it comes to discerning some of the prime differences between acedia and depression as noted above, for such an understanding could potentially develop how depression is treated, if acedia is suspected as an underlying current of the disease.

It is important that we have essential information and communication so that we comprehend what is at stake regarding the well being of our soul, and in turn, the world we live in. For it seems evident that we are suffering with acedia on many fronts. Namely, environmental and ecological acedia, economic, capitalist and consumerist acedia, and perhaps the most grave identity crisis of all: political acedia. In order to come face-to-face with the ‘noon-day demon,’ the *soul thief*, we need to find the necessary courage to have a meaningful conversation with our souls.

We can consider the convergence of art and spirituality as a means of discerning the needs of our soul – our true identity, and as a means of communicating with the soul’s first language – imagery. In holding favour with the Christian medieval monastic teachings, the convergence of art and spirituality points to the monastics’ prescription for healing; and as one that can span faith or denomination.

Converging art and spirituality requires patience and perseverance. It explicates a need to pay attention, to be present – to remain in ‘one’s cell.’ It is a form or organic prayer. This pastoral practice obliges us to consider some of the darkest recesses of our minds, hearts, and souls. The work is not faint. It is ‘manual,’ and it is ‘labour.’ The convergence of art and spirituality – speaking to the berth of theology and the arts – in and of itself is a call to safety: as it moves us forward, embraces our past, regardless of how painful, and provides us with portals of choice to reconnect with one’s self, one’s

neighbour – hands outstretched to the stranger, with a reserve of empathy and humility. The act of converging art and spirituality is an usher away from acedia. In so doing, is this part of its mysterious power? After all – is it not possible that the danger of acedia is that it is attempting to destroy ‘the image?’ This question could invite further investigation into assimilating itself into acedia’s gravest consequence: suicide.

Identity is about stories, narratives and needs. It is about our experiences, and with what and where we have found meaning in our lives. It speaks to what we believe, and value. Identity is about what we express and how we are affected by the world we live in, the relationships we honour, and the communities we engage in to demonstrate how we care. Faith – of any sort, affects our identity tremendously. And it is at risk with acedia. All of this is at risk with acedia. The most appropriate way to examine a case study of this nature is to consider the phenomena of acedia through the lens of a methodology that examines meaning – namely phenomenology. Let us now turn to chapter four for the write up of the chosen methodology: a phenomenological case study. We will also examine the research design.

Chapter Four: Methodology and Research Design

Methodology: a phenomenological case study

A phenomenological case study is the most appropriate methodological approach for this project, with hermeneutic phenomenology as the predominant phenomenological orientation. Throughout the development of the research question it became evident the best strategic route would be to frame the context as a case study. However, it became more apparent that to complement the system with a phenomenological methodology would offer a more integral, holistic view for the case study to stand as a “critical reflection upon a specific practice of ministry.”⁴⁹⁰

The design of the project had originally been formulated as a model of pastoral theology intended to address an area of concern that grew out of both personal and professional experience and observation. I came to question whether these experiences when observed as a research component could determine if such a practice could help others discern acedia in their lives, and also to provide an impetus toward responsible change and transformation. Noting Goble and Yin’s statement: “The purpose of hermeneutic phenomenological research is to bring to light and reflect upon the lived meaning of this basic experience.”⁴⁹¹ ‘This basic experience’ in this case study, is referring to both acedia, and the practice itself. Before moving onto the practical elements of the research design, let us first examine this choice of methodology.

⁴⁹⁰William R. Myers, *Research in Ministry, a primer for the doctor of ministry program*, third edition, (US: Exploration Press of the Chicago Theological Seminary 1993, 1997, 2000), 5. (accessed 2015).

⁴⁹¹Erika Goble, PhD Candidate, University of Alberta & NorQuest College, Yin Yin, PhD Candidate, University of Alberta <https://iiqm.wordpress.com/2014/10/16/introduction-to-hermeneutic-phenomenology-a-research-methodology-best-learned-by-doing-it/>, accessed November 5, 2017.

The case study is recommended by Myers as an appropriate approach for a practical theology project for as he suggests, “it borrows tools from other research methods,”⁴⁹² offering a ‘holistic focus’ on the various elements of the context. However, the project also calls for a phenomenological study, as we examine the lived experiences of the participants. Turning first to John Creswell for his definition of a case study, Creswell identifies a case study as such: “Thus, *case study* research involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system (i.e. a setting, a context).”⁴⁹³ He emphasizes how the study is “explored...through detailed, in-depth data collection involving *multiple sources of information* (e.g., observations, interviews, audio-visual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case *description* and case-based themes.”⁴⁹⁴ *The Art of Soul Care* Retreat qualifies under this definition, as data has been collected from ‘multiple sources’ during the course of the project: recruitment efforts, phone calls and e-mails, preliminary interviews, the four separate modules of the retreat itself, the art generated within the context of each situation, the end-of-day questionnaires, and the audio recorded material. Additional data was generated from some of the participants’ journals, and the final questionnaires, as well as a final interview process. There are also field notes, and early illustrative material pointing to the development of ideas.

Creswell differentiates between the various types of case studies, investigating the difference between the ‘intrinsic’ and the ‘instrumental’ case study.⁴⁹⁵ This project would fall in line with the instrumental case study, where “the researcher focuses on an issue or

⁴⁹²Ibid.

⁴⁹³John W. Creswell, *Five Qualitative Approaches to Inquiry*, <http://williamwolff.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/creswell-chapter4-5approaches.pdf>, 73 (accessed September 24, 2017).

⁴⁹⁴Ibid.

⁴⁹⁵Ibid., 74.

concern, and then selects one bounded case to illustrate this issue.”⁴⁹⁶ The research is looking to shed light on an ancient *malaise* of the soul, as one part of the issue, but most prevalently to present a working pastoral model which could provide educative resources regarding acedia’s trajectory, with the hope the results might help one to discern acedia in the workings of their own life, while also providing the possibility of movement toward responsible change and transformation.

Creswell speaks to the ‘final interpretive phase’ of a case study. Citing Lincoln and Guba (1985) “this phase constitutes the ‘lessons learned’ from the case.”⁴⁹⁷ There has been sufficient material generated by the case study to make reasonable future recommendations for not only the field of practical theology, but also correlative fields, e.g. psychology, ethics, and the study of methodologies. Engagement with the process is imperative to the practical theological nature of this study, and as such does bring us to ‘lessons learned.’ Not only has the context developed and presented an educational forum dealing with acedia, it provides a synthesized method of theological reflection which through its engagement, may provide an impetus toward further development of the practice in the lives of the participants. As the nature of the experience is a key focus within the bounded system, the most appropriate lens is phenomenology.

Creswell citing van Manen, notes: “The basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence (a ‘grasp of the very nature of the thing.’”⁴⁹⁸ In the design and delivery of *The Art of Soul Care* Retreat as a phenomenological case study, the experience of phenomena

⁴⁹⁶Ibid.

⁴⁹⁷Ibid.

⁴⁹⁸van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990) quoted in Creswell, 58.

was addressed on several levels: the experience of the retreat, the experience of converging art and spirituality as a possible tool of discernment for acedia, acedia as a phenomenon, and the experience of the various influences conducive, or not, to the retreat, including that of the environment. And the experience addressing the ‘who am I?’ question as a central theme. In this context, the participants provided a variety of descriptions, expressed through a variety of media, looking to grasp the essence of acedia, alongside the relevancy the practice may have had in their lives.

Thomas Groenewald takes note of the phenomenological investigation as the most suitable pathway when examining “an aspect of teaching and learning practice,”⁴⁹⁹ finding it to be the one that “would prevent or restrict my own biases.”⁵⁰⁰ The context in question here is noted to be a ‘teaching and learning practice,’ as it addresses both the make-up of the hermeneutical circle, as well as offering up an epistemological framework for the examination of theology and the arts as a viable method of practice. The actual doing of the art, and the manner in which the expression was shared and witnessed provided an arena where bias could be restricted, if not totally prevented. There was a fine balance to maintain while bearing in mind the need to not withhold a reasonable amount of pastoral care without forecasting a conflict of interest, and by the same token, to also present the arising questions that could help unpack the experience of the participant.

Groenewald introduces phenomenology through the concepts of Husserl, naming phenomenology as ‘the science of pure phenomena.’⁵⁰¹ Acedia is a phenomenon. Converging art and spirituality is also a phenomenon. The overall phenomenological

⁴⁹⁹Groenewald, T. (2004). *A phenomenological Research Design Illustrated*, International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 3(1). Article 4, 42 http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/3_1/pdf/groenewald.pdf (accessed October 1st, 2017).

⁵⁰⁰Ibid., 42.

⁵⁰¹T. Eagleton, *Literary theory: An introduction*. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983). Quoted in Groenewald, Ibid., 43.

experience of the retreat is an overlay to the practice that has (or not) helped discern the purpose of one's life, and the challenges involved, acedia possibly being one of those challenges. Noting the lack of pastoral education and care about acedia as a spiritual *malaise* as the cited problem, and also the possibility of naming acedia as a causality of identity crisis, therefore affecting one's ability to fulfill one's purpose, the practice under investigation provides a pastoral education of not only acedia's trajectory, but also addresses what Tim Sensing has referred to as: "I advocate...an intervention that encourages transformation."⁵⁰² In my introduction, the beginning of the examination of the problem rings of a similar nature, as I question whether the practice could prove to be a motivational feature toward 'responsible change and transformation.' Phenomenology is the most suitable method in which to weigh the outcomes as the experiences of such speak through the various voices of expression of the participants.

In referencing *Phenomenology Online*, a website dedicated to highlighting the various orientations of phenomenology, this phrase sums up much regarding the focus of this project and its relationship to hermeneutic phenomenology: "Especially in Heidegger's later work he increasingly introduces poetry and art as expressive works for interpreting the nature of truth, language, thinking, dwelling and being."⁵⁰³ This statement provides additional rationale for the use of arts based research as a reasonable tool of interpretation.

Additionally, we see how:

Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenology examines how human meanings are

⁵⁰²Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research, A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*, (Eugene, Oregon, WIPF & Stock, 2011), 142.

⁵⁰³*Phenomenology Online*, <http://www.phenomenologyonline.com/inquiry/orientations-in-phenomenology/> (accessed September 28, 2017).

deposited and mediated through myth, religion, art, and language. He elaborates especially on the narrative function of language, on the various uses of language such as storytelling, and how narrativity and temporality interact and ultimately return to the question of the meaning of being, the self and self-identity.⁵⁰⁴

These particular facets of phenomenology speak to the heart of this project. Both Ricoeur and Heidegger's groundwork not only support the hermeneutic phenomenological lens, but also provide support for the use of arts based research. Noted, two significant themes can be drawn from the above-mentioned passage: temporality, and self-identity – both of which are the antithesis of acedia.

How to move from the abstract forums of phenomenon, to arenas of practical theological matters? “Heidegger asked how the being of beings (things) show themselves to us as a revealing of Being itself. For Heidegger the phenomenological question became: How can we let that what shows itself be seen in the very way that it shows itself from itself?”⁵⁰⁵ This is a crucial component to support the use of theology and the arts as method, for I believe the answer lies in the nature of convergence, and in this case, the convergence of art and spirituality.

Goble and Yin, in speaking to the challenges of hermeneutic phenomenology, make reference to Adams' (2014) statement: “We are always ‘too late,’ unable to directly access the object of our interest.”⁵⁰⁶ In this case, the practical theology and the arts provide the elements in which to ‘bridge the gap’ – the key role of practical theology – between the case study and phenomenology. It permits the data to be evaluated as a kaleidoscopic portrayal of experience: if not directly – for we can never assume the direct experience of the other – then symbolically, artistically, metaphorically, and practically,

⁵⁰⁴Ibid.

⁵⁰⁵Ibid.

⁵⁰⁶Erika Goble, PhD Candidate, University of Alberta & NorQuest College, Yin Yin, PhD Candidate, University of Alberta <https://iiqm.wordpress.com/2014/10/16/introduction-to-hermeneutic-phenomenology-a-research-methodology-best-learned-by-doing-it/>, (accessed November 5, 2017).

while remaining within a bounded system. Goble and Yin's summary: "For this reason, the most effective phenomenological workshop and courses are laden with activities that challenge its participants to move beyond thinking about the methodology and towards embodying it."⁵⁰⁷ Theology and the arts play a leading role in 'embodiment,' for such is the nature of the convergence of art and spirituality.

The leading function of this phenomenological study also has directed me toward a summary of its role. It has served as a springboard for future recommendations, in particular when interacting with the final act of agency of the retreat – the writing of the covenant.⁵⁰⁸ Noted on the *Phenomenology Online* website when speaking of ethical phenomenology: "Basic themes of ethical phenomenology are 'otherness,' responsibility,' 'I-Thou,' 'the vocative,' and 'non' relationality.'"⁵⁰⁹ All of which are conflicting notions to the character of acedia, perhaps even all definable as antidotal to the disease?

As such, the question of the final module of *The Art of Soul Care* Retreat is redeemable here: "Who are you called to become?" was the leading question posed on the last afternoon of the retreat. Not only were the participants led into a group exercise, (whereas all of the previous modalities were aimed at solo efforts) each participant was asked to spend some time addressing this question in terms of a promise, a contract – a covenant, as a means of spiritual renewal. In short, the experience offered a profound turning point in my research. I was struck by the realization that a method of discerning through the lens of hermeneutic phenomenology provided a substantial recommendation for not only adjustments toward future facilitation, but also as a future recommendation

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁸ To be explained in more detail in the upcoming description of the design of the project.

⁵⁰⁹ *Phenomenology online*. <http://www.phenomenologyonline.com/inquiry/orientations-in-phenomenology/ethical-phenomenology/> (accessed September, 2017).

of research regarding acedia: namely the field of theological ethics.

By looking at the case study supported by a hermeneutic phenomenology it permits the research to become interconnected, woven, and holistic, as both Myers and Creswell have suggested. By doing so, the project does not rest on the surface of a generalization, but rather gives the project enough room to breathe so the experiential devices may take hold and give substance to the questions asked. However, for the practice to be interpreted concretely, and evaluated within the nature of what practical theology is, a bounded system – that is the case study – is necessary.

The case study as a bounded system serves as the cover of a book, the binding and the seams of interwoven chapters, and the texture of the pages read; whereas phenomenology is about the ‘word’ on the page, and the experiences themselves, and their meaning. They inform each other. Both of these methodologies are complementary in nature, symbiotic in process. By using this format we are informed of how this complementary design of case study and phenomenology addresses the ‘what is’ the practice, the ‘what does it do’ of the practice, and the ‘meaning’ of the experience of the participants, including that of the researcher – as observer, facilitator and participant.

Creswell suggests “a holistic analysis.”⁵¹⁰ This manner of analysis is appropriately suited to the character of this project, as we examine the various interwoven threads of the dialogue between case study and phenomenology, as a means of support for the entire fabric; weaving as a process of engagement with observation, reflection, movement, contemplation, creativity, expression and experience; in other words, the analysis of the whole. This choice of methodology speaks to the principles of cohesiveness, and integrity. We have a combination that provides some reasonable

⁵¹⁰Creswell, 75.

recommendations for the advancement of methodological study, and provides support for the advancement of arts-based research. The phenomenological case study is the most suitable vehicle in which to discover the understanding of the world of the participants, and their meaning when coming face-to-face with not only themselves, but the potential impact acedia may have or have had on their lives, and how the facets of a practical theology and the arts can help discern acedia in one's life.

Research Method and Design

For the sake of this project, the practice – with its ongoing development – has been designed as a retreat, and formulated as a phenomenological case study, to examine acedia's trajectory, to educate, to contemplate and to evaluate the role of acedia in one's life – the possible pre-cursor of what was initially observed as apathy in former clients. Alongside is the examination of 'Who am I?' and a subtext of existential questions dealing with beliefs, values, purpose, challenges, and becoming, as experienced through the merits of the practice of theology and the arts; namely the convergence of art and spirituality. This project's format contained four sessions taking place over four weeks, for an eight-hour day, once a week (Saturday).

Though the following chapter assesses the explication and evaluation process, let us now examine the structure of the project with a step-by-step synopsis of all the essential aspects, including:

- Ethical standards and requirements
- Recruitment and sampling
- Location and environment

- Preliminary interview
- Retreat modules day 1 – 4
- The weekly questionnaire
- The final questionnaire
- Journaling
- Email correspondence
- Check-ins
- Final interview
- Field notes
- Other: conversations, focus group, thesis proposal, and artifacts
- Collecting data

Let us begin with the ethical standards and requirements.

Ethical standards and requirements

The application to the Review Ethics Board included the following:

- Application form
- Participant recruitment letter on SPU letterhead (Appendix A)
- Recruitment poster (Appendix B)
- Letter of consent (Appendix C)
- Preliminary interview questions (Appendix D)
- End-of-the day questionnaire (Appendix E)
- Final questionnaire (Appendix F)
- Approval of the thesis committee (Appendix G)
- Research project

After the project's preliminary review by the review ethics board, (REB) the only issue which needed clarifying was the level of risk, which was deemed to be minimal. Participants were informed of the names of two contact persons, an Anglican Church minister and a psychologist. Also available was the link to an online resource directing them to the 'Centre de Crise de Quebec' (Quebec Crisis Centre) where phone intervention is available 24/7, if ever necessary. None of the participants ever asked for, or felt the need to use any of these resources.

Recruitment and Sampling

Although it is sometimes suggested acedia may affect us at random times in our lives – as is the case with most sin – Margaret Funk noted it can have a much more crucial effect at mid-life and beyond. She is informative in her simple approach to *Thoughts Matter*,⁵¹¹ emphasizing acedia's claim on the soul is related to when one is called into spiritual maturity. This strategy correlates with Erikson's model of personal development where the mid-life years can swing toward either 'generativity or stagnation,' and presents 'care' as its virtuous component. (Appendix H) It is for these reasons the age group of the population – both male and female, with a reasonably balanced mix,⁵¹² was to be approximately 35 and upward.⁵¹³

The ideal number of participants ranged from 5-9. Requests about the project came predominantly from reading a displayed recruitment poster (Appendix B) whether it was seen in a public place, such as the local grocery store (IGA), post office outlets, or on social media, including *The Art of Soul Care* newsletter, and on the website home

⁵¹¹Funk, 32.

⁵¹²Gender and sexuality not an issue.

⁵¹³Erikson, (See appendix H) This chart was part of the presentation in one of the retreat modules.

page.⁵¹⁴ Additional inquiries were received by phone after the local Anglican Diocese of Montreal sent out an email informing people of the project. There was also the opportunity granted for me to make announcements after Church services, and three of the local Churches in town (Catholic, United and Anglican) agreed to publicize the poster, along with a notice in their Sunday bulletins. There was also an ongoing support/curiosity from some who have been following my academic journey who expressed an interest to participate in the program once the time arrived.

All inquirers received a copy of the introductory recruitment letter (Appendix A) once they asked about the project. There were a total of 20 women, and five men who inquired about the study. Out of these 25 inquirers, six participants were chosen. The breakdown of locations and numbers were as such: Oklahoma, U. S. (1) Winnipeg, (1) Montreal, (6) St. Lazare, (1) Vankleek Hill, (4) Hudson, (11) and one unknown. Six preliminary interviews were scheduled. Three of those took place at the studio, the other three took place in a neighbouring village where some of the participants resided. All six agreed to sign the consent form. The rest of the inquirers though keen, were not eligible for a variety of reasons: previous commitments, holidays, distance, illness, and a few behaviour patterns of two individuals which had been noted on previous occasions which I thought may have proven disruptive to the group dynamic. I had been looking for 5-8 participants, from ages 35 and up, and settled on the six.

Time availability, and upcoming holidays for some were part of the deciding factor as to when to start the modules. I could have continued to look for participants, but then risked the chance of losing some of the ones I had, so I decided to proceed. There were five female participants, and one male. The group was made up of diverse spiritual

⁵¹⁴Still referred to as The Songroom at the time.

and religious beliefs, including Anglican, Presbyterian, Presbyterian leaning toward Buddhism, and one who at that time, identified as an atheist. This someone had no formal religious education or historical involvement with a denomination though had been exposed on occasion to church services. The retreat began January 14th, 2017 and carried through with the four weeks/modules until February 4th.

Out of the six people who agreed to sign on, three of them were familiar with my work. These three persons also knew each other. I questioned the Review Ethics Board (REB) whether this would prove to be a conflict of interest, and also checked to see if knowing people I had socialized with presented a bias, with this particular type of format. Additionally, I also inquired about using social media, for example Facebook as a recruitment place.⁵¹⁵

After the preliminary interview, I was comfortable with the three people knowing each other – two of them a married couple – for they demonstrated a level of maturity, wisdom, and commitment toward their own personal growth. These three were the elders of the group, all of them in their late sixties. They were sincere in their desire to participate, and beyond that, curious to know if indeed they were being affected by acedia, having been a bit more versed in the topic than the other three. All three were retired, however deeply engaged with their communities. The other three participants were from Hudson. Their ages ranged from 34.5 years of age to late fifties, with one in their late forties.

Given this study took place in a village with a small social circumference,

⁵¹⁵ Louis Perron, Chair REB- reply transmitted December 14th, 2016, via Mohamed Kouachi, Office of Research and Ethics: “Dear Ms. LaRivière,

1/ There is no problem advertising on Facebook.

2/ There is no ethical issue if you recruit people you know, if you declare it, what you actually do in your email. The real problem is methodological, since it may introduce a bias: it is up to you and your director to answer that question.
Sincerely, *Louis Perron*, Chair REB.

providing a description of career and vocation could provide identity clues, and so I have chosen to forego this information. Although some of this information does present itself in the audio recordings and transcripts, though it is couched in the coding of the participants. I questioned my own anonymity, wondering if it would have been better had I not been known at all; but this would be almost impossible within the confines of village living. Recognition and reputation proved to be a positive element, for it presented a modicum of trust. Having some idea of who I was encouraged them to inquire in the first place.

Location and Environment

The research took place at my studio, in Saint-Lazare, Quebec. Saint-Lazare is a small village noted to be one of several off-island suburbs of Montreal, Quebec, and is part of the regional municipality known as Vaudreuil-Soulanges. The population of Saint-Lazare sits at approximately 20,000 after a most recent growth spurt. Though a growing environment, with boundaries extending to a density of 289.6 Km,⁵¹⁶ often due to its proximity, my locale is often thought to be situated in the adjacent village of Hudson; the predominantly Anglophone village is but a mere half-kilometer away from my place of residence and studio.

Many people value what Hudson Quebec has to offer, including its picturesque Sandy Beach. I used to live in Hudson, and much of my social life still centers around this quaint, charming village, as it is the place where I go to Church, most often shop, and also work part-time on occasion. Additionally, many of the people I know and socialize with do come from this village, and I've taken part in, and also facilitated many events

⁵¹⁶Saint – Lazare, Quebec, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint-Lazare,_Quebec, (accessed March 18, 2017).

there as well. My residence and studio sit on the fringe of both of these worlds. There was one Saint-Lazare resident who inquired about the project, however none from the village proper participated.

Though Hudson boasts four churches, (two Anglican, one United, and one Catholic) Saint Lazare still hosts only one Church – French Catholic – despite its rapidly expanding population, which is almost four times the size of Hudson. As in other territories, many of the local churches are struggling with declining membership and attendance. A small mission Anglican Church about one kilometer up the hill from my residence recently closed. There is also a Baptist Church less than a kilometer away from Hudson, but actually in Saint-Lazare – ironically it is known as ‘The Hudson Community Baptist Church.’

Notwithstanding its increasing numbers of citizens, Saint-Lazare can still be very much defined as a rural area, still touting itself as a haven for horse owners, and those who wish to escape city life. Many of the homes speak are grand, with sprawling grounds, large barns, and a variety of equestrian facilities. Where I live, the property basks in pastureland surrounded by a variety of light to dense shrubbery, backing onto heavier wooded areas. The landowner’s acreage leaves room for fields of wheat to grow and to be harvested for baled hay. The environment is pleasing to the eye, and though very close to a main road, once within the confines of the studio, the quiet begins to infiltrate. Peace abides.

The sweeping views invite the lucky observation of a family of wild turkeys, and the occasional deer, coyote, wolf, rare fox, or dashing rabbit on occasion. Summer fields are often filled with a plethora of dancing fireflies. Additionally, there is a wide variety of

birds and butterflies in the area. The breath-taking sunsets revealed daily across the road sometimes leaves one utterly still with awe. Simply to say, the environment is conducive to this type of retreat and provides the peace needed for quality inner work. Though the retreat could be repeated in less organic settings, preference for this type of locale was deemed to be a positive approach for those participating. The connection with nature was particularly important as well as the lack of distraction from daily life, traffic, social media, and other diversions.

The studio is a two-story renovated garage not adjacent to the main living quarters, but quite close. It could best be described as rustic, and charming. It is very well lit with natural light coming from several windows surrounding the space, on two floors. The downstairs space has heated cement floors. This designated area in which the participants were directed to do their artwork, was set up with three tables and stools dedicated to art making, as well as two tables filled with a variety of art supplies.

The upstairs space, including a floor fabricated out of original (1920's) four to six inch wide pine planks, offering squinting visibility of the downstairs in many areas, does stir a bit of uneasiness in some when first walked upon. However, this quickly passes when one feels how solid the floor actually is. The upstairs is heated with four, modern, recently installed electric radiators. It hosts a lot of windows as well. The partially dormered area is furnished with desks, tables, a computer, printers, etcetera – it is my main office. This upper room, set up with a variety of reasonably comfortable chairs, was designated as our main meeting area, where the readings, brainstorming and meditation took place. The house proper was used for morning check-ins, tea and coffee, washroom breaks, lunch, and even for rest on occasion. (Appendix I)

Preliminary Interviews

The preliminary interviews took place from the end of December 2016, to the beginning of January 2017, January 6th to be exact. The initial time allotted was an hour, however, none of the interviews took that long. The shortest clocked in at 21 minutes, the lengthiest, 35 minutes. As described in the proposal, time was allowed to settle in and get comfortable, and I then proceeded to share about how the retreat would unfold, allowing time for unstructured questions. All participants demonstrated keenness toward their own personal and spiritual development and thought the project would prove to be helpful. All participants signed the consent form when offered it on the day of the interview. An informational e-mail was sent out a few days later, with reminders of everything which had been discussed regarding start-up time, lunch, comfortable clothing, etc. Books were ordered, and the task at hand was to prepare the studio for the retreat, and to ready the readings for day one.

Retreat Modules Day 1 – 4

Each of the modules followed a very similar agenda, starting the day with an initial gathering in the house; checking in with hot coffee/tea, some hot, homemade bread offered by one of the participants, alongside a variety of snacks that remained available throughout the day. Details and reflections of the week were shared, as well as points to be made about the day and/or the agenda. Once completed, we made our way to the studio to begin the first segment of the given module.

- The four modules investigated the following questions:

Day 1: “What do I believe?” (Morning) and “What do I value?” (Afternoon).

Day 2: “What is my purpose?”

Day 3: “What are my challenges?”

Day 4: “Who am I called to become?”

Each module was structured according to this following pattern:

- Readings and/or video⁵¹⁷ (Appendix L)
- Brainstorming
- Meditation
- Artistic expression done in silence
- Sharing and witness to the art
- Questionnaire completed
- Daily closure

Breaks were structured but also taken as needed. Lunch breaks were scheduled at appropriate times, with the agenda adjusted accordingly.

The last module ‘Who am I called to become?’ unfolded with a few extra steps. Participants did have their own art pieces to do, as per the other modules, and did share accordingly, as they had in the past. However, the final project was an interactive group project – done in silence. And the sharing component was an intermingling of their comments directed to me, as well as to each other. Lastly, they were asked to forge or begin to create what would be referred to as a covenant, a contract, or promise. Noted, from the observer’s point of view, these pieces, detailing a quality of personal and spiritual intimacy, were exceptionally moving. More detailed information to follow in the

⁵¹⁷Day 1 – “What do I believe?” Sample readings, Day 1, Appendix L List of exact readings for all modules will be introduced in chapter. Noted: as these are subjective, such choices could be evidence of a bias, however duly noted. Such choices should be left up to the discretion of the facilitator if the workshop were to be moderated by another. Culture, context, and spiritual and religious identities need to be taken into consideration.

next chapter.

The weekly questionnaire

At the end of every day, the participants were asked to answer a brief questionnaire consisting of eight questions. (Appendix E) The questionnaire was filled out and returned before departure. The choice to address impressions, discoveries of self, affect, etc. provided essential data to support the choice of the phenomenological aspects of the methodology.

The final questionnaire

The final questionnaire (Appendix F) was circulated to the participants on the last day of the retreat, after the final closure. I ask the participants to complete the questionnaire within a few days, as the experience was still fresh in their minds. I then arranged a concluding follow-up interview to go over the questions again, finalizing any additional comments that the participants wished to add, asking clarifying questions, and unpacking their answers with a bit more detail.

Journaling

Every participant was assigned a journal with the hope some of its contents would be admissible data, bearing in mind not only the ethical code of confidentiality, but also the level of vulnerability that may be encountered. Five of the six participants chose to share excerpts from their journal when they thought something to be relevant. I would also consider some of the email correspondence that ensued during the course of the project could be considered as ‘journaling’ as many of the thoughts that were shared were freestyle, reflective, and intimate in detail.

Email Correspondence

Saved were the copies of the electronic correspondence between participants, and other persons of interest, with over 90 pieces accumulated. The correspondence includes initial inquiries as well as much more finer and intimate details of the participants as they found themselves continuing to reflect and process during the week in between modules. When writing the participants reminders, and about other details of the retreat, I also offered to any who would wish additional feedback, thoughts or questions on their art that I would do so only upon request. Five of the participants took advantage of this with positive results and feedback. Due to the sensitive nature of some of this correspondence, the context of such when used will be generalized as much as possible.

Check- ins - day 1- 4

To help ease into the day, the group was asked to do a brief check-in at the beginning of the module. This took place in the house, before entering the studio. A time to warm up; drink some tea or coffee, and to have a bit of a morning snack. At the beginning of the project, these were not recorded to allow the group to get over their initial nervousness, and in some cases shyness. As the participants began to feel more comfortable with each other as well as having more to share, the check-ins were recorded. The check-ins consisted of naming themselves,⁵¹⁸ how they were feeling, and if they had anything in particular they wished to share from their week regarding any insights or observations they may have had.

Final interview

Six interviews were set up; again some at the studio, and others in their homes. All interviews were scheduled within three weeks of the final retreat, as some of the participants were away for a week of holiday after the final module. Most of the

⁵¹⁸Participants were given a code to identify themselves, though they were familiar with each other's true names.

interviews lasted between 42 – 49 minutes, with one lasting an hour. Additional data encapsulating both reflections after a bit of time had passed, some more consideration for future retreats, as well as items for further recommendation did surface. This information once again supports the cause for discovery of meaning of the participants' experience, as well as provided closure to the character of the case study itself.

Field notes

Unbeknownst to me at the beginning of this program, would be the need to keep what is known as field notes, a requisite of observations dealing with the phenomenon in question. Initially, I deemed my collection and the organization of such material unsuitable to the task. Such is the life of an artist at times. However, in hindsight, an array of reflections, observations, notes, comments, ideas, definitions, thoughts, questions, page links, art doodles, comments, email correspondence, in a variety of mediums, ranging from notes in textbooks, to scribbles in margins, alongside sketch books of ideas, and computerized files as well, have all helped shaped the echelon of questions that have accompanied me along this journey. Sources will be referenced when suitable.

Recordings

Both preliminary and final interviews were recorded, as was each module, and most of the check-ins. A partial bit of conversation about beauty was lost during one of the modules, either by a mistaken erasure or the recording device not having been set up properly. Everything else has been digitally recorded and stored.

Other

The use of a flip chart served as a visual aid, including reminders of key points

made during the conversations and brainstorming sessions of each module. Each of these pages has been photographed, and will be referenced when highlighting key aspects of the project. Additional components such as a focus group, an initially unimaginable wide variety of conversations over the period of five years, research material, inquiries – both personal and professional – mentorship, and other guidance, could all be deemed as some sort of ‘other’ material which had some bearing or influence on the shape of the design, as well as the choice of methodology.

Collecting and storing data

The artwork created by the participants included: paintings, sketches, poetry, collage, and other forms of expressive and interpretative inspiration. Art supplies made available were acrylic and watercolour paint, canvases, sketch pads, paint brushes, colour pencils, pastels, and crayons, plasticine, a variety of craft materials, journaling, a variety of paper types, scissors, and other craft materials. Photographs of all expressions of artwork have been collected and stored; all of the flip chart information has also been photographed. All of the recordings have been stored as well.

Saved also are the copies of the electronic correspondence between participants. Data has been stored in numerous ways. Transcripts have been made of all recordings, and are available digitally as well as having been formatted in hard copy. There are non-edited and edited versions. A non-disclosure agreement was signed with the company that did the transcripts. (Appendix J) All recordings are stored electronically on several devices as are the photographs of all of the artwork of the participants, as well as photographs of the flip chart pages. A hard copy of the flip chart remains as well. Storage includes a desktop computer, a laptop computer, a Seagate rebootable back-up

device, and USB stick. Areas where the recordings are saved include the computer's iTunes component as MP3s, as well as in the files of each of the participants. Let us now move into chapter five for the explication and evaluation of data.

Chapter Five: Explicitation and evaluation of data and research findings

Plan for explication and evaluation of data

Practical theology's key objective is to bridge the gap between what is, and what ought to be, providing a means by which practical theological experiences can help participants navigate pathways toward transformation. When speaking of the arts as an extension of practical/pastoral theology, it is par for the course that the language of symbols is often couched beneath what could be layers of superficiality. Therefore, the data must be presented in a way that the significance of the experiences in question is illuminated simply, yet while paying attention to subtle detail.

As a search for meaning has been the impetus which has helped shape the plan for the explication and evaluation of the data, the most lucrative way to present the material is to allow it to speak through an unfolding organic narrative, to show how the data speaks to the various experiences of both the participants, and myself as a researcher, facilitator, observer as well as a participant. How through these experiences, we find movement and meaning, and see how these details may have encouraged moments of transformation.

What merits attention here is what Stanley, Wertz, Nosek, McNiesh and Marlow refer to as 'texture and structure and meaning,'⁵¹⁹ written up in a paper outlining the work of Todre's "Embodied Enquiry." Although the process does not thoroughly follow the

⁵¹⁹Marcia Stanley, et al., *The Complete First Person Narrative: Texture, Structure, and Meaning in Writing Phenomenological Descriptions*, March, April, 2011, International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-Being, 6(2) 2011; https://www.researchgate.net/publication/51057287_The_composite_first_person_narrative_Texture_structure_and_meaning_in_writing_phenomenological_descriptions?_esc=publicationCoverPdf&el=1_x_2&enrichId=rgreq-998ef53c5571e3c450177a637a9aecce-XXX&enrichSource=Y292ZXJQYWdlOzUxMDU3Mjg3O0FTOjk4NjY0Nzg5ODM5ODc3QDE0MDA1MzQ5Mjc3NTY%3D (accessed February 22, 2018).

path of the ‘composite first person narrative,’ some of the authors useful guidance helped shape this presentation. These authors describe the existence of “a tension in writing phenomenological descriptions: how best to present qualitative research to convey its findings”⁵²⁰ in ways that are ‘credible, and dependable, and conform’ to the standards of investigation.⁵²¹ The article highlights the necessity to “ascribe meaning with others so that sense can be made of things and situations.”⁵²² Stressing this advice:

In order to do this, the researcher must provide the texture that brings the fullness and richness of the experience to the reader so that it is alive in Gendlin’s ‘felt sense,’ allowing one to go beyond emotion or a mere feeling about the topic, and find in oneself the physicality evoked by the words (Gendlin, 2004). And yet the researcher must provide a structure that ‘thematizes,’ expressing the boundaries of the phenomenon with other experiences and contexts in generalities to reveal what it essentially appears to be (Todres, 2007). A challenge to the researcher is to find a balance of texture and structure in describing the phenomenon.⁵²³

To understand the power of narrative is to understand that much is revealed as narrative unfolds. One needs to consider not only the intimate development of the stories, but also the impact of the vulnerability and transparency of the participants, as well as effects of the interconnectivity between participant and their artistic pieces of expression.

The explication of the data is best described in a manner that can help the reader understand the implications of these experiences, allowing the process itself to become an anchor of observation, and discovery. It offers the facts as a qualitative process. And follows up with a ‘collective portrait of meaning.’ The ‘portrait’ – an ensuing composite –presents itself as being ‘in conversation’ with the details of the explication underlining the development of the themes. The collective portrait offers a synopsis of the discoveries highlighting significant ideas and images of meaning, as outlined by the participants as

⁵²⁰Ibid., 1.

⁵²¹Ibid.

⁵²²Ibid.

⁵²³Ibid., 2.

we search for themes. No doubt, due to the organic nature of the presentation, and the collective wisdom shared, there are overlaps in thinking, shared perception, and reasoning. With exception to a few examples in the text itself, edited copy and artwork of the participants presented in text boxes will be referenced in the figures section.

I am choosing explication and evaluation over analysis and evaluation – often the chosen standard measure of procedure for qualitative research. Groenewald’s concise explanation of the explication of the data warrants consideration as he cautions against the use of ‘data analysis’ noting: “Hycner cautions that ‘analysis’ has dangerous connotations for phenomenology.”⁵²⁴ He continues to explain that analysis “usually means a ‘breaking into parts,’ and therefore often means a loss of the whole phenomenon.”⁵²⁵ Explication on the other hand suggests an “investigation of the constituents of a phenomenon while keeping the context of the whole.”⁵²⁶ If meaning stands at the core of this investigation, integrity is crucial.

To break apart ideas will only diminish the argument. Whereas allowing the matrix to be shaped organically, gives voice to ‘the context of the whole.’ Phenomenological reduction is geared toward suspension of judgment – at least as much as possible, given the subjectivity of the material. We can however, derive a conclusion – an evaluation – as to whether the pathway that was offered provided a reasonable forum in which to allow meaningful expression.

⁵²⁴R. H. Hycner, *Some guidelines for the phenomenological analysis of interview data*. Eds: A. Bryman & R. .G. Burgess, *Qualitative research* (Vol. 3, pp. 143-164). London: Sage. 1999
Quoted in Groenewald, 17.

⁵²⁵Ibid.

⁵²⁶Ibid.

Groenewald's goes on to 'simplify Hycner's explication process'⁵²⁷ suggesting a five-step approach:

1. Bracketing and phenomenological reduction
2. Delineating units of meaning
3. Clustering of units of meaning to form themes
4. Summarizing each interview, validating it and where necessary modifying it.
5. Extracting general and unique themes from all the interviews and making a composite summary.⁵²⁸

Groenewald emphasizes Hycner's approach to reduction, not as a total suspension of judgment, but rather for the researcher to be 'opened' to "the phenomenon 'in its own right with its own meaning'"⁵²⁹ to make room for the participant's interpretations of the phenomena. As noted: "Here it refers to the bracketing of the researcher's personal views or preconceptions."⁵³⁰ Almost an impossible task given this forum, for springboard material is necessary to introduce each module, and to highlight areas that feel intuitively called to be unpacked more during the course of the varied conversations. However, providing the 'place and the space' to allow the liberty of expression, void of censorship or judgment, did allow the participants to express themselves freely and safely, and created the arena for reflection and contemplation on the material offered, so as to encourage personal interpretation.

Moving on to the delineation of meaning, and back to Groenewald, he stresses how important the 'literal content' is in searching for "the number (the significance) of times a meaning was mentioned and also how (non-verbal or para-linguistic cues) it was stated."⁵³¹ Onto clustering of units, again bracketing is stressed, "in order to remain true

⁵²⁷Ibid.

⁵²⁸Ibid., 50

⁵²⁹Ibid.

⁵³⁰Ibid.

⁵³¹Groenewald, 50.

to the phenomenon,”⁵³² searching to “elicit the essence of meaning of units within the holistic context.”⁵³³ An accent toward ‘artistic judgment’ and ‘creative insight’ is given the nod here, as one finds the ways of bringing together ‘units of meaning,’ that will help ‘determine central themes,’ “which expresses the essence of these clusters.”⁵³⁴ In so doing, we look to ‘validate and modify where necessary’ in the summation, while unearthing the uniqueness of what has been expressed and explored.

Practically, this will be demonstrated by supporting the narrative with appendices, photographs and figures – as warranted – alongside the highlighting of significant quotes and passages, as well as demonstrating some of the artistic efforts created and expressed by the participants. The appendices reserve the material required for the REB, other references that were used to support the text, and also the holding place for the various readings. The figures are reserved for display of the artwork, and text of the participants. All recordings have been transcribed,⁵³⁵ (See Appendix J) however many of the transcripts had to be re-edited, as some of the interpretations of the recordings bordered on the absurd. Additionally, the use of *Atlas:ti* – a state-of-the-art qualitative data and research software – has served as a beneficial tool to hasten the search for compatible components. The software’s efficiency has helped tabulate quotations, codes, themes, and ‘word crunch,’ but unfortunately, has also presented challenges.

Though initially it was thought the software would be very useful it became increasingly more difficult to use. With Groenewald’s explanation, I now understand the reasons why I was facing such difficulties. Put simply: “However, ...the understanding of

⁵³²Ibid.

⁵³³Ibid.

⁵³⁴Ibid.

⁵³⁵A bursary for persons with permanent disabilities was obtained from *Education et Enseignement supérieur Québec*, www.afe.gouv.qc.ca/ NoNotes.com received the contract. Appendix J is a copy of the non-disclosure agreement.

the meaning of phenomena ‘cannot be computerized because it is not an algorithmic process. In ...can be used to ease the laborious task of analysing text-based data, (Kelle 1995) through rapid and sophisticated searches, line-by-line coding, and so on. However, these programs do not help with doing phenomenology.”⁵³⁶ The efficiency of the program’s database capacity has eased the overall searching as well as offering the means in which to categorize per groups and itemize accordingly. However, there was the annoying issue of consistent crashing of the system, making it not only unreliable, but also risky.

Over 200 items have been put into the system for this project. (281 to be exact) including: approximately 24 hours of audio recordings of the preliminary interviews, each module, and the final interviews. These have all been transcribed, and these documents are uploaded. Additionally, completed daily questionnaires, final questionnaires, field notes, photographs of all of the art that was expressed, (including in some cases, that of the researcher), the flip charts for each module, and some email content, as well as notes and drawings serving as keynotes along the journey have been uploaded.

The image of a spiral arises as a central focus, in which to direct the process of explication and, as a result to correlate significant relationships and links throughout this assessment. Similar in reasoning to Creswell’s ‘data analysis spiral,’⁵³⁷ without the analysis, using the image of a spiral demonstrates some organizational structure of interpretation, as it moves us away from a “fixed linear approach.”⁵³⁸ Thus, stages of the project will be examined with an emphasis on the key points of the research questions.

⁵³⁶Ibid.,51.

⁵³⁷John W. Creswell, <http://www.ceil-conicet.gov.ar/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/CRESWELLQualitative-Inquiry-and-Research-Design-Creswell.pdf>, third edition, 182 (accessed January 23, 2019).

⁵³⁸Ibid.

Namely an investigation of where the topic of acedia may surface, the proponents of discernment, and any expression of meaning that may become thematic, while maintaining the leading question: ‘can a practice of pastoral theology and the arts help others discern acedia in their lives? In so doing, could this provide an impetus toward responsible change and transformation? Attention to any activity that might justify my claim that acedia is a causality of identity crisis is to be observed; and the central theme of ‘who am I?’ must also remain in focus.

Sufficient space and freedom of expression need to be considered to allow subtle or covert interpretations that intuitively may arise, both on the part of the participant and the researcher that may shed some light on the final outcome. What happened to determine the quality of the experience serves as an important subtext, along with information shared by the researcher as facilitator, together with what was revealed as a result of understanding the trajectory of acedia. How were the participants affected by this knowledge? Given the nature of phenomenology, I would think it vital that these same liberties apply to the reader as well.

There will be an introduction for each segment followed by the explication and evaluation of the data. Allowing the structure of the narrative to unfold by highlighting key areas encourages a depth to the participant’s connections that might be less visible otherwise. Though perhaps unconventional, providing detailed, edited verbatim accounts of the participants is a means in which to offer a glimpse of their individual nature, their challenges, as well as their aspirations. It is these accounts that are presented in the figure elements, providing the vitality of a phenomenological account – accessing meaning as directly as possible with their own personal accounts. This style of presenting explicit

details is free of partiality as it is rendered without critique, and is suspended of judgment, as much as possible, with exception of the need to choose what is deemed eventful and meaningful in terms of the research questions, while also garnering what is of meaning to the participants.

As noted in the REB criteria, the participants were asked to submit portions of their journaling if they chose to do so, and some of the participants did submit notes. Additionally, there is also content of email correspondence. As it turns out, the nature of these reflections is highly personal. Given full consideration to the trust of the participants I do not think it wise or beneficial to share this information. Although it proved to be beneficial from a ‘pastoral’ point-of-view, while also providing opportunity to both the participants and myself as a facilitator to unpack some of those conversations, and to reflect on the process, its overall content does not necessarily provide any additional information to advance the findings of the project. Maintaining the standards of ‘minimal risk,’ I have chosen not to share much if any of the contents of the journals or emails. This also affects a great portion of what would be considered field notes.

Biases

In speaking of ‘bracketing’ and ‘suspension of judgment’ here is a suitable place to express the biases in my role as researcher, facilitator and participant. I understand a bias as a preference, a judgment, or a prejudice that in the case of this type of work needs to be held in reserve, suspended if at all possible – for the good of the all. In contemplating the nature of a bias I at times see duality at play within myself, where I may sway from one end of a spectrum to another. While conceiving the awareness of my

biases, I am asked to regard the tension between either my own dual thinking and/or with another as a discipline in and of itself, for in the holding of the tension, I am given the opportunity for the possibility of my own transformation. I am offered the prospect of acknowledging my own weaknesses, and vulnerabilities as a mechanism toward growth.

As a person of both spiritual and religious adaptation, I believe in God. My liberal temperament is exercised when in a group setting as a facilitator, recognizing that many come to their own understanding on their own time. Bearing in mind the various stages of faith development, I must consistently remind myself of this. As an academic, and a practical theologian, I am genuinely curious about how people describe and engage with their faith. At times, I am cautious around the arenas of fundamentalist thinking, believing that fixed notions can be dangerous and at times enlist prejudicial notions, behaviours and action. Nonetheless, I am mindful that these areas are also part of one's faith development, and do my best to curtail comment or reaction, unless there are harmful and disrespectful reproaches.

My liberal theology can provide a lot of space for those who express a life of secularism. I lean toward these borders myself at times, finding and feeling that at times, Church traditions are particularly constraining given the vernacular of our days. Especially when it comes to patriarchal language, and colonized thinking. The word 'Lord' and 'Father' are but two examples. Knowing I sometimes lean toward "the edge of the inside,"⁵³⁹ I am faced with the choice to be a person who stands within the circle of religiosity, understanding that despite my controversial nature, I most likely have the most influence within, rather than without – and vice versa. Despite the infused doctrines

⁵³⁹Richard Rohr, *Daily Meditation*, Center for Action and Contemplation, <https://cac.org/the-edge-of-the-inside-2017-09-12/> (accessed October 31st, 2018). I read Rohr's daily meditations. I remember being particularly moved by this statement, finding that it is quite descriptive of my liberal theological nature.

and dogma of Church life, I have found that religious life, in particular the way of the contemplative, to be an extraordinary contribution to my life, for the method instils peace in the mind. As an acquired discipline, it manifests patience, perseverance and above all – humility. I am conscious of not using my role as a facilitator or practitioner to persuade others toward my religious and ethical convictions or values for those not part of the circle. No proselytizing.

Although at times I am quite aware of my personal resistance toward discipline, or even a ‘rule’ for that matter, there is the greater part of me that is enamoured by the contemplative life. I feel impassioned by the order that ‘work is prayer’ as it is with the Benedictines. I lean more toward the monastic way than the precepts of the institutionalized Church, though admit to being consistently moved by a beautiful mass. The bias is simply that I would wish the same for everyone: to feel recognized by God, and to feel engaged in a holy life. But sometimes there is the wish that the other believe as I do – which is virtually impossible. Though I also struggle with speaking of my faith, outside faith circles – with those who don’t understand. And, I find at times, my own thinking a detriment with how I am expected to be as a religious person.

As an artist, and a pastoral theologian, I fully believe the images that surface during times of meditation are at times amenable to the language of the soul. I wish on occasion, people would take these images more seriously and to also exercise the power of converging art and spirituality as a serious and pastoral practice and prayer. I am often highly sensitive and experience heightened intensity with the purity of colour. It is almost as if God speaks, and yet with no words to describe this exact essence. The same heightened expression may happen when composing or playing music, and writing.

Being connected to a subject in nature with a camera is also particularly exhilarating, and yet calming. The beauty of the act of creation moves me to places void of explanation. I believe it is with this impetus that I am called to do this work. For there is joy here. As such, it would be my wish that others would delve deeply into their creative arenas. However, the intensity can also be a biased expression toward wanting to shape or control the outcome. Another reminder to ‘let it go.’ As participants are often judgmental of their own work, I too must exercise caution to consistently work with the quality of the experience, as opposed to the quality of the art, whether in the role of facilitator, researcher or participant. For it is in the description of the narrative, accompanied by witness, which offers a culminating spirit as part of the impetus toward transformation – for both the participant and the practitioner.

As a learned person, I must consistently remind myself of the power of ambiguity. And how such power is evident in the spiritual and religious lives of many. Not to assume an outcome, but rather strive toward serving the other, (participant or client) so that they (and I) remain opened to the Voice of the Spirit. To release a sometimes self-imposed competitive edge is a must to look out for, as the end goal is to serve ‘the good.’

Even though I trust myself to be a deep listener, I also have a sceptical side. I believe in the ‘wounded healer,’ and those who are named to be a true shaman. I am weary and wary of charlatans, and some of those who avow to be enlightened yet hold a lack of respect for the religious traditions of others, and for those who claim to be ‘spiritual and not religious’ and yet are without discipline, practice, or humility. I find it disingenuous. And yet, humbly, I too have traveled these roads. I wish to sincerely hear

what one believes to be ‘the truth’ of themselves, their beliefs, and their God, however I lack patience at times with hearsay and opinion that is not of one’s own.

I have my own preoccupations with anxiety and time, and given a hearing impairment (along with other disabilities) can sometimes feel the need for more structure than others within a working environment or retreat setting. Time becomes a precious commodity, noting that a lot of my own time feels wasted as a result of both the need to have things repeated and the repercussions of anxiety. I must consistently remind myself to be gentle with my time – mine, and that of the other. As we are cautioned and advised to hold the light to our biases, it also provides the occasion to be fully present for the other. Void of pre-conceived notions, before and afterthoughts, in doing so, we spawn a conservation of energy that could be reserved for empathy and alterity.

The one bias that most notably runs the deepest is belonging, along with the mystical experienced as being an artist. We are influenced by the experiences of our lives, and I as a researcher am no different. I bring with me behaviour and conditions as a result of an early traumatic history, some of it pre-verbal, which is most difficult to describe at times. And yet, such a history has been opportune for the development of the many gifts in my life that no doubt were developed in order to help me cope. In hindsight, these graces have saved my life.

I say this to highlight the essential need to belong. It affects many in many different ways. As we never know the story of participants until they choose to tell it, I find that at times – within this context – energy has to be tempered to adjust to the climate of the room. There is the desire for things to go well, and the hope that folks will connect and engage within the group, and with each other. And, there is always a risk

involved. I tend to be sympathetic to this energy; with the hope that no one experiences what it feels like not to belong. And no doubt belonging is one lens I look through as I consider the repercussions of acedia.

I tagged mysticism alongside with belonging. For myself, there is no deeper experience than what I would name as a mystical experience. And yet, the definition of such an experience is undoubtedly as difficult to define as spirituality, as we have seen in the previous summary on that topic. Dorothee Sölle, the German liberation theology states: “The history of mysticism is a history of the love for God.”⁵⁴⁰ In tune with how I came to the concluding question about spirituality, that is spirituality potentially being a ‘political statement,’ Sölle says this: “I cannot conceive of this without political and praxis-oriented actualization that is directed toward the world.”⁵⁴¹ As she furthers her thinking: “My questioning is focused on social reality. This means that for the sake of what is within, I seek to erase the distinction between a mystical *internal* and a political *external*.”⁵⁴² As I team mysticism with belonging and believe that the ultimate quest of not only the mystic, but the contemplative, the spiritual, along with the artist and the monk within, Sölle sums it up: “For mystical consciousness, it is essential that everything internal become external and be made visible. A dream wants to be told, the ‘inner light’ wants to shine, the vision has to be shared.”⁵⁴³ I simply wonder if there is a cohesive spiritual bond between belonging and the mystical.

I am hopeful the presentation below is without any considerable lean toward bias, prejudice or judgment. The testimony of the participants, their artwork, and the sharing of

⁵⁴⁰Dorothee Soelle, *The Silent Cry – Mysticism and Resistance*. (Minneapolis U.S.A., Augsburg Fortress. 2001) 2. Noted that the spelling of Sölle’s name has been spelled differently for this publication. Quoted in the publishing material: “This book is a translation of *Mystik un Widerstand: ‘Du stilles Geschrei’* by Dorothee Soelle, 1997, Hoffman und Campe Verlag, Hamburg, Germany.”

⁵⁴¹ Ibid.

⁵⁴² Ibid., 3

⁵⁴³ Ibid., 13

their artwork will speak for themselves. And yet, for the project itself to have any credibility, I believe the reader must experience some inclination of their own about what a pastoral theology and the arts is all about, and so perhaps the greatest bias is leaning toward leading by example.

How was I to keep the awareness of these biases in check? I mentioned frequently during the days of the retreat when I was aware of any potential lean or subjectivity: “I’m citing a bias here.” There was also reference to this during the times of the final interview. Said participant # 2 as an example: “And honestly, you mentioned it only a few times about your biases, and I knew you were trying to stay very unbiased, about everything. But to me – it’s an organic thing. You’re not a robot. It makes it more human, more comfortable, more real, and more valid. You tried very hard. I could see that.” In compliance with the mandate of the ethic review board, efforts were made for the participants to gather for a final meeting. Five of the six could attend. As we broke bread together, sharing a communal meal, we went over a draft of the thesis, eliciting comments, suggestions and observations on the part of the participants. When I addressed the topic of biases, there were no comments brought forth. As I read in detail the final composite of themes, everyone present agreed that which was being referred to was indicative of their original statements, and voices. One questioned the choice of themes. The methodology was explained, and I trust that it clarified matters. I suggested to the participants if they had anything additional they wanted to add before submission, they could submit in writing before the deadline. I heard or received nothing of concern. Let us now turn to the introduction of each segment.

Introduction of each Segment

Preliminary interviews

Six preliminary interviews took place, lasting approximately 30 minutes, after 25 pre-screening conversations with people inquiring about the project. Such conversations took place either after church service, or on the phone, some via email, and others happening randomly as a result of social interaction. A copy of the recruitment letter was forwarded to those who wished to further investigate the possibility. Two people demonstrated what I felt was a behaviour that may have proved detrimental to the project, or in the least an unwarranted level of discomfort. I decided to not encourage their interest, choosing to act on the side of caution to keep the safety risk to a minimum as stated in the REB criteria. Three interviews were recorded at the studio; the other three were recorded at a nearby village. Following ‘an informal approach,’ I started with a check-in allowing the participants to ‘settle in,’ to see if they were ‘comfortable, and relaxed’ before proceeding. Next, the details of the retreat were explained before proceeding with the six structured questions. (See appendix D) These questions were designed to determine interest in the project, what each participant might aspire to discover, and to determine if participants had any formal knowledge of acedia. The nature of spiritual and religious affiliation was asked about, not as a bias, but rather out of respect toward the potential participants, and to help determine any evidence of prejudice.

Areas of concern were given room to be voiced. Inquiries about time frames, group dynamics and number of participants were addressed. Questions asked by the interviewees included inquiries about topic, format, definitions, dates, art supplies, confidentiality, and concerns about vulnerability, and safety. All six people signed the

consent form, agreeing to participate in the study.

All of the participants demonstrated an inquisitive introspection, aligning their responses with a thematic pursuit of the self, though their spiritual and religious affiliations were diverse, ranging from Anglican, Presbyterian, Presbyterian/Buddhist, and ‘spiritual/not religious.’ Curiosity about the nature of acedia began to emerge, as definitions were sought, Google searches were made, and the Norris’ text rifled through. Diverse expressions of anticipation and judgment were made about the doing of the art.

The Daily Agenda of the Retreat

The agenda for all of the retreat days unfolded in a similar fashion. All six candidates showed up for all modules, everyone came as prepared as their lives would permit them to be. We began with morning coffee, and a check-in with either a talking stick, or with “Shug” the teddy bear. ‘Shug’ is a ruffled, scraggly, teddy bear hand puppet that I’ve had and used in all kinds of scenarios for over 30 years. The puppet became a bit of a comforting mascot at times, especially when pain was surfacing, and tears flowing. Humour and fun are sometimes good ways to break the ice, especially when dealing with serious and vulnerable topics.

Though future check-ins were recorded, the first one was not, as I assumed (and rightfully so) that the group may be nervous, and not knowing each other, I decided to move into recording slowly, paying attention to vulnerability. Names, feelings and intention were shared for the first round. Once the check-in was complete, we headed over to the studio proper.

We began our time together in the studio with the lighting of a candle and a prayer. The group was then asked to share their thoughts about Norris’ text. The question

as to whether this book could serve as a text in the event this project became formulated as a curriculum of sorts was posed to reflect upon. On day one a journal with a printed image of the coloured spiral (first seen on the recruitment poster) taped on the inside of the cover, was given to each participant, along with a brief one-page composite on acedia that I had written. (See appendix K)

The material significant to each of the module's question of the module was then presented preceding the brainstorming session. These consisted of scriptural readings and/or poetry, reflections, sometimes videos and/or musical clips as well. Once the brainstorming session was tapped out, we moved into meditation, taking on a non-religious/denominational tone in order to address the needs of all. Emphasis was placed on the breath as it moved throughout the body, as energy, light, 'Spirit,' and its connection to Mother Earth; noting it takes the body approximately 10 – 15 minutes to begin to relax. Time was allotted to focus on the question of the module, to reflect, and to see if any images, thoughts, or ideas arose. The participants were instructed to move quietly downstairs into the art space to work on their artistic expression.

Approximately 45 minutes were given for the doing of the art. The participants then returned to our upstairs meeting place, taking turns sharing their work, and reflecting on any ideas and meaning that surfaced. The group was cautioned that this was not a 'therapy session,' however clarifying questions were allowed as well as comments, and observations.

Questionnaires

At the end of each day a questionnaire was handed out, (Appendix E) and photographs of the art were taken. On the last day, all participants were given the final

questionnaire to complete and return within a week. (Appendix F) Preparations for their final interview were also scheduled.

Final Interviews

Final interviews were scheduled within a week of the final module. Again, three occurred in my studio, and the other three in a nearby village. The goal of the final interview was to question or unpack any details that needed clarifying, and to also bring closure to the project. Let us now turn to the explication and evaluation of the data.

Explication of the data

The development of clusters of meaning and themes build upon one another, as they follow suit with the chronological character of the modules. As the participants become more familiar with the rhythm of the modules, while establishing each their personal comfort levels, in conversation, in meditation, and with the silence, and art expression and sharing, there is a momentum that builds. This leads to the development and expansion of their ideas, as they nurture their first claims, and open themselves up to the collective wisdom and sharing. As such, it is best to present these ideas and the emergence of themes while abiding by the chronology of the modules.

Preliminary interviews

Can a practice of pastoral theology and the arts help others discern acedia in their lives? In so doing, could this provide an impetus toward responsible change and transformation? In holding the research questions to the light — as Groenewald has suggested — gives attention to the statements that move toward ‘the essence of meaning.’⁵⁴⁴ At the onset of the project, the preliminary interviews set the tone for what the participants were hoping to discover on the retreat. They make mention of their spiritual and religious affiliation and beliefs. Some chose to open up about the challenges they were presently facing. These testimonies laid the groundwork for where their future sharing and witnessing would take them.

None of the participants had any knowledge of the concept before they had heard me speak of acedia, whether that was in conversation, or while doing the recruiting for the project. If there is an indication that they do, it came about as a result of researching acedia after hearing a preliminary conversation. Some took it upon themselves to begin to research the concept. Two of the participants question the correlation between care and acedia. (See figure # 1A and 1B for participants’ pre-knowledge of acedia.)

Inquiring about what each participant might hope to discover along the way, some are searching for answers to ‘unlock’ or ‘unblock’⁵⁴⁵ areas that are of concern for them. We see what might be the first unnamed reference to acedia: “what you’re putting your finger on.”⁵⁴⁶ Others were in search of ways to ‘deepen’ their ‘understanding of their

⁵⁴⁴Groenewald, 50.

⁵⁴⁵Participant # 1, 3 – Both of these participants speak of ‘something’ that they feel is in the way of their moving forward.

⁵⁴⁶Participant # 1.

spirituality.’ One hoped to address ‘fear’⁵⁴⁷ and was also considering how fear might be related to acedia.

Spiritual affiliation was a diverse mix. (See figure # 2 – spiritual and religious affiliation.) People questioning their faith, their relationship with church, some citing a deep anger, some honouring spiritual practices, others with none.

Preliminary units of meaning

Seeking ~ the quest

Though there is yet any experience of doing art or group conversation in the preliminary interviews, there is the mention of ‘finding one’s tribe,’⁵⁴⁸ dealing with wounds, and shadows, things we fear, and anxiety. As we proceed with the initial questions, there are expressions of looking for community, “searching for solutions to a local problem.”⁵⁴⁹ There are reflections of memories relived of childhood and spiritual experiences, thoughts about their families of origin, parents, and family histories, some with depression, and how to grapple with the “understanding of caring and suffering.”⁵⁵⁰

Needs

The first question of the preliminary interviews ‘what drew you to the project,’ participant # 1 declares: ““There is a tribe here, I just need to find it, right?” Not only does it imply ‘seeking,’ looking for a tribe, does the question suggests a need to connect? Additional units of meaning described with emphasis on potential needs were: spirituality, self-analysis, and challenges of life, personal history, acedia, and curiosity. There is a leaning toward the existential quest. Says participant # 4: “It’s a call. It’s the same kind of call to express one’s existence.” The need to know one’s self. (See figure #

⁵⁴⁷Participant # 5.

⁵⁴⁸Participant # 1.

⁵⁴⁹Participant # 1.

⁵⁵⁰Participant # 1.

to connection, and call – “announcing our existence,” and nature. The idea of nature is mentioned on several occasions along with ideas of interacting and being in relationship with the Earth, nature, and nature as teacher. There is emphasis on ‘connecting and connectedness,’ from both biblical and communal points of view. There is mention of time as ‘continuity,’ and making choices. Duality surfaces, as in light and dark, as does the topic of death. Values as related to ethics are beginning to surface, “leaving a positive footprint, making a difference.” There is talk about family, and the importance of engagement as “part of the dance of life.” (See figure # 5 for the highlights of the participants’ comments – “What do you believe in?”)

Units of meaning and emerging themes

Symbols

Circles and spirals

There are images unfolding as symbols, used to describe states of being and experience. In this first module – the description of the ‘circle’ motif in the art suggests a representation of ‘connectedness of human bonds.’ (See figure # 6, participant # 1) Participant # 1 suggests that ‘believing in’ as something “being inside of something.” Figures of gardens and ‘mother’ become “figurative works as part of the interpretation.” Additionally, we have the ‘spiral’ denoting the ‘outward movement’ beginning with God in the centre, and moving toward a final description of ‘crucible.’ (Photo above, also see figure # 7 for full description.)

Seeds

The use of symbols is becoming part of the language in which to describe several takes of meaning of the participants. The representation of ‘seeds’ is demonstrated not only as elements of faith but ‘interconnectedness,’ and our ‘alignment with nature,’ as part of an ecological system. An unfinished collage reflects how ‘the elements of nature,’ are reflected in a ‘kind of a body:’ “Meaning of seeds, circulation of air, and how such was the ultimate interconnectedness and how we align ourselves with nature. How we share the same composite as “bone and rocks.... this is what this spiral was telling me.”

Hearts

Cited on several occasions, renderings of hearts also become a symbolic gesture of connection.

Poetry

One of the participants chose to present her poetry as both the written word and in the symbolic shape of a spiral. The appearance of symbolism continues to set a thematic tone, as we see with the use of the spiral, as it connects visually with poetry. Participant #4’s description of her spiral/poetry: (as described with art image above)

Poetry gave meaning to my spiralling thoughts... starting from the inside moving outward, key ideas being uplifted were about God, connection, responsibility, community, restoration, create, communion, love, flowing, believing, nature, and lover. Hope, suffering and relationship.

She ends the poetic prayer with ‘crucible.’

Interconnectivity

Along with the spiral we see the theme of ‘interconnectivity’ presented by another participant, beginning to emerge as it is associated with identity, as in something to ‘believe in.’ Different colours are representations of different identities and how “we are

reminded of our living selves where the intersections occur.” Struggling with faith, ‘needing to see things,’ brings the metaphor and the symbol of ‘seeds of faith’ to the surface. (See figure # 8 for participant # 5’s sharing and art.)

To be seen

The necessity to be ‘seen,’ to be known by the Divine is ushered in. This cross filters with participant # 5’s need to ‘see things,’ as mentioned above. Expressions of ‘comfort and feeling connected’ to the group are mentioned. A link is made on how art ‘bridges the gap,’ as it “put me in touch with my beliefs, and my Divine connection.”

Light and darkness

Light and darkness were first mentioned as a passing thought: “As a pendulum of balance.” It was also suggested as part of a claim to existence: “It goes back to...and God spoke and there was dark and there was light – announce, to speak.” As we spoke of what we believe in participant # 6 emphasizes: “Light and dark. And the ‘AND’ is big, signalling its correlation with connection.

To connect – and variations there of

The word ‘connectedness’ marked its debut in the first module. (See figure # 9A – flip chart) According to the word cruncher offered by Atlas: ti, ‘connect’ and its many derivatives are the most used words throughout the course of the project. (See figure # 9B)

Ethics

There are ripples of ethical care beginning to surface: “Leaving a positive

footprint, making a difference,” and how ‘choosing’ provides meaning and direction.

Relationship

There is mention of parents, ‘mother,’ family homes, being called, a connection with the Divine, and with the Earth, and other constructs of moving toward connection.

Acedia - symptoms

Developing is the mention of feelings such as ‘isolation and loneliness,’ as they would suggest ‘not being seen,’ and their possible connection to acedia.

Module 2: “What do I value?”

(See appendix M for material presented)



“I believe very strongly in the value of being in nature.”

(Participant # 2, see figure #10 for full text.)

“The right to choose,” is repeated, along with ‘simplicity, and ‘not getting caught up in the un-necessities of life.’ Values such as honesty, ‘purity of connection,’ and ‘no pretending’ are listed. Authenticity and intimacy touch the foreground. The circle re-surfaces, as we are witness to the question of ‘sacrifice?’ (See figure # 12, participant # 1,

‘sacrifice?’) There are additional references to family, children, sentient beings, and ‘centeredness.’

Further references are made about: “nature and ecological systems that support human life. We wouldn’t exist without it.”⁵⁵¹ In the mix, along with some discussion about beauty is how ‘gratitude’ may interplay with the notion of beauty: “recognition of them being valuable is what made them beautiful?”⁵⁵² “Humanity or human existence and life itself,”⁵⁵³ are noted as valuable. We are reminded about: “community and our collective intelligence, and the gifts we all bring, and how those come together.... we can build beautiful things together.”⁵⁵⁴

“Love” is re-iterated. “I believe in love”⁵⁵⁵ is linked to the value of love, and loving. While another values ‘solitude, and justice:’ “Justice in the sense that if there is a cause that comes up in one’s heart that is so strong when you realize something is so wrong that you need to fix it and you go ahead at all costs.” There is a reaffirmation of the ‘belief’ that ‘service’ is of value, and as such “to be significant.”

One participant took to sharing about her family history. History and family themes emerge as they play a part in both questions of value and belief. The participant found the belief question to be more ‘cerebral,’ while the value question went down into ‘something closer to the heart.’ Relationships with family members, including that of ‘mother,’ and animals are cited.

⁵⁵¹Participant # 3.

⁵⁵²Participant # 3.

⁵⁵³Participant # 3.

⁵⁵⁴Participant # 3.

⁵⁵⁵Participant # 5.

Clusters of meaning

Clusters of meanings are formulating, with ‘connection’ as a consistent, central component. ‘Gifts’ become a repeated gesture of connection, encouraging others to share their gifts, as in doing so has considerable impact – especially noted regarding our environment and how we are connected through our ecological systems. Apparent are expressions of value: honesty, ‘purity of connection,’ intimacy, choice, authenticity, and gratitude – though not directly spoken – inferring a modicum of humility. And, love.

There is consideration for the ‘beautiful’ as landscape, geographical, environmental, and the invocation of beauty strewn with gratitude, and awe. Also presented is the idea of the search for ‘unity between the human and the divine;’ oneness, integrity, authenticity, and intimacy.

Emerging themes - what is meaningful?

Connection continues....

We have a conscious mention of ‘God,’ as a means of connecting to ‘whom,’ as a mention of who or what is valuable. Which leads into a conversation about intimacy:

In that same vein, the word that comes to mind for me is intimacy in a sense of just the opposite of the culture that we live in which is so superficial. So intimacy to me means depth. And honesty and...the unity between the human and divine...the reciprocal relationship that is unifying between the human and God.⁵⁵⁶

Ecology and the environment, nature

The ongoing development of ‘ecological systems’ management, parallel with the capacity of ‘collective intelligence’ in community as a means in which to cultivate engagement, though engagement continues to be mentioned as connection. We see this as

⁵⁵⁶Participant # 6.

it is repeated frequently with faithfulness toward nature: “I believe very strongly in the value of being in nature.... I taught my students...there’s a desperate need for it more and more.”⁵⁵⁷

Service

A collage of ‘S’s accented with simple pen and paper, participant # 5 addresses how he believes that his value “comes from the cross actually.” He values his work with people who are challenged, whether that be a ‘physical, mental or emotional’ challenge.

Symbolism

Re-occurring mentions of ‘circle,’ denoting relationship, choice, and ongoingness. There are hearts, symbolic gestures of nature - tree, water, and a potential perspective of ‘home’ as a means into love, and ground, and hands as a description of giving, and service.

Relationship

As we move forward and continue to speak of connection, we also have reminders of childhood memories, family history, and ‘love.’ Speaking of nature and environment, and service, and a search for unity, and how these ideas merge and overlap, it compels the idea of relationship, and engagement.

Existentialism

“Existence.” (See figure # 11, “What do I value?” Participant # 3)

A woman who was also the tree...I started with a few words on the roots...foundation, source, and connection. The colour blue, ‘kind of like water,’ with energy flowing through...then these are arms, it kind of looked like a cross at first - I’m not religious ...she has seeds, they’re falling down, and they’re growing and then there’s a heart.... Kind of connects it all...the energy coming out of the heart is like flowing into other things. So I value existence, connection, connection to nature, and...like roots coming in and like... sharing the heart and they’re

⁵⁵⁷Participant # 2.

holding together.

We hear about existence and how it relates to connection, and Divine source.

God

Participant # 6 speaks about God:

The oneness with God,” and how “theologically, I believe we are already one – we with God, we with other humans, and we with all creation. God for me is a oneness that includes it all. So god wants to be in a relationship to self and we want to be in relationship to god, i.e. to self...this wholeness is what I value. So what I believe in is also what I value. The glimpses I get and or feel and or experience give me great joy. The beauty I see as I drive the back roads of farm country bring me a sense of this oneness, this wholeness, and it is joy. Make me yours, I said, 35 years ago to the divine. And right now, it feels like I have agreed to enter deeper on this dipsy-doodle passage...but what a struggle to get there. I know it is or I have called it loneliness because maybe it's acedia, but I care so very deeply that it strikes me that it's just loneliness. I am empowered by the quote on my kitchen windows so, ‘Loneliness is the human condition cultivated the way it tunnels into you, allows room for your soul to grow.’ For what I value is what I believe in that is the connectedness of everything.

Acedia – symptoms

Acedia is beginning to take shape as a theme, as loneliness is cited again as a potentially vulnerable aspect of acedia.

Module 3: “What is my purpose?”

(See appendix N for material presented)



“One of my purposes is to bring joy to others in this world.”

(Participant # 2. See figure # 14 for full text)

Purpose is defined similarly to some of the values: as ‘a connector,’ as means of service, to love, and to ‘journey,’ and ‘to bring joy into the world.’ To ‘be a voice, and to choose wilfully.’ To connect people through their stories, and to express one’s self, and to become aware of what purpose is, how ‘being’ is the still point. There was a common deliberation about the ‘journey’ and how “we wait for a destination to feel like our journey is complete or happy,”⁵⁵⁸ and “Being present with our own existence” as opposed to ‘intellectualizing everything...’⁵⁵⁹ were the topics that came to light.

More childhood memories surface, including stories of significance that helped shape their understanding of purpose. Purpose becomes expressed as colour, as joy, as mission. Some talked about how they have “drifted away”⁵⁶⁰ from their purpose, while also sharing their understanding of the matter: “That’s a huge realization.”⁵⁶¹ There is again, a suggestion by some how these questions are linked: “I’m one with the Creator,

⁵⁵⁸Participant # 2.

⁵⁵⁹Participant # 3.

⁵⁶⁰Participant # 6.

⁵⁶¹Participant # 6.

which is what my values are all about.”⁵⁶² Another admits to having “struggled with that for many, many ears so there’s a lot of baggage I’m bringing in.”⁵⁶³

Emerging themes - images of meaning

Joy

There are reflections on joy, and how this is associated with purpose. (Participant # 2’s expression of purpose, photo and quote above) Participant # 6 fashions a sense of ‘wholeness’ as when connecting with ‘beauty’ and how that emanates a sensation of joy: “The beauty I see as I drive the back roads of farm country bring me a sense of this oneness, this wholeness, and it is joy.” (See figure # 15 for full text, journaling, participant # 6) Participant # 2 is candid: “Not enjoying the journey, thinking joy is going to be at the end of the journey when you get to the top of the mountain instead of finding joy in the whole trip.” Another, Participant # 6 also assumes a sense of purpose as it connects with his mission: “I guess one of my purposes is to bring joy to others in this world...”

Symbols

Participant # 6 describes a visual of the eye of her horse, along with the significance of her choice of colours. She described how she was receiving “an indication to get closer to the deeper levels of life.” She goes on to categorize the colour ‘grey’ as a reminder of the counterpoint between darkness and light:

And the edges are the darkness out of which the light comes and the darkness has never put out the light. So there’s no black. This is a charcoal grey, it’s not black. So the darkness is there and it’s the light’s never been put out and the invitation is to be one with all, simply to be. So that what’s that means for me, the purpose.

⁵⁶²Participant # 6.

⁵⁶³Participant # 3.

She also speaks to how such a manifestation of purpose resides in her life vocationally.

Colour

The various strata of colour to depict the pleats of the earth, ‘of the soil, water, vegetation.’ We have the presence of yellow depicting ‘love of sun,’ and ‘gifts,’ and energy, and the expression of darkness as a way into the light. Ideas about how colour, particularly the colour blue for one participant, acts as a first move may take us into contemplation about balance. (See figure # 18, participant # 1)

Circles

Circles appear again, as a means of describing: “people connected through gifts, and how connection and stories can help us move our society away from really messed up value system that’s destroying the planet and ourselves and health and community.”⁵⁶⁴

Mountain

The mountain story:

All of the people that were climbing up the mountain were faster than me and it didn’t take more than a half an hour for the group to be way ahead and I climbed for two hours by myself determined to catch up with the group ahead of me and go out to the top of the mountain and they’d already been there and gone back down. And I remember standing at the top of the mountain and seeing how beautiful it was and just being so disappointed that I wasn’t good enough to catch up with everybody else and feeling quite lonely and on my own and when I’m looking at these images of nature I totally missed out on the purpose of climbing the mountain. I got caught up in... ‘the struggle?... Yeah, and that image has come back to me a lot in my life and yeah we just kind of miss out all the living because we get caught in the struggle.’⁵⁶⁵

In describing ‘a different mountain,’ purpose is relegated to being ‘useful,’ and ‘about love.’ (See figure # 17, participant # 4 for text and art) This particular piece also connects the participant with ‘seeking,’ as in climbing, family history, being in nature.

⁵⁶⁴Participant # 3.

⁵⁶⁵Participant # 4.

There is an emphasis on the wind...”it’s windy enough to bend the trees over and change the way they grow...Oh!”

Choice

A participant addresses choice: ‘how the very act of ‘choosing’ is about purpose: “My challenge and my calling, I would say, is to choose.... to be a voice.”⁵⁶⁶ A connection between choosing and acedia is made here: “I find that sometimes the weight of all of the decisions or the choices that you can make and weighing ... I find very overwhelming, and I choose, at that point I choose but I choose acedia. I choose to say I’m checking out of here, okay.”⁵⁶⁷

Stories

Purpose becomes expressed through the ‘telling of stories.’ (See figure # 15, participant # 3, art and text) We see these thematically connected with symbols, as mentioned in ‘circles’ above.

Connection – Community

There is consistent mention of connection and variations thereof as linked with community, both as a call of concern regarding the ‘destruction of health and community,’ to being a ‘connector,’ and again reference to connecting with nature, and ‘connective energy’ as a resource of consciousness. We have a link from the previous week: “It’s a clear view from last week....a connection of everything.”⁵⁶⁸ And, referring back to ecological systems: “The way...the people that are around.... everybody is kind

⁵⁶⁶Participant # 5.

⁵⁶⁷Participant # 5.

⁵⁶⁸Participant # 5.

of sharing in as part of that connection between the earth and the universe...we all have to share these resources.”⁵⁶⁹

Acedia - symptoms

Acedia is mentioned on two occasions: as a ‘conscious choice – to choose acedia, also associated with a reference to not being grounded.

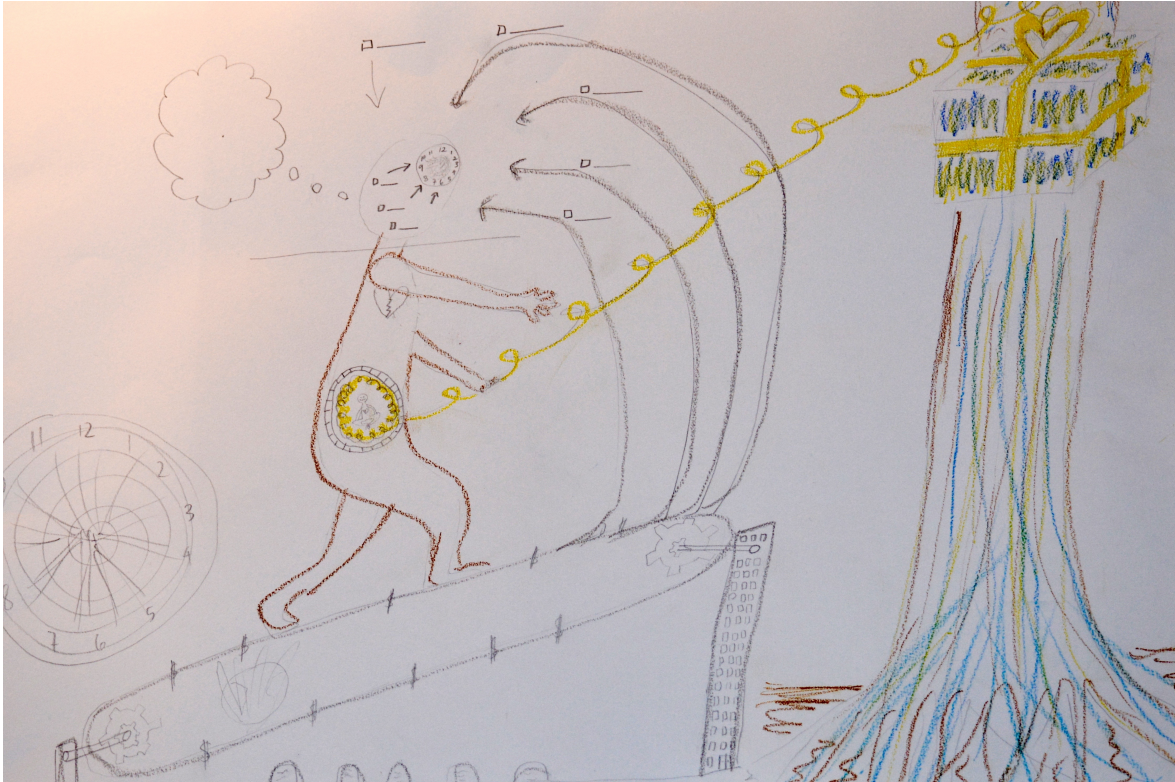
Norris highlights

Noted: Unfortunately, part of the morning’s recorded discussion was not registered. What were lost were the comments around the discussion of Norris’ readings, (Appendix O) and the dialogue that took place around some of the quotes that were presented from both Norris and the Ecclesiastes text. Also missing were the ideas surrounding the topic of beauty. However, there are pictures of the flip chart notes indicating a key thematic indicative from participant # 2: “ Choose to care more, do less.” With emphasis on the word ‘choose.’ (See figure # 19, flip chart.)

⁵⁶⁹Participant # 3.

Module 4: “What are my challenges?”

(See appendix P for material presented)



*“And that’s probably one of my challenges – avoiding. Avoidance in general.”
(See figure # 20, participant # 3, for art and full text.)*

The idea of belonging is beginning to arise, as is the continued mention of ‘flow,’ and ‘continuity.’ Discussion ensued about crisis, and how it places us on the ‘precipice’ of change, and transformation. ‘Self-doubt’ and “Limitations, restrictions, ...all of those things,”⁵⁷⁰ are all named as challenges, as are ‘fear and distrust. ‘And being ‘uncomfortable with the vulnerability of truth.’ Being ‘overwhelmed,’ feeling ‘blocked’ in terms of something being in the way of discovering one’s true self is noted as

⁵⁷⁰Participant # 1.

challenging, along with ‘disempowerment,’ ‘confusion,’ and ‘fear.’ This brings us to acedia. Participant # 3 asks:

Acedia makes you more susceptible to the other ones, right? ... So I see it’s a disconnect... and once you have disconnected from that connection, then that’s when you’re susceptible.... disconnect from...I guess your true self or like a disconnect of behaviour and values potentially, disconnect from your path, your calling.

We hear about ‘self-image,’ and ‘authority’ as being a challenge. Also mentioned is how we’ve lost ‘the art of listening,’ and how listening might be associated with vulnerability:

We don’t listen to the river which is the deepest needs of our souls. We don’t listen necessarily to each other. We’re doing a good job listening here I feel but in general, in society, in our cultures, we don’t listen... So the vulnerability is what I really felt there and out of your pain and your questioning and you’re listening, you were listening and it just flowed up.⁵⁷¹

The thought of ‘emptying the self,’ is presented as challenging, and the admission of not ‘wanting to suffer,’ as the topic of death is spoken about once again, noting that we live in a culture that is ‘afraid of death.’

Field notes refer to rumination about acedia’s possible link with denial and the false self: “And so I’m asking denial of false self versus our authentic true self or the created and creating self. Whatever we choose to call that true self.”⁵⁷² When suffering with acedia, are we in denial that there is a false self, and yet living out of the false self that we have denied? That would be indicative of ignorance as opposed to a willful choice.

Participant # 6 found the insights and discussion helpful if we move from denial to choice:

⁵⁷¹Participant # 5.

⁵⁷²Field notes, lunch break, January 28th, 2017.

What you've just said has been helpful for me in understanding why acedia is a sin...How I've taken it, acedia for me at this point still has every single one of the other sins attached to that.... sits in the heart, sits in the soul... So the choosing to live out of the false self rather than to live out to the true self – I have a better image from what you just said.

Emerging themes – what is meaningful?

Acedia

In the sharing of the art, acedia becomes the first mention. “In acedia there's sort of a funny play between what's safe and what you were drawn to in order not to have to push yourself too far but then there's also that, okay, well, maybe that's a little bit too easy.” (See figure # 21, participant # 1, collage and full text)

As participant # 5 began to share of a traumatic experience and how he believes this event has challenged his life, he questions whether it also shapes the question of acedia and a link to trauma. He once again addresses the need to ‘see things.’ There are several indications of ‘searching for the shadow self.’

Participant # 6 refers to the ‘darkness’ again: “During the meditation...a little tiny mystical moment. The inside of my head got bright, bright, bright, blinding bright light... So all of that is very positive...because the other party is the dark...you asked us how we were, and I said, dark, it's dark, it's really dark. And my life has been really dark for the last three, four years.” We have an evolving reflection, one that locates darkness, choice, acedia and ‘oneness’ along with faith - with biblical reference:

Being here, what – learning about the acedia is about, and about looking at what I value, what I believe in, and what I value, and the challenges, and what is my purpose, and the challenges to that. And it is exactly that that has been the darkness for the last three, or four years. So the challenges are legion, they are legion. So because the challenges are legion... so my challenge – the challenges are - I'm the problem, I'm the one who has to choose.



And so my hand stops me from seeing this little hand which is kind of like the – is an Isaiah, that has the, “I’ll hold you in the *palm* of my hand.” So this is the divine hand holding the pure...

So the swaddled infant is in that hand...they're attached, because they are attached. It's all one, everything is one, I've always believed that, and I still believe it. So I'm the one who has to choose the moments when I'm not going to live with...I'm going to choose the positive rather than the negative in this darkness, because what I see is the causality isn't going to go away. It's not going to go away, so I'm the one who has to do something about it...About this quote I have sitting on my window sill about “loneliness is the human condition, cultivate it.” So to me, that's the positive that says...I'm cultivating a situation that I did not ask for.



When asked about the colour red: “Oh, it's a powerful blockage.” I asked her: ‘if it could be rage?’ She considered that a possibility. As she too mentioned ‘trauma,’ she also emphasizes:

I'm going to be terribly devastated when we're not together, because one of the – one of the issues for me is superficiality. I feel like I live in a bubble of superficiality. And I have not lived my life in superficiality; the whole of my professional life has been anything other than superficial. And where I am, is to me, in my judgment is very superficial. And it drives me a little bit insane. This group is the antithesis to superficiality...it's like my soul feels real good at the end of Saturday...what I'm going to do Sunday?

Symbols

Spiral

A return of the spiral as a representation of ‘joy’ and another speaking of spirals as connectors: “with stories together, and weaving them.”

Mountain

Again, the metaphor of mountain emerges:

Yeah...there’s mountains and there’s a kind of a plateau that would be the highest mountain.... called a plateau.... through the river, through the river of a million eyes, and through the wilderness, and the forest, and under the mountain. My thought was that the challenge never stops. You don’t sleep. You don’t turn away from it. The challenge continues night and day...ya’ just gotta live it, I think. (See figure 22 participant # 4 for full text and art)

She goes on to speak of ‘the mountain as her death.’ “That’s my final transformation.” She also symbolically interprets this mountain as “Christ’s ascension...when he went up in the mountain.”

Flow

One participant often refers to ‘the stop of flow,’ while participant # 1 speaks of it as: ‘that flow, that continuity,’ when speaking of Siddhartha’s river. When asked about feelings around the art: “Flow...I gave up expressive modes of expression...” This person too, also mentions vulnerability, in the same description.

Connect/disconnect

There are reflections around the self, and the susceptibility to acedia when ‘disconnected’ from the self, and values. Expressions of ‘feeling disconnected’ surfaced while presenting, and an acknowledgement of how that feeling leads to ‘giving up.’ We

have mention of weaving stories together as a means of connecting, and feeling
'disconnected' when not being able to 'access the Divine' source.

Module 5: “Who am I called to become?”

(See appendix Q for material presented)



(Last piece. All participants. Silence. Together.)

Norris highlights

Before beginning the last module, we had a final round of reflection regarding Norris' text *Acedia & me: A Marriage, Monks and a Writer's Life*. Norris as a 'good companion' surfaces again. One preferred the personal elements and reflections of Norris' life, as opposed to the other segments of the book that she found "too academic." One found comfort with the text that refers to 'not always needing to say a prayer, but sometimes we can live out a prayer.' One coined the term 'lamppost sayings': "She

[Norris, sic.] has a lot of sayings that really mean something to me. Hard to always take...takes a long time to digest, but found it very relevant, very personal.”

Additional conversation led to a particular statement of Norris’: “I have learned that nothing will erase my susceptibility to acedia for it is part of who I am.”⁵⁷³ Participant # 6 affirms for herself: “ It strikes me from all the different definitions that she gives that it's absolutely imprinted in every single one of us.”

As we were putting the final touches on Norris’ book, I brought up the topic of the healing of acedia, and how the monks referred to a prayer life as one of the three prescriptions; the other two being hard work, that is manual labour, and overcoming the resistance of leaving the cell. We talked about various forms of prayer, and also reflected on what it might mean today to ‘remain in one’s cell.’ Someone suggested an example of a Benedictine community, and how it was ‘a beautiful life,’ while another points to the significance of ‘community.’ As we spoke of the monastic cell one reflects: “resistance to the quiet?” Participant # 1 referenced the ‘cell’ as: “a safe place, to be vulnerable, to be in contact with your soul. And so when you are out, you’re sort of afraid of being amongst others who might not be at the same level of intensity.”

Units of meaning

Discussion about spirituality and politics

The first part of the brainstorming discussion led into the idea of spirituality as defined as a political statement, that I have addressed in the section dealing with the definition of spirituality in this paper. Participant # 2 cited: “Politics is something I pretty much abhor. So I have a hard time putting politics and spirituality in the same... The

⁵⁷³Norris, 275.

bullshit. The stuff you can't believe, you are told then they lied." Participant # 3 referred to "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People," and how we "all have an underlying paradigm...we build on that...all of our values...how we understand ourselves and relate to the world...it made me think of paradigm as being a word, a model...and how we base all our values and beliefs on and then also collectively, which affects us collectively..."

Participant # 1 clarified her understanding of politics:

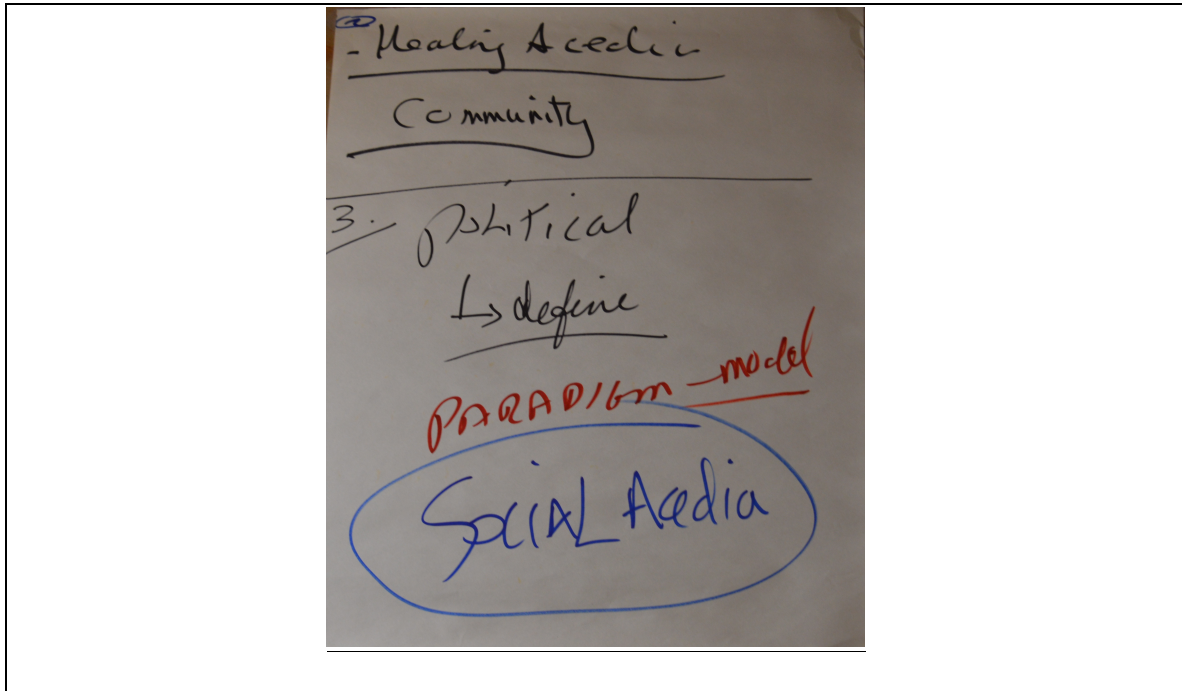
But that's the superficial side of the politics.... that it has now become...but if you think of politics at the ...level when it started, it was more trying to figure out the structure of how to be just and fair and to represent sort of the majority or trying to find some form of governance that best represents the weakest against the strongest. It's all of that. So I think what we're living now is something that's – wasn't originally meant to be. It's just what is – it's the easiest.

Participant # 2 concludes her thoughts on this part of the conversation "Doing less but caring more of what we do and with that passage, that letter, speaking about love, becoming more loving. More patient."

Social acedia

Participant # 3 states her case:

But individually, we say we're experiencing acedia,
I started to think maybe there's like a social acedia that we're sharing.
This kind of disconnection together.
Social acedia.



Commitment

As we moved into the question proper – “Who am I called to become?”

comments: Participant # 3 suggests:

Stepping into our true selves...Commit. I want to say committing. Committing to care. Commitment. Because it's like an action of becoming. It's an action. I guess because that's related to what we are talking about what you have to do to be something into your true self in that process of becoming, and like sitting with it and being in the cell.

Gifts

Participant # 3 believes:

What are you called to share with others...in relation to others...relates back to the gifts...sharing the gifts. Your unique gifts that you're given, and how that kind of fits with everybody's interactions and inspiring others. It just leads like a ripple, or butterfly effect...and if you're sharing your gift, it could have an impact on others to share their gifts.

Group project: “Who am I called to become?”

All of the participants came together in silence to work out a directive that would demonstrate their gifts, the giving toward another, as strangers – with no words. There instructions were as follows:

Imagine you’ve been shipwrecked on a desert island; all of you are from all different parts of the world. Your survival depends on each other, but none of you speak the same language. You all have gifts. How will you rally, and demonstrate who you are in tangent with the needs of the group?

Participant # 1 speaks of ‘ascension,’ the meditation causing her to reflect on being brought to every one’s path through different experiences. Participant # 2 shared about the choice of background colours, describing the final piece as “very bright and very inviting, and very healing.” She continues to speak on the process:

I was curious and a little uncertain as to how we were going to pull all this together. I had a faith that we would because I think we've all done some pretty amazing stuff - and excited to see the end product... people just started doing their own things or helping others to do things, and it was interesting in a sense once we were all hovering around that paper. How people we're putting things on, and making very little eye contact, a little bit with a smile, but it felt very comfortable, but we were just all doing this together, nobody was overpowering anybody else or directing anybody else, and we're all okay with that. That felt - it felt good, it felt different for sure.

Some participants asked questions of themselves: “It started with strips of fabric that I just wanted to tie them together... and different colors of strips of fabric... Oh, this is so relatable to...just like life.... How do I fit in this picture? How do I fit in the world? How do I fit in with others?”⁵⁷⁴ As some of the pieces were fastened with a tiepin donated by one of the participants, along with the addition of nests, participant # 3 mentions: “nurturing the integration of all of these things.”

⁵⁷⁴Participant # 3.

Commenting on their experience participant # 3 replied: “We all had our own perspective, and then came together.” Participant # 1 states: “There's no project that I can do on my own so I have to find the strengths and the interest of each person and bring them to the table.” There is mention of ‘the spiral’ once again, as did the reminder of ‘seeds of faith’ as # 5 specified: “The circles, our beliefs, our value, which is kind of like our personhood, within that...” “ He also became witness to his own role in doing the art: “I don’t know what that says about myself...except that I am an anchor.”

Participant # 6 noted the movement:

From the individual to the community.... who I am called to become - and who each of us is called to become ... part of the community. So my stuff was the sun, which is a star, which was to me the sign of birth and new life, and leadership, and also the big, big flower and one of the trees of life. And the eyes, beside the star – to see – I did two of them...for seeing, for the insight, for the observation, for the witness. And the tree of life was the flower where about new life and wisdom, the wisdom of my age group.

I asked the participants if they had to name the piece what would it be: “Synthesis, A Combination of Things, Life, Us, Ascension, The Stories we Weave Together, and The Paths of Life.” They found the exercise ‘fun, good, cool,’ “good to be pushed out of our comfort zone.”⁵⁷⁵ “It just grew out of a piece of blue bristle board...grew so organically, so naturally, I loved observing everybody doing their thing.”⁵⁷⁶ Participant # 3 finalized: “It gives me contentment, in the sense that I can see working between people and complete cooperation with people for doing things that are hopeful, and in connectivity to each other and to the world, and to the universe... In seeing the spirals – It’s nice to see this again. It’s a really good recap of the entire process...of the month.”

⁵⁷⁵Participant # 2.

⁵⁷⁶Participant # 5.

The covenant

To honour these people, I have chosen not to edit these final statements. Each person's testimony about his or her mission statement is presented along with a photo of the work of two of the presenters. (See figures # 23 – 28 inclusively) The participants were asked what they thought about the exercise: "Good, peaceful, affirm, enlightening, connecting. And... I'm feeling tons of resistance, so...sorry.' Another commented: "I just feel like going through that process, brought a lot of the things that we have been talking about, brought it full circle. For me." Another suggested, "It helps us stand in our truth..."

Units of meaning – what is meaningful?

The call/becoming

One participant referenced the call of becoming as a 'call to action, and a commitment to care.' Called as in called to 'share with others,' to be 'in relation with others,' to 'share our gifts,' as the have an 'impact on others to share their gifts.'⁵⁷⁷ 'Contemplation and action' were cited as ways of being called, along with questions about the use of language in the question proper – debating whether it should simply be: 'who am I becoming?' Foregoing the emphasis on the word 'call.'

The self

Becoming became associated with the self: "becoming more and more your true self." The idea of being 'self-programmed' surfaced. And how by 'committing to care,' committing to 'do something' calls us into our 'true self...'and in doing so 'becoming becomes a process.' Another spoke of indwelling: "inhabiting, living in our true self."⁵⁷⁸

⁵⁷⁷Participant # 3.

⁵⁷⁸Participant # 3.

Suffering/Empathy

In the telling of a story told about the suffering of the other, and how that was a life lesson, as it evoked the distance we put between ourselves, the other, and suffering.

Care

While addressing Heidegger's notion about care and being 'being synonymous,' we hear from participant # 3 again: "It defines your being, what you care about." Care as mentioned above, as it relates to commitment. We see this referenced as an overlap in the claim to social acedia.

Flow

The idea of flow continued to surface with one participant questioning as to whether 'flow' is an 'intuitive thing for some people...as innate.' Another made use of the word 'flow'she when decided to start the group art session 'from where will it all flow?' There was also the subtle mention of flow when speaking to the pin in the group art piece: "flowing seed from a bulrush, " again another 'seeds of faith' symbol.

Colour

Colour continues to play a significant role in the expression of some of the participants, with an ongoing mention of how colour relates to the images portrayed, and their significance. The 'yellow' ribbon as an example of the 'energy that flows through everything.'

Symbols

We see the return of familiar images that have come to be symbolically represented throughout the retreat, i.e. mountain and with that ascension, the path, water, trees, and introducing 'the loon,' as a symbol of identity, and comfort. Circles are

revisited: “The circles, our beliefs, our values...” as well as the ever-present spiral: “It’s nice to see this again. It’s a really good recap of the entire process...of the month.”

Cycle

There is reference to cycles in relation to families, sustenance of life, ecological systems and how they serve in preserving life.

Connection

We have an ongoing mention of the word connection, and its many variations on a theme are present, including the re-occurring witness to connection with nature: “ you realize the beauty of the earth and sense that kind of connection.”⁵⁷⁹ And also the dark of the light: “This kind of disconnection together.”

Let us now enter into conversation with what themes are revealed, as we move into the evaluation of the data.

⁵⁷⁹Participant # 4.

A composite summary ~ a collective portrait of meaning



“I needed to tell a story.”⁵⁸⁰

The preliminary interviews

Beginning with the preliminary interviews, and building on the root systems of the participants’ first descriptions of meaning, while addressing the reasons as to why they wanted to participate in the project, and what they were hoping to discover, these interviews offered a basic understanding of the voice of each person, unfolding the early stages of a ‘collective portrait of meaning’ as they shared about what they hoped to encounter during the retreat.

It was important to establish what the participants knew of acedia in the preliminary interview. As none of the participants had any pre-determined notion of acedia, their responses about their knowledge of acedia during our introductory interview supports the claim that there is a lack of pastoral education regarding acedia. And that despite the voluminous amounts of material on acedia, the average person has neither

⁵⁸⁰Vivianne LaRiviere, photo, field notes.

heard of acedia, nor received any religious education, or pastoral care concerning the nature of acedia, and its consequences.

The nature of spiritual and religious affiliation of the participants is indicative of our religious revolutionary times. As we visited the various spiritual and religious affiliations of the participants, we have people questioning their faith, their relationship with church, some citing a deep anger, some honouring spiritual practices, others with none. There was no indication the spirituality or religion background of the participants had provided them with any pastoral dimensions that would educate them about acedia.

Preliminary units of meaning

Seeking ~ the quest

There is direct and indirect reference in the preliminary interviews to ‘seeking’ – as in a quest – as an active verb. In the very beginning of the process, it is noted there are similarities amongst some of the participants, as they speak about the search for self. There is a call to deepen their faith, along with the ‘expression of one’s existence,’⁵⁸¹ their creativity and how it may shape their spirituality. Regardless of their differences of needs, they are all seeking something. The relevance of ‘the quest’ becomes evident. I felt moved to consider the role of their historical experiences, both personal and family systems, and what affect these have on how they seek, and what it is they are seeking, as one reflects: “I’m like stuck in this thing, I’m stuck in this – and oh, my gosh. I’m almost 40 and I haven’t really launched myself.”⁵⁸²

⁵⁸¹Participant # 4.

⁵⁸²Participant # 3.

Needs

Seeking implies needs. The needs of the various participants began to be characterized per person. Some were looking for community, others needing to question areas of their spirituality and religion. One spoke of ‘a call,’⁵⁸³ and another needing to deal with emotional blocks. It is in the naming of a need or needs that we find meaning, and identity. All of these needs tend to the ground of possibility toward responsible change, and possible transformation.

Connection

We observe a possible pattern of ‘trinity’ formulating: ‘seeking, needing, connecting,’ as how it may relate to ‘existing.’ Relating ‘connect’ and ‘seeking’ with the character of the existential plight. In looking for the phenomenological meaning, we seek ‘meaning itself.’ From the researcher’s point of view, a question of reflection arises: Is the implication that seeking, needing, and connecting, as it relates to existentialism all converge upon each other? Suggesting also that ‘to be called,’⁵⁸⁴ is a cry toward authenticity and integrity?

A reminder of Noddings’ reflection about care being “always a move from the self,”⁵⁸⁵ adjacent with Heidegger’s response to care, as the ‘call comes from me, and yet beyond me,’⁵⁸⁶ could suggest that in order to ‘move away from one’s self,’ one must be aware of a self to move away from. Some of these participants are seeking such an answer. How they integrate this search in their lives may vary, but all are in search of answers to the exacting existential questions. All participants shared a curiosity to discover something; all in search of something beyond what they presently knew of

⁵⁸³Participant # 4.

⁵⁸⁴Participant # 4.

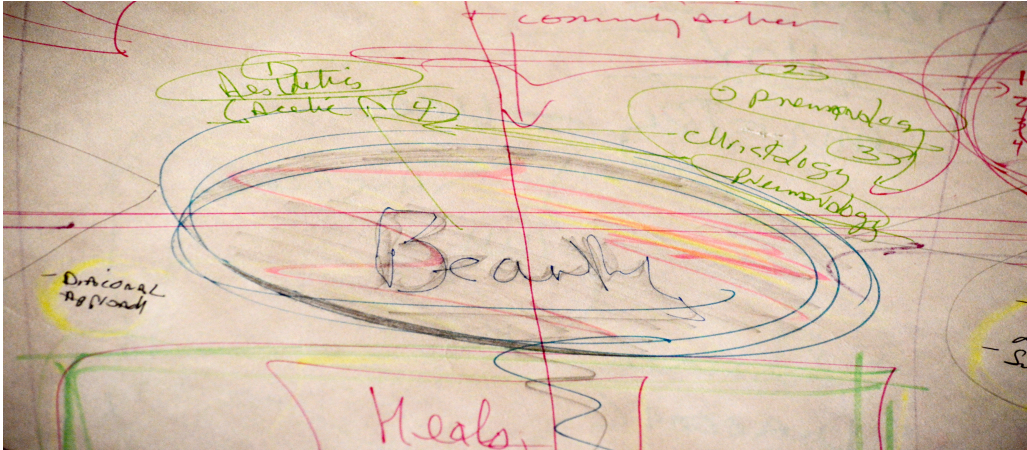
⁵⁸⁵Noddings, 16.

⁵⁸⁶Heidegger, 320.

themselves. Suggesting an inviting space to prepare for a possible change of heart, change of perception. Knowing something of ourselves, beyond ourselves, could motivate transformation.

Existentialism

As I scan the preliminary responses, and am witness to words and ideas such as ‘understanding my path,’ and a ‘deeper understanding of my spirituality,’ I was reminded of my colourful preliminary field notes which I had jotted down, as I sought to find some centre in which to grasp, and hold onto, both as a practitioner and an academic. There is such an example, dated October 2013, underlying a quest for self, with beauty and how that might be intuitively linked to the healing of relationships. There were notes and insights urging me to address areas academically that could potentially correlate with these preliminary intuitive thoughts; namely – the study of aesthetics, pneumatology, Christology, and the qualities of the acetic life. In hindsight, all were substantial in the development of the project, as researcher and practitioner. Some responsible for avenues taken, others remaining to be considered for future recommendations. There are early indications of ‘community action’ and the ‘diaconal approach’ as conceived thoughts moved toward ‘bridging the gap,’ viewed even in the early stages of this project’s development. In search of something, there is beauty at the crossroads.



Vivianne LaRiviere, October 2013

Beauty heals relationship ~ Pneumatology, Christology, aesthetics, acetic.

Module 1 - “What do I believe?”

As we begin the retreat with the first question – What do I believe? – there are indications that the art of the participants support their statements. What we don’t hear in the conversation, at times we see in the art. For example no one mentioned ‘believing in God,’ or naming God as part of a belief system when addressing the first question, during the course of the conversation that took place during the brainstorming. No one said out loud: “I believe in God.” Yet, there was indication of ‘the Divine,’ and connection with the Source in some of the artwork. God was spoken about metaphorically, as was the consideration of faith. Looking back on the field notes, it caused me to question the question itself. Should it be more decisive: Whom do you believe in? Or a combination of the two? Who and what?

What may first appear to be a contradiction is much more of a deeper personal reflection on the part of the participants, than that of the brainstorming discussion. Stories unfold; ‘texture and structure’ are prevalent as are the beginning indications of what

gives meaning to the lives of the participants. The art is beginning to ‘portray’ their lives, as does their testimony about their art. From a facilitator and researcher’s point of view, and as the observer, it is like watching someone sew a quilt, offering glimpses and timelines of lives lived, historical threads of narrative – beauty, joy and sorrow experienced. Voices rising, and some resurrecting, some of concern and some of hope. Repetition in the units, developing into clusters of meaning that begin to form relevant themes.

Units of meaning and emerging themes

Symbols

There is an assorted choice of symbols that begin to surface in the first round of art. Glimpses of questions surrounding identity begin to symbolically manifest, as colours represent various aspects of identity and where links in relationship occur. Like a conjunction – where art and colour meet the contours of existential expressions. Faith is symbolically defined, as ‘seeds of faith’ become an expression of meaning.

As we see circles and spirals begin to take shape on paper and collage, some of the participants’ figures and statements are indicative of the merging idea of symbols as a theme, as the circle is explained as an image of ‘connectedness.’ Such emphasis provides ‘relationship’ as an accompanying theme. With the circle, one participant is moving inward, connecting within one self, as a need, yet hovering, historically and observingly. The other, with a spiral, is moving outward – moving ‘from the inside moving outward,

bringing God into the ‘crucible’ of the poetic word. Another reflects on the language of the art as symbol: “This is what this spiral was telling me.”

This is in stride with Calahan’s thoughts about how ‘transformation in theology’ “means creating imaginative forms of poetry, metaphors, new symbols, and narratives.”⁵⁸⁷ The journey of the retreat itself was symbolically designed with a spiral. At first hand, we see a return of investment of the convergence of art and spirituality. There is also the overlap of one symbol with another, seed and spiral, both directing the conversation toward ‘interconnectedness.’ As did the nature of the ‘heart.’ If we recall, good leadership requires ‘heart.’⁵⁸⁸ It is also symbolic of love.

Poetry

Moving into the arena of poetry, supporting Cahalan’s theory about how transformation is to ‘include imagination,’⁵⁸⁹ and how poetry may play a leading role, we are prompted by Taylor’s claim that poetry is a powerful means in which to ‘create worlds.’⁵⁹⁰ We read in the exposé of the poetry itself, suggestions of other thematic meanings.

As we consider the intimate details of the participants’ stories, we are reminded of the ‘interconnectivity between the participants, with each other, and their creative expressions.’⁵⁹¹ This idea is consistently expressed as the participants search for the resources and the language in which to express not only the need to ‘connect’ as to what we would deem phenomenologically meaningful, but to also present some derivative of connection as a virtue, a desire, a service – ways by which joy is experienced, in

⁵⁸⁷Cahalan, 84.

⁵⁸⁸Bolman and Deal, 77.

⁵⁸⁹Cahalan, 84.

⁵⁹⁰Lincoln, 11.

⁵⁹¹Marcia Stanley, Stanley Wertz, Marcianna, Nosek, Susan McNiesh and Elizabeth, Marlow, accessed February 22, 2018, 2.

relationship, community, Church, as well as how gratitude is ratified in daily life. The sharing of their narratives becomes poetic, with movement, imagination and hope.

To be seen

The sharing of the art gives voice to the need to be seen, and how art works in tangent with this idea. This prompt supports Illman and Smith's reference to Viladesau on how "art embodies revelation."⁵⁹² This statement becomes more extensive as we consider how art may reveal one's self with authenticity, in so doing embodying the revelation of God, as perceived from a Christian perspective.

Connection

It became apparent very early on that 'connection' would become one of the predominant thematic foci. There was considerable emphasis consistently focusing on the value of 'connection' and many of its derivatives. This principal theme stands in contrast to one of the core aspects of acedia, as it is 'characterized by disconnection,' as suggested by Russell.⁵⁹³ In doing so, the experience of 'connection' leans toward the possibility of responsible change and transformation. 'Connection' was communicated and interrelated in a variety of ways, as a prevalent extension of the central themes of the questions themselves.

Connect, connectedness, connection, all become interpreted accompanied with symbolic translation. We begin to see overlaps in language, and use of symbols and metaphors, to describe what 'connection' means, and how it is manifested. Participants strive to find the means and the metaphors in which to express how deeply they think and

⁵⁹²Illman, and Smith, 26.

⁵⁹³Russell, 71.

feel about the need to connect. We see this as someone expresses the means in which to connect ‘with others in this way,’ addressing nature as a social means in which to connect with people with similar interests. Additional references to nature are determined as a teacher, and an avatar of connection.

There is an elaboration on the word ‘connect’ as we witness its movement toward ‘interconnectivity,’ and how that finds association with ‘identity,’ as it is faceted with ‘something to believe in.’ We also have numerous mentions in various descriptions of the ‘Divine connection.’ We are witness to the use of colour as a method in which to convey a variety of connections – in relationships, with nature, with animals, and with others – and how such meaning is referenced symbolically and interpreted. We hear about “aligning ourselves with nature,” and how the images reveal the importance of “nature’s systems and how such interaction with the soil should also be visible within our systems”⁵⁹⁴ as we are to be a reflection of Mother Earth herself. This ‘interaction’ infers not only relationship but also engagement, and some consideration toward ethical review. We are beginning to see inquiry into potential symptoms for acedia – isolation, loneliness, and ‘not being seen’⁵⁹⁵ – and curiosity about how these might be related to acedia.

Module 2: “What do I value?”

In line with the phenomenological aspects of this study, the question – “What do I value?” could also be posed as to “What is meaningful in your life?” As the participants share about what they value, some voice that what they believe is also what they value; for example, believing in nature, and valuing nature. And though there are many notions

⁵⁹⁴Participant # 3.

⁵⁹⁵Participant # 6.

addressed, we can pre-suppose that there is process happening, connecting links between belief and value. For instance, the mention of nature and our relationship with ecological systems is a stark reminder of our responsibility toward the environment; again, a call toward ethical consideration.

I make note of a reflection, which is perhaps fashioned out of one of the biases that I have previously named – that there is little mention of ‘valuing God.’ And with exception to two mentions from myself as facilitator, there is also no mention of inherent worth. Apparent nonetheless are other expressions of value: honesty, ‘purity of connection,’⁵⁹⁶ intimacy, choice, authenticity, and gratitude – though not directly spoken – inferring a modicum of humility. And, love.

Although conversation around the topic of ‘beauty’ as something of value, there is no direct link to consider beauty as something that is worthy of care, or regarded as such with a relationship it might hold with ‘just,’ as in justice. Though not in full contrast, there is Evagrius’ reflection on the ultimate mission of the soul,⁵⁹⁷ as a signpost toward the development of the soul. Though the ideas of ‘solitude, and justice’⁵⁹⁸ stand side-by-side. These two themes are markers of the contemplative life: to take up our devotion toward the path of silence and solitude, so that we may be emptied to serve as we are called to do equitably. Indications of the benefits of the contemplative path, solitude, and time in nature are mentioned.

Emerging themes - what is meaningful?

Connection continues....

⁵⁹⁶Participant # 1.

⁵⁹⁷Sinkewicz, 260.

⁵⁹⁸Participant # 5.

‘To connect’ becomes related to beliefs and values as we heard about ‘purity of connection,’ and ‘believing in love.’ A reminder of how Okholm established how Cassian suggested, “the monk seeks purity of heart.”⁵⁹⁹ Funk advises that the abandonment of ‘mindless thoughts’ leads to purity of heart.⁶⁰⁰ We have a conscious mention of ‘God,’ as a means of connecting to ‘whom,’ as a mention of who or what is valuable. This participant also relayed how her beliefs and values were of the same weight. We are introduced to the idea of intimacy as something we search for.

Ecology and the environment, nature - engagement

There is an ongoing development of ‘ecological systems’ management, parallel with the capacity of ‘collective intelligence’ in community as a means in which to cultivate engagement, though engagement continues to be mentioned as connection. And we have a frequently repeated faithfulness toward connection with nature; rather this is about engagement.

Service

As the role of service is called to mind, Viladesau’s remark about Leeuw’s ‘sotoriology’⁶⁰¹ comes to my attention, for the ‘valuable’ stated here speaks to the worthiness of a person, that is an inherent manifesto from God as this participant names his value as coming ‘from the cross.’ (See figure # 13 for art piece and text)

Symbolism

Symbolism continues to headline, with metaphor taking shape as symbolic gesture as well. There is the notion of ‘hands’ as an emblem of service. Is this reflective of a symbol of ethical regard as well?

⁵⁹⁹Okholm, 182.

⁶⁰⁰Funk, 94.

⁶⁰¹Viladesau, 25.

Relationship

Various configurations pointing to ‘family life’ as entities of value are noted. There is discussion about childhood memories, stories of significance along family lines, and a consistent mention of love, as ‘what is valuable.’ Relationship finds its significance in nature, as does connection. Again with connection, nature, relationships converging upon each other, along with existence. Depicted as a ‘root system,’ as the roots are condensed and shared through to the symbolic heart gesture. Everything is held together. Is this a qualifying unison and integration as we ‘connect,’ in opposition to the character of ‘disconnect of acedia,’⁶⁰² therefore shadowing upon a disruption of self – as everything can be threatened to become undone? Are we substantially creating an identity crisis? Could the image of a root system tied to the heart, be appreciative as an image of relationship with Divine Power?

God

Immersed in participant’s # 6’s journal is an outpouring of reflection about God, and being in ‘oneness with God.’ There is mention of a theological argument of being of ‘one’ with others, and with the all of creation. In reference to ‘other human beings,’ Graham’s alterity⁶⁰³ begins to ring true. She speaks of ‘wholeness’ as what she values. She speaks of being in relationship with Self. Participant # 6 revisits a promise made years ago. In the reading, we see a moment of profound humility as the words echo a promise once again. It should be noted that with this comes the acceptance of surrender and with this ‘going deeper.’

⁶⁰²Russell, 71.

⁶⁰³Graham, 15.

Acedia

There is additional out-loud-pondering between the potential of a link of loneliness with acedia. ‘Connectedness of everything,’⁶⁰⁴ would magnify the omnipotence of God, with ‘loneliness’ as a prevalent challenge.

Module 3: “What is my purpose?”

As the participants begin to unravel the third question, with a variety of readings and videos presented, coming to grips with the question “what is my purpose?” there is a merging thoughtfulness as to what purpose means, personally, and collectively. And how it relate to life, and mission, and God. Can the art offer a noteworthy pathway toward ethical regard as part of what purpose means? Illman and Smith offered links of how beauty was perceived in the making of art, poetry and or otherwise, determined to connect the doing of artistic expression as being “clearly ethical in nature.”⁶⁰⁵ The depth of perception and sharing would seem to indicate such revelations. As the sharing of the art began, the question arose: ‘is purpose about the doing or the being?’ I would suggest that purpose is not a derivative of duality – not an either/or – but rather a convergence of the two: emanating doing and being; meaning purpose is integrative. Quoting from my comprehensive exam: “In the doing we become.”⁶⁰⁶ Looking at what the art is telling us, these ‘images of meaning’ are becoming emerging themes, beginning with joy.

Emerging themes - images of meaning

⁶⁰⁴Participant # 6.

⁶⁰⁵Illman and Smith, 44.

⁶⁰⁶Vivianne LaRiviere, comprehensive exam, University St. Paul, January 21st, 2016.

Joy

Prompted by the relationship between purpose and joy as mentioned by the participants, Nault's notion of the 'joyful perseverance' undertaken as a 'strategy to combat acedia,'⁶⁰⁷ is revisited. The sharing in this round generated the notion of the adaptability of symbolic gesture as a means in which to express our joy with brightness, and colourful expression. Perhaps this is an example of 'the strong holding environment' that Daloz Parks spoke about when she described the kind of 'redeeming space,' that could 'encourage transformation.'⁶⁰⁸ Art may serve as an antidote toward being caught by the temptation of acedia, as Stone reminded us of how art resists 'joylessness,'⁶⁰⁹ and Noddings stresses that joy is part of our 'basic reality.'⁶¹⁰

Let us also remember Bolman and Deal speaking of 'the gift of authorship,' and how "creating something of lasting value" is "sheer joy."⁶¹¹ And we have read of Pope Francis' 'joyful response to God's love...'⁶¹² Though there is no direct copy to these concepts mentioned by the participants, there is the understanding of serving 'others in the world,' as it is associated with purpose and joy; both contenders of authentic identity.

Looking back at the illustrations considered as part of the file of field notes, again dated sometime in October 2013, I was considering the associations between joy, peace and love, but predominantly joy as part of the end results of what I was beginning to understand as *praxis*. I was considering *praxis* as a move beyond the imagination – bringing intuitive designs into view. It was a demonstration of hopefulness – a 'joy' that

⁶⁰⁷Nault, 255.

⁶⁰⁸Sharon Daloz Parks, 226.

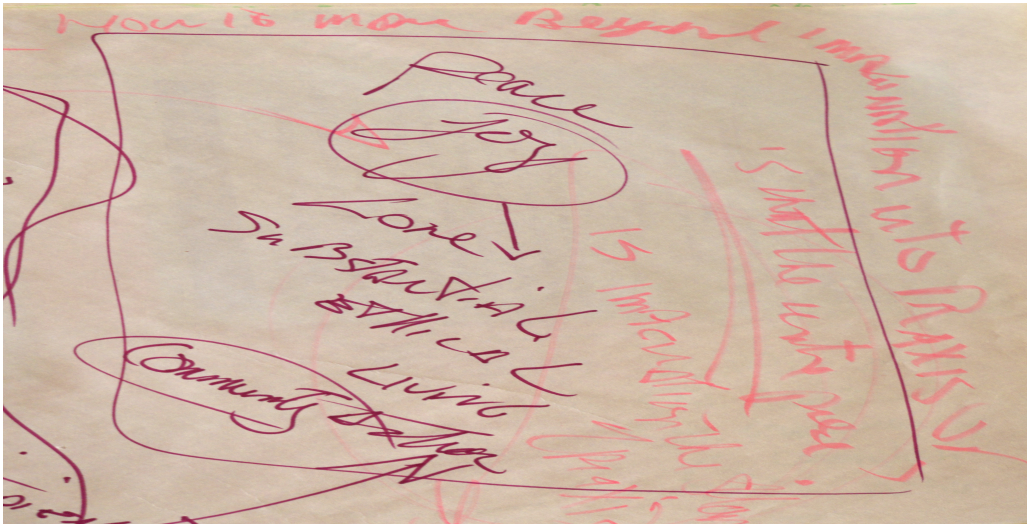
⁶⁰⁹Stone, 29.

⁶¹⁰Noddings, 51.

⁶¹¹Bolman and Deal, 80.

⁶¹²Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 25.

might accompany transformative practice. It was sharing a bit of common ground with some of the thoughts of the participants and their reflections about purpose.



Vivianne LaRiviere. October 2013, field notes.

Symbols

Symbols have established themselves as a predominant feature of the expression of art, both in the doing, and in the sharing. The use of images is present to connect us to a depth of meaning, as with colour, the circle, the mountain, and expressions of nature, water, bees, and horses, and how that also translates as images of our relationship with the Divine.

Colour

In accompaniment with ‘symbol,’ we see the rise of weighty descriptions of the use of colour itself to convey some sensibility of language that is difficult to touch. We witness the emergence of the importance of colour to depict sensual motives that are difficult to express in the vernacular: ‘blue – as a good primary colour,’ as means to ‘connect us’ a place to move from, and into. Colour as an expression of ‘joy,’ and a means of service to ‘bring joy to others in the world.’ Eisner’s description of ‘*expressive*

form’ and it is ‘representative of feeling...in many ways...’⁶¹³ obliges us to consider the effects of colour and other artistic elements as a means of ‘resonance in the perceiver.’⁶¹⁴ It invites us to wonder about the organic perceptions of colour itself, its power – beyond the word ‘colour,’ as a form of life, and language.

Circles

We find emphasis on how the circle is symbolic of how we share in a universal connection, and the link between our ‘shared stories’ that ‘collectively’ speak to these connections. As previously mentioned, purpose is demonstrated with the use of circles, as purpose becomes expressed through the ‘telling of stories,’ but also how it becomes thematic as depicted as a ‘connective energy.’ (See figure # 16, participant # 3, “Telling Stories.”) An abstract similarity can be found in Lincoln’s description of Taylor’s ‘imaginary’ and how lives are imagined, and yet expressed beyond ‘theoretical terms...carried in images.’⁶¹⁵ The circles though also become linked with the theme of some of the stories told.

Mountain

As we read the story of the mountain, it takes on an aura of symbolic gesture. The climbing of a mountain, as it breathes of courage and wonder. It takes courage to climb a mountain. According to the etymology presented earlier, *acedia* demonstrates a lack of courage. In describing the wind as part of the story of the ‘different’ mountain, there is exclamation of surprise perhaps with the realization of the power of the Spirit, as it is figured as a symbol, and metaphor.

⁶¹³Eisner, 17.

⁶¹⁴Ibid.

⁶¹⁵Lincoln, 75.

Choice

As ‘choice’ becomes part of the discussion on purpose, David Perrin reflected a sentiment as he spoke to the ‘ascetic task,’⁶¹⁶ and how it derives in its own purpose a means in which to develop wholeness through ‘life-giving choices’ that appeal to the whole self. This would be an opposite representation as to what we hear participant # 5 as ‘checking out,’ as when ‘choosing acedia.’

Stories

Stories continue to be shared. There is an emphasis on how we share in a universal connection, and the link between our ‘shared stories’ that ‘collectively’ speak to these connections. Akin to both Greene’s statement about how stories shape ‘the growth of identity,’⁶¹⁷ and Lincoln’s reference to Taylor, explaining how our lives are not ‘expressed theoretically,’ but rather “carried in images, stories...”⁶¹⁸

Connection – Community, Service, Ethics, acedia

Various exchanges referencing the ongoing emerging theme of service: bringing joy to the world, making people laugh, connecting, helping others, and acting conscientiously. Though still considered a unit of meaning, additional thoughts of ethical care continue to become apparent: “Care more do less” noted during the conversation around Norris’ text. In association with Noddings’ ethics of care⁶¹⁹ this statement reflects engagement rather than busy-ness. Looking at acedia as a wilful choice, its virtue would be to choose care, and how this facilitates engagement. Several of these statements riding beside acedia as a means of ‘checking out.’

⁶¹⁶Perrin, 246.

⁶¹⁷Greene, 186.

⁶¹⁸Lincoln, 75.

⁶¹⁹Noddings, 19.

Module 4: “What are my challenges?”

Acedia is named as a challenge, as are sadness, loneliness, and imbalance. When the group is asked to consider what may be the core cause of all the ‘symptoms’ mentioned, participant #3 suggests: “Disconnect.” This again is reminiscent of Russell’s argument about acedia and how he gives claim to ‘the disconnectedness of acedia’⁶²⁰ and its consequences. The brainstorming part of the module also brought about a discussion about death, and the fear of death present in our culture. Revisiting the references made by Larchet, acedia is about “death of the soul, and the mind.”⁶²¹

Emerging themes – what is meaningful?

Acedia

As there is mention of an association of acedia and trauma, made by participant # 5, I remind the reader of a similar juxtaposition made in chapter three. We are witness to the developing understanding of acedia, as it is used in sentences, and expressed by various members of the group. Participants voicing it as a ‘disconnect,’ and understanding that one may be ‘susceptible’ to acedia when this happens, noting acedia as a ‘disconnect from your true self...and values, your path.... your calling.’⁶²² Another spoke to the deeper understanding of how acedia might be defined after I presented some ideas from noontime field notes. She names acedia as a challenge, along with sadness, loneliness, and anger, perhaps even rage. MacQuarrie’s extensive descriptions of acedia

⁶²⁰Russell, 71.

⁶²¹Larchet, 201.

⁶²²Participant # 3.

also include rage.⁶²³ This also directs us to some of the symptomology of acedia, as there is also mention of acedia as a ‘funny play between safe and not pushing yourself...’ allowing things to be ‘a little bit too easy.’

Symbols

Spiral

Out of the discussion come various interpretations of the representation of the spiral, suggesting once again symbolic gesture as means of interpreting connection, and interpreting story.

Mountain

Participant # 4 addresses the mountain as a metaphor to what ‘challenge’ is about, as it is a part of life that ‘never stops.’ She brings in a reflection on how climbing the mountain is also representative of death as the ‘final transformation.’ These images, text and metaphorical meaning, give pause for reflection on one of the main elemental cures for acedia: perseverance, as previously noted by Norris,⁶²⁴ Nault,⁶²⁵ Funk,⁶²⁶ Evagrius via Bunge,⁶²⁷ and Sinkewicz.⁶²⁸

Flow

After taking stock of the mention of the word ‘flow’ on several occasions, it is noticed as a nodal point in past segments. Might it infer ‘connection?’

Connect/disconnect - is engagement implied?

We see ‘connection’ suggested as both an ideological caption and a concrete forum where people suggest the manners in ‘how’ they connect, implying engagement.

⁶²³MacQuarrie, 34.

⁶²⁴Norris, 261.

⁶²⁵Nault, 255.

⁶²⁶Funk, 106.

⁶²⁷Bunge, 67 – 70.

⁶²⁸Sinkewicz, 64.

However, noting perhaps a critical difference between the two – connection and engagement – I am not reassured that one is implied in the other, as they carry different inferences: however, both are necessary for the success of each other.

Connection may have the occasion to remain on the surface, as it requisites superficiality, with low risk of vulnerability, and intimacy. Point cited would be the make-up character of many of social media interactions. We ‘like’ people; we wave and smile, and join hands across many miles. But we risk not bearing down on what it means to be inclusive in a tangible way. Though we do need an initial impetus to move ground.

Engagement on the other hand, requires risk and commitment, as it is a choice made while understanding the implications of vulnerability, as we face the risk of witnessing, suffering, opening our hearts, and changing our minds. The actual word ‘engagement’ was used directly very few times, rather finding its way into connecting. It was often implied, but rarely named or defined. Engagement carries with itself a proposition of relationship. As we are created in the *Imago Dei*, a lack of engagement would imply acedia, would it not? For with acedia, we do not extend ourselves toward ‘the other.’ So then, who are we otherwise? Perhaps this question is the greatest challenge of all.

Module 5: “Who am I called to become?”

Norris highlights

Final considerations on the Norris text ranged from ‘a good companion,’ to highlighting some favourite quotes. Some of the participants finished the text, while others did not. In future I would put together a choice of a few texts, with also perhaps handouts highlighting particular passages out of a range of books. Some audio on the

subject matter might be helpful as well. Keeping in mind the varied learning styles of many, one should not hesitate to use poetic references as well as images.

Units of meaning

Discussion about spirituality and politics

After consideration of how Norris' text fared during the retreat, the idea of spirituality and how it might be considered a 'political statement,' was introduced; as previously argued in chapter two – where I defined spirituality. The group roamed with their ideas ranging from how politics were 'abhorred' to revisiting a historical ideology of politics, as a system of justice to protect the 'weakest from the strongest' as opposed to the murkiness or darkness of the politics we have come to know in present-day. In hindsight, the final exercise of writing the covenant could be considered for some as a political ideal as to what one may hope to achieve, while addressing the 'who am I called to become.'

Social acedia

Moving beyond the aforementioned symptoms of acedia, isolation, loneliness, fear, anxiety, restlessness, and disconnect, a culmination of thought brings us to the possibility of acedia as being a contagion. Somehow, and not surprisingly the US political landscape came into focus. The statement about 'social acedia' is a powerful one, offering support to my earlier statements of acedia being a danger 'toward ecological and environmental habitats, our economic and capitalist systems, and most dangerously, our political arenas.' Conversation about Heidegger's concept, also presented in the chapter on acedia led to this: "It defines your being, what you care about."

Commitment

The group voice suggested that ‘becoming’ is the authentic self, the ‘true self.’ Areas of the contemplative life are echoed as we come into being through contemplation and action. The idea that we are to share our gifts and to ‘inspire others,’ nurtures the question of who we are called to become.

Group project: “Who am I called to become?”

As the group worked in silence, there was nonetheless a minutiae of revelations affecting the choice of colour, images, and collage as they brought together the thoughts of their collected gifts and efforts. They were engaged – as people bringing themselves to the table, bringing their gifts, their energy, their curiosity, and yet also needed to make space to find a way to ‘connect’ with ‘the other,’ without their usual language on which to depend on. They shared common ground with the silence and the body, and its expressions, as an indicator as to where to go and what to do.

Looking at ‘from individual to community,’ this is centrally located around the concepts of Parks,⁶²⁹ Palmer,⁶³⁰ and Bolman and Deal,⁶³¹ as they direct us toward their various models of leadership, inclusive of authority, and coming to grips with ‘the adaptive challenges,’ all while also allowing our gifts to emanate into the making and building of community. The end result spoke of being moved out of one’s comfort zone, and yet to appreciate the opportunities and possibilities we can create together.

The covenant

⁶²⁹Parks, 226.

⁶³⁰Palmer, 34.

⁶³¹Bolman and Deal, 80-86.

Whether they chose to name this work a covenant, a promise, or a contract was up to the participants. After a brief check-in, we prepared the space to share, listen and witness each other's pieces. No notes were taken, and everyone was asked to simply give space to the other with no questions, but rather to simply sit, listen, and receive. 'Shug' the bear was part of the process. There were tears, of the presenters and the listeners. It was an exceptionally revealing, intimate and vulnerable time for all concerned.

Units of meaning – what is meaningful?

The last batch of units of meaning cover much of what we have already seen and heard: symbols, colour, flow, care, and some mention of suffering, and once again – connection. There is an undertone of empathy – not directly mentioned, but significant nonetheless. By now the 'collective portrait of meaning,' has taken shape. There appears to be a signature compilation of voices: with 'connection' and 'disconnect' wearing the mantle.

Evaluation: The final questionnaire/final interview

The results of the final questionnaires and subsequent final interviews provide the evaluative qualitative data supporting the research questions. The final questionnaire and final interview process offered an overview of the pertinent details including the overall experience, feedback on the method and design of the retreat, and reading of the text. The participants agree the retreat helped them discern acedia in their lives, and that the retreat was transformative. Additionally noted is how the various aspects of acedia were addressed, including definition, comprehension, affect, and healing. Most found Norris to

be instrumental in their education of acedia.

The overall experience was found by all participants to be a positive experience. They provided feedback on the format of the retreat itself: facilitation, the environment, and the experiences of what ‘the doing and sharing of the art’ meant to them. Falling in line with the qualities of a phenomenological experience – what gives meaning - there are additional reflections on the significance and meaning of the overall experience in their lives, and in some cases, expression of highlights and the significance of the art that was expressed.

Most of the participants were able to articulate a definition of acedia for themselves. (See figure # 29, participants defining acedia) Their definitions were neither congruent, nor what would be deemed accurate on a historical basis, however there is a sensibility of the malaise, that each person interpreted for themselves. And though the participants were introduced to the idea of acedia as a ‘demon,’ at no point was acedia ever referenced as a ‘demon.’ Though participant # 4 suggested during the module on challenges that: “bad thoughts are real, and they lead to bad actions, and the conclusion is that we’re a priggish culture.”

Most of the participants agreed on the concept of acedia as a potential causality of identity crisis; some considering it as ‘possibly.’ (See figure # 30 for responses) Five of the six participants noted some affect of acedia in their lives. (See figure # 31 for responses) In addressing the healing of acedia, all participants offer up some ideas on how to approach the healing, including not remaining in isolation, but rather talking about the disease and ‘being expressive in groups.’ To ‘name it, to see it...to historically understand it...’ (See figure # 32 for responses)

Did the practice of converging art and spirituality serve as a tool of discernment? There were descriptions of emotions coming to light as the practice “helped place a finger, a thought on a feeling, on a blocked emotion. It helped place continuity where words and thoughts failed.”⁶³² Reflects participant # 2 “Yes, obviously I can think about it more...sensitive to it in others.” The art provided ‘the connections and tools to connect with myself...provide me with the things that lead me to disconnect from my beliefs, values, purpose, calling...the things related to acedia.” (See figure # 33 A for responses)

The experience of the art making led to various discoveries and confirmations: “I found it opened a lot of pathways I wasn’t counting on.”⁶³³ For some it was “very meaningful, and somewhat challenging. Challenging in that it looks straight at you. When you see something like that, it’s not like looking in a mirror. It’s more like looking straight into your soul.” (See figure # 33 B for responses)

Was there a greater understanding of how beauty, imagination and soul would be thought of? Unfortunately, due to the lost transcript, and also feeling these topics were not addressed sufficiently; there was minimal data to fall back on. Nonetheless, there was movement, where for some there was a change of perception, but not for others. There were additional insights into the nature of one’s soul:

I value the knowledge of myself more. I realize that my existence includes soul now. I wish to become more integrated with my salvation, my wholeness, and that includes my soul and connection with the soul of others.⁶³⁴

The role of the imagination was expanded on: “I need to let my imagination wander, dream a little, explore, try various modes of expression.”⁶³⁵ (See figure # 34 for

⁶³²Participant # 1.

⁶³³Participant # 4.

⁶³⁴Participant # 5.

⁶³⁵Participant # 2.

responses)

There were personal discoveries and discoveries about others: “That art is still very much a part of who I am and helpful in unblocking the locked and painful memories.”⁶³⁶

Thoughtfulness directed toward judgment of self, and others, spiritual direction, and how prevalent ‘choice’ is in our lives.’ One particular voice:

I learned that I suffer from/participate in acedia. I find it difficult to know that I suffer from this ‘sin.’ But it explains a lot about how I have been feeling for the last 10 months (or a little less). But I have also learned that I have certain wisdom and an insight into life, theology and the church.⁶³⁷

(See figure # 35 and # 36 for responses)

Comments on the Church’s role regarding the lack of awareness and education about acedia were forthcoming: “the Church has flattened out the teaching of ‘soul care....’ “Which church? The one focused on somehow maintaining itself as it dwindles? To the best of my knowledge, there is no education whatsoever in the church with regards to acedia. We could name it, talk about it, and acknowledge it.”⁶³⁸ (See figure # 37 for responses)

Moving toward the method of retreat, style of facilitation, and final recommendations we find an overall positive response: “It worked very well...it helped put acedia in the perspective of every day life.”⁶³⁹ From another:

I appreciated the way the material was presented. I appreciated the fact that it was not judgmental and not rooted in any one particular religious tradition. I felt it was an opportunity to listen to other people talk about their soul struggle. It’s good to find common ground even if the ground is one of suffering.⁶⁴⁰

And in closing, “I loved the art of ‘soul’ because soul is a word almost lost in our culture

⁶³⁶Participant # 1.

⁶³⁷Participant # 6.

⁶³⁸Participant # 4.

⁶³⁹Participant # 1.

⁶⁴⁰Participant # 4.

today. In looking at soul, we reacquaint ourselves with the experience of soul, and we can see more clearly the affect of acedia on the soul.”⁶⁴¹ (See figure # 38, 39, 40 for responses)

Was the retreat transformative? All of the participants agreed that it was, in some shape or another, and also named something they experience that they would name as transformative:

Participant # 1:

It set a shape to the struggle I, and what I suspect many members of my family have struggled with over the course of their lives. I now see Acedia as an ebb and flow to be understood, respected and tolerated, a natural rhythm. The realizing that I was the prickly dragon I had been weaving in and out of my work through school and life since, that I have been putting my hand up and barring people from speaking or listening to me, that I had been keeping myself from wanting to be back on that path ascending up to the peace and beauty of being amongst the cows in the mountains with my father.

Participant # 2:

It helped me to get to know a couple of people who were acquaintances. It affirmed my desire to bring goodness and light into this world.... to look for the good in people and situations.... something to think about as I amble through life.

Participant # 3:

I feel like I am on a constant continuum of transformation and that this retreat helped me to be more confident on my journey rather than the shimmying or two steps forward and one step back kind of trajectory.... I feel that this “yes” needs to be put in the context that I feel continuously engaged in transformation. Also that my own research is related to systems transformation, specifically of the food system and of the social-ecological system. I have found through this process, I have also experienced much personal transformation and feeling it increasingly related to spirit. The Art of the Soul helped me to connect these two journeys.

Participant # 4:

Yes, it was. I encountered myself, a long loving look. I think that’s a good thing. I am more centered, more honest. Those cocoon like hours have encouraged a metamorphosis of a bit of a “... type butterfly.” I realized that I needed to say goodbye to the ideas of my parents and of that generation, when I was able to acknowledge that I was sorry to disappoint, when love came back to greet me instead of pain, I knew that I did not need to hide anymore.

Participant # 5: Yes, it was. I came away more honest about the things I do and do not do. I am called to more discipline, contemplation, and action, risk, and flow.”

Participant # 6: “Yes, I think it made me face me and things in me that I needed to face. Like despair, rage...”

⁶⁴¹Participant # 5.

Discussion ~ a collective portrait of meaning

Overview

The table below is a summary of the central units and clusters of meaning. At a glance, it offers a view of the development of the emerging themes. Designed as a visual aid, the table offers lists of the words, and ideas generated by the participants consistently throughout the modules. The repetition suggesting what is meaningful, and how that was communicated through the use of symbols, art and language – and art as language. This table was generated in Excel, and transferred into this document.

We then move into a formal discussion of what is meaningful for the participants, how that is expressed, and how the findings potentially relate to the findings of the review of literature. Emphasis is placed on ‘what is meaningful,’ as the various statements of expression were indicative of what stood out as the principal themes of meaning for the participants. A conclusion is offered before moving into the final recommendations offered in chapter six.

An overview of the main clusters of meaning and emerging themes

Pre. Interviews	Believe in	Value	Purpose	Challenges	Becoming	Questionnaires	Covenant
Symbols	Symbols	Symbolism	Symbols	Symbols	Symbols	Symbols	
Circles	Circles	Circles	Circles	Circles	Circles	Circles	
Spirals	Spirals	Spirals	Spirals	Spirals	Spirals	Spirals	Spirals
	Seeds	Seeds	Seeds	Seeds	Seeds		Seeds
	Hearts	Hearts	Hearts	Hearts			
		Tree	Mountain	Mountain	Mountain	Mountain	
		Water	Gifts		Cell	Cell	
			Colour			Colour	
		Home	Wind			Wind	
	Colour			Colour	Colour	Colour	Colour
Connection	Interconnectivity	Connection	Connection - community	Connect	Connection	Connecting	
	To connect - variations	Relationship	Stories			Engaging	
Disconnect			Disconnect	Disconnect		Disconnect	
		Gifts	Gifts	Gifts		Gifts	Gifts
Darker side	Light AND darkness		Darkness	Darkness		Dark	
LOVE	LOVE		LOVE			LOVE	LOVE
GOD	DIVINE	GOD	GOD	GOD	GOD	GOD	GOD
Flow	Flow	Flow	Flow	Flow	Flow	Flow	Flow
		Service	Service		The call/becoming		
			Choice				
			Ethics			Virtue: hope, faith, love	
	Ethics						
Existentialism	To be seen	Existentialism	Purpose		Suffering/empathy	Humility, empathy	
Seeking - The Quest	Relationship		Joy		The self	The Quest - seeking	
		Ecology			Commitment		
		Environment			Care		Care
Nature	Nature	Nature			Nature	Nature	Nature
				Avoidance			
Acedia	Acedia symptoms	Acedia symptoms	Acedia symptoms	Acedia	Social acedia	Acedia/anxiety	
	Poetry					Poetry	

What is meaningful?

Connecting, disconnecting, engagement – flow

It was apparent from the onset of the study that ‘connection’ was going to be a principal focus. Extensive mentions of the word and its many offshoots consistently found their way into both discussion periods and the expressions of art. Connecting had meaning for everyone, in some shape or another. As there is mention of the grace of living itself, and the value of humanity, we come to consider how in ‘connecting,’ that these connections may speak to a “collective intelligence...we can build beautiful things together.”⁶⁴² Though not directly stated, building things together moves us beyond connection into engagement.

Combining this with the expressions of goodness – honesty, intimacy, vulnerability, depth, inspiration, service, climbing mountains, and ‘purity of connection,’ – we are witness to how grace became apparent as each participant chose to express the ways in which care was prevalent in their lives and issues that concerned them the most. Konyndyk DeYoung’s reference to Aquinas reminds us of how virtue is part of what makes up the authentic self as we “take on the character of Christ.”⁶⁴³ Without ‘charity’ we may fall ill with sorrow⁶⁴⁴ as the soul needs to authenticate itself into giving of oneself: connecting with ‘the other,’ and engaging to fulfill herself, through mission. Pope Francis speaks of the resistance that gets in the way of accomplishing ‘mission,’ as he addresses the ‘state of paralysis’ so prevalent to acedia.⁶⁴⁵ Perhaps a similar indication as we heard about being locked, blocked, fearful, angry, and numb leading to

⁶⁴²Participant # 3.

⁶⁴³Konyndyk DeYoung, 92.

⁶⁴⁴Ibid.

⁶⁴⁵Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, # 81.

‘disconnect,’ and ‘paralysis’⁶⁴⁶ of sorts. Pre-occupations with time, and lack of momentum, can suggest this same result.

In contrast to connect is ‘disconnect,’ mentioned frequently, reserved to express extensions of the darker self: anger, sloth, anxiety, restlessness, separateness, judgment, and suffering. We heard testimony on how the Earth is affected by systems that are corrupt, and how we are at risk of being disconnected from the understanding of unity, and how our connection to the Earth, is our only means of sustainability. There is cause to consider how ‘disconnect’ might be detrimental to ‘behaviour and values, and to your call,’ and to our emotional landscapes. Consideration is also given on how it affects ‘disconnect from our Divine’ source. As previously mentioned, without the participants being aware of Russell’s testimony regarding acedia and ‘disconnect,’⁶⁴⁷ (though mentioned after-the-fact) we see it mentioned as acedia is being considered: ‘acedia is a disconnect from your true self...our values, your path...your calling.’

When looking at the challenges offered, and wondering what could possibly be at the core of the symptoms mentioned, it is validated once again: “disconnect.”⁶⁴⁸ In contrast to connecting, and engaging with one another, ‘building things together,’ addressing the means in how we serve, while focusing on the integrity of the call, we are at risk of being infected, for acedia is a contagion, and could be communally infectious. Participant # 3 suggested we might be ‘disconnected together,’ implying a “social acedia.” In regards to acedia, this statement represents a culmination of all the concerns that were talked about, reflected upon, witnessed and processed – that could unhelpfully materialize. As I have cited some implications and dangers of acedia, and how it could

⁶⁴⁶Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, # 81.

⁶⁴⁷Russell, 88.

⁶⁴⁸Ibid.

infiltrate our social fabric, naming ‘social acedia’ as a major concern, about the possibility of suffering a communal ‘disconnect,’ emphasizes the need further investigation.

We find dashes of ‘flow’ throughout all of the modules. Perhaps an interpretive gesture for the many ways we speak of the Spirit, as we are reminded of Taylor’s remark about “the force, which flows through everything.”⁶⁴⁹ Perhaps it is ‘flow’ that may move us from ‘connect’ to engagement, and may spark those areas that some of the participants spoke of that are ‘locked’ and ‘blocked,’ as this might be indicative of a need for deepening one’s approach to spiritual practice.

Humility, empathy, care, and ethics

Though there was seldom any direct mention of empathy, or humility, there were several inscriptions of care toward God, Church, family, nature, Mother Earth, and relationships; also propositions on how to care, with the sharing of our time, gifts, service, and insights. We heard of service: to walk in companionship with others, as they are dying, and service to the community, political and otherwise. We heard about how to ‘care more, and do less.’ We were witness to the vulnerability of the participants, how they spoke honestly, with humility about their lives, and their joys and concerns.

As participant # 1 suggests, “this is where I step into being,” in answer to another’s needs, is it then that acedia is definable as non-being? Without relationship, without connection and engagement I do not recognize myself. Nor can I be considerate of another, nor be empathetic. In order to survive acedia, our joy is in accompaniment with the quality of time as a perennial wisdom, and how through temporality, we seek to connect, relate and engage. To be in service of the other as participant # 5 speaks of

⁶⁴⁹Taylor, 6.

‘value that comes from the cross,’ ultimately speaks of both humility and empathy.

Ultimately, perhaps engagement in regards to ‘the other,’ as we have discussed alterity, could infer the embodiment of another’s suffering: orienting us toward Graham’s encouragement of empathy as she describes how to structure alterity.⁶⁵⁰ Participant # 3’s lucid description of anxiety, the treadmill, the stories of people, industry – the angst, the pressure, and the capitalistic systems that are challenging our very lives – is visibly rendered symbolically, figuratively and emotionally. On one account, we can perceive the pain of the anxiety, and on the other, we can feel the empathy for the Earth, and for the next generation, and for the suffering that our systems are imposing. It is up to us to choose our points of reference and perceptions, though I would take into consideration the power of transformation as we hold the tension between the both/and, rather than assimilate the expression as an either/or.

Empathy and humility need be considered as the antitheses of acedia, if acedia is to be considered seriously as a ‘fear of suffering.’ Educational reasoning would point to the necessary liaison between the two and could be considered as part of the curricula of the education of ethics. Who are we called to become? Whoever we define ourselves to be. However, the authentic self, the created self as it is intended to be – regardless of shape, by its very religious, spiritual and co-creative nature, is empathetic. In the Christian world, recognized as the forebear of *agape*.⁶⁵¹ As participant # 4 stated: “I believe in love.” This is the basis of the Christian ethic.

In the sharing, the elaborating, the witnessing and the weeping it becomes spiritual, as participant # 3 tells of ‘feeling connected,’ but nonetheless ‘feeling isolated

⁶⁵⁰Graham, 154.

⁶⁵¹Okholm, 87.

behind a wall.’ As pointed out by Norris, the etymology of care comes to mind: to cry out.⁶⁵² Occasions like these warrant a teaching moment, as there is room to convey the character of what practical and pastoral theology are all about – bridging the gap between what lays clearly before us as a socio-political possibility, and how religious, spiritual and institutional tenure can listen deeply to the plight of those who are doing the ‘crying out,’ and act accordingly – according to the claims of our moral responsibility and ethical agency.

Reminded of # 1’s comment on purpose: “There’s no particular purpose in what I do. I’m just a connector.” I would suggest not minimizing the role. For I believe it speaks to the contrary: that part of our purpose is to connect. Participant # 5 established his purpose and identity as ‘an anchor,’ as he also suggested that where we find our ‘interconnectedness’ is the place of identity, where engagement could free us to deepen our call toward empathy. As an extension - the theme of beauty was recognized, someone established the link between the beautiful and gratitude; to recognize the ‘other’ as valuable is posed most likely as a sympathetic question: “makes them beautiful?”⁶⁵³ In order to perceive this to be true, we need to exercise empathy, to be opened to the grace and humility of service, and to be visibly recognizant of alterity, so that we may shape ourselves ethically, according to what we care for. There is evidence of this in all of the participants, without direct mention of the words – ethic, humility or empathy.

Virtue: Hope, faith, love

During part of the final module there was mention of how through our ‘spiritual connections’ there was ‘inspiration.’ As a result of coming together with a common goal,

⁶⁵²Norris, 4.

⁶⁵³Participant # 3.

regardless of the silence, unity prevailed through inspiration – pointing to the power of converging art and spirituality as a means in which to inspire engagement, and relationship.

Hoping that discoveries would happen on how to ‘open up’ a little more. Hope to overcome challenges in their lives, including fear and anger, and anguish. Hope as an investment toward the growth and maturation of their spiritual lives. And hope to ‘unlock’ or ‘unblock’ the energy of the challenges that stand in the way of reaching their pathways of joy. Hope and discovery seemed to go hand in hand. The participants discovered much about themselves, and ‘the other.’ Along with hope were the pronunciations of their passions: God, gardens, nature, relationships, animals, the environment, service to their communities, and the dedicated movement it takes to care for all of these people, places and things. All of these were mentioned as accessories of connection, at one point or another. And so where there is connection, there is hope. It would stand to reason that acedia as a ‘disconnect’ could lead to the tragedies of despair, to *krisis*⁶⁵⁴ as so well defined by Kierkegaard, and ultimately suicide.

From the budding ‘seeds of faith,’ to the culminating action of the covenant, faith was frequently named. At times straightforward, other times versed in symbols and poetry, and wet paint: ‘Seeds of faith out of nothingness.’⁶⁵⁵ Love was extensive: “I believe in love,”⁶⁵⁶ and, “After all, in the long run, do we not all think and act in conformity to what we love?”⁶⁵⁷ Yet another: “And another word for that beauty or

⁶⁵⁴Barnett, 114.

⁶⁵⁵Vivianne LaRiviere, one of my comments as we were in conversation during the ‘purpose’ module.

⁶⁵⁶Participant # 4.

⁶⁵⁷Participant # 5.

oneness is love. Always everywhere yellow, the color of life, okay.”⁶⁵⁸

Acedia, anxiety

As we hear descriptions of anxiety, in contrast with flow and continuity, and whether (or not) it takes an occasion of crisis to bring us to the precipice of transformation, how do we position ourselves in these questions and how might they relate to temporality, and our relationship with time? I reflect on participant # 3’s statement of “the big clock with lots of time passing,”⁶⁵⁹ and how her continued description points to how being ‘overwhelmed’ and time are somehow at odds with each other.

We hear a similar dilemma presented by participant # 4: “The challenge never stops.”⁶⁶⁰ Pope Francis’ message leans toward the efficacy of time and how acedia can crush our responsibility toward service as it is related to time.⁶⁶¹ The way of contemplation is a visceral acknowledgement and surrender to the wisdom of time – something that is of major consequence when suffering with acedia, as it plays out as anxiety and restlessness.

Time plays a significant role in the rule of monastic life. As a discipline it offers a gift of precision. Perhaps this is what is meant by the often-repeated reference to ‘flow’ by many of the participants. For indeed, when discipline prevails, and precision is keen, for some it may feel like ‘flow.’ Converging art and spirituality may provide us with the means – ‘place and space’ – in which time becomes associated with the voice of the

⁶⁵⁸Participant # 6.

⁶⁵⁹168.

⁶⁶⁰169.

⁶⁶¹Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, # 81.

Spirit, reducing our anxiety, and helping us see the cause of both our social anxiety and restlessness that could potentially lead to ‘social acedia’ as mentioned above.

We suffer if we encounter acedia. However, acedia may also have a purpose.

Participant # 1’s reflection:

Acedia for me is that part where it’s easier to step away from the pain, and just sort of say...I can’t reach the clarity, I can’t reach the truth, I can’t reach the connectedness...the shadow around the edges of our days, of our years, of our loneliness. It seeps into our lives and can bleed into the bright colours of our clarity and our happiness. It taunts us; it shields light and lightness of being. It is a human condition, which is there to help us keep balance.

As we strive to ‘keep balance,’ what is prevalent is the freedom to choose. Does acedia merit the consideration of a wilful choice to abscond from our responsibility to care, to be empathetic, to be humble, as we turn away from ‘the other?’

Symbols

We have heard about the extensive use and number of symbols, and how they have helped bridge the gap between the participant and their inner language. These symbols are both collective, and personal. As such, the discoveries in which they speak to, and the method by which they come by, could represent a *fusion of horizons*⁶⁶² as diverse ‘synthetic’ aspects of the retreat blend here: in the meditation, in the contemplative arena, in the reflection of, in the doing and expressing of the art, in the witnessing, and in the breath of silence that immediately follows. The symbols linger like smoke, ever so slowly dissipating after the conversation, but lingering nonetheless; and resurfacing, then lingering again. Does the symbol represent the ‘embodiment’ that Illman and Smith spoke about when presenting Viladesau’s statement? “Art embodies

⁶⁶² A reference point toward Gadamer’s *fusion of horizons*.

revelation.”⁶⁶³ I suggest that to look to the symbol, is to look toward the transformative path.

The cell

As the historical monks have prescribed time in the cell, manual labour and perseverance as part of the remedial path for acedia, we see ideas illuminated around the importance of the cell, both figuratively and metaphorically. Though ‘cell’ was not talked about frequently, it nonetheless left an impact, as it was thought of with a particular vulnerability, as people spoke reverently about the importance of spending ‘time’ in relationship, in service, with God, in Church, with family, with animals and other sentient beings. Perhaps metaphorically and symbolically so, we see the ‘cell,’ in the mountains mentioned, in the river, in the gardens, in the songs they sing, and how ‘ascension’⁶⁶⁴ is perhaps what it is all about, as it relates to the unfolding of these personal journeys, in relationship with ‘Christ’s ascension to the mountain,’⁶⁶⁵ and how the convergence of art and spirituality serves to deliver these messages.

Seeking ~ the quest – What is meaningful?

And so we seek. We seek to be seen, we seek to be known, to be accepted as one’s self. We seek to know ourselves in the context of our environment, our experiences and our relationships. “I am nothing without the other,” claimed participant # 1. We seek to be in unity, in ‘oneness’ with the Divine, and with love. We seek to be fulfilled, and to be rid of anxiety. We seek to have ‘hearts’ full of love, gardens full of ‘sunshine,’ and to abate the ‘loneliness.’ We seek depth, to move beyond surface veils of ‘superficiality.’

⁶⁶³Illman, and Smith, 26.

⁶⁶⁴Participant # 1.

⁶⁶⁵Participant # 4.

We seek to be rid of ‘fear and anger.’ We seek to be ‘motivated’ and ‘inspired.’ We seek the truth of who we are, as we find ourselves in ‘crisis.’ We seek to define acedia. We seek to find ways to subside the anxiety and the restlessness and the lack of motivation. We seek to understand ourselves. We seek to ‘mature spiritually,’ to exercise our ‘connection,’ in a fashion that is true to our needs, our ‘identity,’ our ‘purpose.’ We seek to colour our world with joy. We seek to give meaning, as we find meaning symbolically. We seek to understand the human condition with its mountains of challenges. We seek to understand ourselves. As we are called to become, these were the testimonies that lay at the center. Who am I? Who shall I love? What shall I care for? And how? How shall I seek out the answers, as I seek to address my purpose in life?

Conclusion

Participants took to heart the questions that were posed as part of the mandate of the retreat, participated thoughtfully in the discussion forums, and gave their full attention to their prayer and meditation time, and their artistic efforts. They all demonstrated respectful and inquisitive dispositions, as they offered up their vulnerabilities and their honesty. There was the witness to some of the most intimate revelations of those who took part. Hope and faith expressed themselves in tangible ways, as participants spoke of their needs, their fears, their ambitions, and their vocations. They gave of themselves selflessly.

We have discovered what is ‘meaningful’ according to these six people who took part in *The Art of Soul Care* Retreat. It has become obvious that ‘connection’ is

meaningful, and how it relates to engagement and service. However, we also have been made aware that ‘engagement’ is not talked about much, or the word directly referred to. Rather, it is reflected as an undercurrent in statements referring to family, nature, art, community, and service, and relationship with the Divine. The ‘cell’ became metaphoric and though perhaps an unconscious gesture on the part of the participants, could be determined as such as they chose to describe the many areas that brought them solace.

We have heard concerns and testimony about how we are connecting to Mother Earth, along with the challenges we face regarding our ecological systems and sustainability. We have heard of the concerns about what could be interpreted as *acedia*. And we have read about the possibility that *acedia* may be considered as a causality of identity crisis.

Symbolism became a means in which to ‘bridge the gap,’ as a form of communication on how to decipher and interpret the art of the participants. Symbolism, and artistic gesture and expression qualifies as language and offers the meaningful passage between what is within, and how those images become a viable conduit between the language of the soul, and the world we are called to connect with, and engage in. This reflects the emphasis of Gadamer’s statement regarding the use of language as a means of understanding, at the core of his concept of *fusion of horizons*.⁶⁶⁶ It also offers a bridge point as to how we might begin to unfold what Farley means by his concept of *habitus* as an “existential, personal knowledge of God.”⁶⁶⁷

This existentialism speaks to the ‘seeking’ of the participants as described throughout the retreat. In search of community, in search of self, in search of relationship,

⁶⁶⁶Gadamer, 84.

⁶⁶⁷Farley, as quoted in Carroll, 161.

in search of purpose, and intimacy with the self, the Self, and the other – also the Self. The beauty and transparency of the covenants ushers in the hope, and wisdom and splendor that all of these people embody. They are indeed gifts, each and every one of them. Their initiatives, along with their challenges mirror the possibilities in each and every one of us.

As a practitioner, a researcher, an observer and participant, I underwent various points of dissolution and integration. Some of which continue to this day. This journey, and the experience of coming to know these six participants, has deepened my faith, as I have also come to know and grow a deeper understanding of empathy, and humility. For this I am deeply grateful.

As I bring this discussion to a close, I would emphasize that this research, with all of its data has answered the research questions: *Can a practice of pastoral theology and the arts help others discern acedia in their lives? In so doing, could this provide an impetus toward responsible change and transformation?* The data, testimony and experience of the participants indicate that indeed such a practice has helped discern acedia in their lives. And in so doing, the context – *The Art of Soul Care Retreat* – has provided an impetus toward responsible change and transformation. We see this described in many ways throughout their testimonies and sharing, particularly in the tangibility of the mission statements. In holding the tension between the convergence of art and spirituality, this practice may lead us to consider what danger may lurk when we come face-to-face with acedia, and what transformation and responsible change is all about.

As suggested by the poet Rilke perhaps the answers lie in the fabric of the

questions themselves:

Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books that are now written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.⁶⁶⁸

Let us now move into the concluding chapter with its final considerations and recommendations.

⁶⁶⁸Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, 1929. <https://www.carrothers.com/rilke4.htm>, accessed October, 2018.

Chapter Six: Final Considerations and Recommendations

Theological considerations

As suggested in the introduction, the goal of this research was to examine how a pastoral theology and the arts might serve as a practice of discernment for acedia. In so doing, I questioned also if this practice of converging art and spirituality could provide an impetus toward responsible change and transformation. A detailed account of practical theology provided the means by which a liaison between the two practices could be considered. The art of theological reflection was examined, as were definitions of spirituality, art, education and leadership. All considered as part of a sustainable formula through which to bridge the gap between the two concepts of theology; with a pastoral theology and the arts serving also as an extension for both method and methodology.

As practical theologians we are called to bear witness and to serve the qualities of mission. Our work is designed so as to suggest the means and the way on how theological practices ‘may bridge the gap between what is, and what ought to be, providing a means by which practical theological experiences can help participants navigate pathways toward transformation.’⁶⁶⁹ In so doing, we are assigned with the task of designing practices that serve to provide opportunities that are transformative and geared toward enhancing the quality of life and leadership, for both the Church and related communities. Our present world is geared toward a world of image. Nestled in this fast-making and moving epoch is the potential to revive and re-establish the vitality of what it means to be engaged with the arts as an extension of theology.

⁶⁶⁹As noted in Chapter 5.

Along with a focus on practical theology and the arts, as researchers we are instructed to correlate with other fields, to support our claims in a social and worldly fashion. Partnering and engaging with different areas of the social sciences provides us with the possibilities to enhance the standards of our own field of research and study. This research examined correlative dimensions including areas of philosophy, psychology, education, spirituality, and insights dealing with historical details of monastic life as it is related to acedia. With a pertinent consideration toward ethics, resources that served as a complementary voice to the design of the *praxis* in question were etched out. Having suggested in the beginning that practical theology is a ‘multi-dimensional theology,’ this investigation laid out the components necessary to uphold such a claim, as various fields were explored.

In correlating with the aforementioned areas, the research has defined regions that may be considered for future investigation. Spaces that, when considering a theological concept – in this case acedia – could benefit from the expansion of mutual components. As we exercise the possibilities of bringing abstract notions together to observe parallel perceptions, particularly as we examine acedia in the light of existentialism, consideration can be given to how these avenues may be associated with the philosophies of ethics and care. Likewise to be deliberated would be the potential connection of acedia with psychology as it leans toward a definition of a complex, and its relationship with trauma.

Although sciences such as neurology, and biology, and psychiatry have not played a huge role in this study of acedia, consideration could be warranted on how this theological concept affects areas such as those previously mentioned in the body of this

work.⁶⁷⁰ Future consideration could be focused on ecology and the environment, geography and sociology, and anthropology with cultural accents, as we witness the shift in landscape and migration as a result of climate change, war and poverty. Economics too could be examined in partnership with practical theology, as capitalism, when corrupted, could be under the influence of acedia. We have also, as previous testimony considers – the dangers of corrupt politicizing. There may be additional benefits in medicine and psychiatry to consider as the symptomatic list of acedia's character becomes more prevalent, particularly when dealing with the areas of depression, identity crisis, and suicide.

Attention could be given to the ongoing coursework regarding the development of the field of both practical theology and practical theology and the arts, as it relates to Gadamer's *fusion of horizons*.⁶⁷¹ Consideration is to be given to the reduction or elimination of patriarchal and colonized mindsets, as it is also essential to uphold a steady stream of life-long learning practices to expand the horizons of practical theology. Specifically, as this work reinforces community, belonging and engagement it is wise to consider the propositions of alterity and otherness, as we are called to address and maintain the role of service and hospitality as core facets of ministry.

To consider practical theology and the arts as a sustainable method of engagement when challenges arise is a deliberate application that has the opportunity to voice what sometimes otherwise cannot be expressed. Working in tangent and complementary fashion with practical theology, there is the opportunity to continue to make drastic advancements in the field, as we find the means in which to communicate with a

⁶⁷⁰Particularly the field of psychology, neurology, the social sciences – the humanities – the field of ethics, and philosophy.

⁶⁷¹Gadamer, 367.

refreshing and yet optimal means of interaction with the religious, the spiritual and the secular as we are called to bridge these gaps.

Practical considerations

Future deliberation could be considered on how to maximize time and space so the practical elements of the *praxis* in question may have the opportunity to be considered under various umbrellas. As it stands, the retreat formation is reasonably malleable. In listening to the testimony of the participants, care needs to be taken to ensure that the location, and the environment are conducive to the contemplative sensitivities of retreat life: quiet, hospitable with good food, includes areas where one can find solitude, and others that are expansive, connected with nature, well-lit with natural light, inviting, simple in layout, accessible and comfortable.

Offering less material and giving more time for the doing of the art is something to be measured with balance in mind. Considering the various learning styles of people, using a variety of ways to present material is wise, such as reading materials, flip charts, videos, art pieces, poetry, and other exchanges are useful commodities. All materials and supplies are to be set up beforehand, with the participant having nothing to do but indulge in the work. This is their time. The materials need to be tapered accordingly, as consideration is given to the length of the retreat, whether it serves as a longer retreat or a shorter workshop, though always better to have more prepared than not enough.

In considering the use of materials, attention should be given to many facets that are also correlative. As a focal point, as this is practical theology, components may focus on scriptural readings and/or theological concepts. In order to maintain an inclusive and

diverse voice addressing the spiritual needs of many, offer miscellaneous material, and correlate with other fields. ‘Walk the talk.’ Find resources in other fields that help support the questions and offer a range of voices on how to present material. Predominantly, as the focus is theology and the arts, use art forms to inspire art forms. Like begets like.

Attention to the style of facilitation is not to be taken for granted. Ongoing study to understand the world of metaphors and symbolism, and artistic merit is warranted, along with keeping up with what is new and exciting in the field of practical theology and practical theology and the arts. As these style of practices are an opportunity to help ‘bridge the gap’ between historical tradition and contemporary spiritual beliefs and practices, the practitioner must be courageous enough to remain grounded in their own views, while keeping still with an open heart, an inquisitive and compassionate mind, and a deliberate voice of authenticity. The integrity of the practitioner plays a vital role as displays of trust are exercised and movement toward transformation is encouraged.

Pastoral considerations

Bearing in mind the changing religious and spiritual landscapes of our times, I suggest practitioners be reasonably versed in areas of religious and spiritual pastoral expressions other than their own. Taking into consideration the many voices of the participants, they will teach you as well. Be opened to receiving many ideas and concepts that are not familiar to you, and be open to having your ideas challenged. Be sympathetic, while educational. Unpack as necessary. Be enthusiastic, and curious. Above all, be empathetic.

Be prepared to offer limited pastoral care on an as needed basis, keeping in mind boundaries and a healthy reserve of space and time. Special care to set up appropriate support resources for the practitioner is a healthy consideration. One cannot assume the carrying of the many details of the stories of participants will not have an affect. Prepare accordingly.

Pastorally, if we regard acedia as a fear of suffering, its sinful nature might be something to be reconsidered, while reflecting on acedia as something that needs to be healed rather than punished. To consider an ongoing investigation on how to better pastoral resources would be beneficial, so that a reasonable education of acedia is made available and rendered. Particular focus could be centered on the needs of pastoral workers, both ordained and laypersons. Find useful language, and language that can traverse a wide-range of denominational and non-denominational barriers. Be contextual; for example is the use of the concept of ‘demon’ still relevant in today’s vernacular?

Consider adapting the work as part of a community engagement project. Extend an invitation toward others to consider partnering resources so that the trajectory of acedia become more known, more familiar, and manageable. Reach out to the leaders of various churches and other institutions to shine the light on the *malaise*. In turn, offer ways in which to continue to expand on the idea of acedia and hopefully continue to find meaningful resources on how to bring this tragic spiritual illness to light; for much is at stake if we don’t.

Recommendations

I would like to begin with giving consideration to the limitations of this work. For within these confines are areas that could be further explored, providing additional vistas for research. It is not reasonable to consider a participant be fully versed about acedia in such a short period of time. Nor do I claim to be an expert on the topic of acedia. We cannot be completely certain the character of acedia was understood, let alone experienced. Though it has been honestly, and vulnerably explored and interpreted as such by the participants. Their experience was transparent and has meaning. Village life makes it risky to mention vocation associated with the participants. Unfortunately, the way the project was designed, it offered no opportunity for follow-up.

Bearing in mind what we learn in hindsight, as a researcher, if I could, I would continue to have my curiosity peaked with further studies. Noted that some of the criteria might change. I would hope to be able to approach this practice as a model for facilitators. Teaching a course would be one means on how to continue to explore acedia and discover not only its historical value, but also its effect on today's world. Providing additional forums for the education of theology and the arts – a must.

A more in-depth description of the historical aspects of acedia along with a descriptive chronology of its development may have been the preferred by some of the readers. However, I found this information easily accessible and already mentioned in countless areas of literature. My concern was more about the assumptive approach that acedia does exist, and that a practice of theology and the arts had the means in which to help us discern acedia in our lives. Notwithstanding, the door has been opened. Participants were eager to learn and explore, though the experience cannot be repeated

with expectation of the same results, similar ones perhaps. With this type of research, one never steps into the same river twice.

Nonetheless, the research provides meaning and relevance, opening up new vistas of research as we meld historical norms with the possibilities of spiritual renewal when approached through the lens of not only a practical theology but with a purposeful extension toward theology and the arts. Opening up the possibilities for theology and the arts as it shapes new approaches to the field of methodology is relevant. To consider the study of symbols as it relates to the discernment and theological reflection is appropriate. As the liaison with beauty, imagination and acedia was only touched upon superficially, a more in-depth study of these links is warranted, for example the work of Balthasar. To further investigate the character of temporality and existentialism as it relates to acedia could be substantiated.

I recommend exploring the means in which to warrant ongoing investigation into the fields of philosophy, psychology and perhaps even psychiatry, in order to determine if there is reasonable ground to consider acedia as a complex. And how in turn, this may affect our ethical climate if acedia is determined as a suspected antagonist of psychological and spiritual wellbeing. Focusing on how detrimental acedia can be could be emphasized in the form of curriculum when teaching ethics, spirituality, psychology, philosophy and economics, and political science, as well as ongoing consideration in the field of pastoral and theological studies, and the social sciences.

Conclusion

We have considered many details as to why it is a serious call to comprehend the trajectory of acedia and how it may be related to identity crisis. We have examined the possibility of acedia being rooted in the fear of suffering, and its possible association with trauma and even perhaps noted as a psychological complex. As an unprecedented danger to our global society it is a pastoral necessity that acedia be returned to a forum of visible detection so that we may consider how this plight could terrorize our spiritual psyches and infest the fabric of our personal and global communities. Acedia is a harbinger with deadly and terrifying consequences.

A practical theology of the arts – converging art and spirituality – has been determined as a reasonable practice of discernment for acedia. We have come to understand the nature of acedia a little more, and have considered how acedia may be a causality of identity crisis and harmful to our relationship with the Divine. The convergence of art and spirituality has provided an awareness of acedia and how it may manifest in our lives. We have also examined historical methods of pastoral care as remedial prescriptions, while considering contemporary and contextual parallels.

Given the scarcity of pastoral care for this spiritual illness, we must be vigilant in our understanding of acedia. To realize this, we need to create occasions where acedia can be examined and deliberated. It is necessary that we provide sufficient education so that we can make reasonable and practical assessments of our personal discernment of acedia. This research has provided significant cause and caution so that we may have the necessary material and knowledge to comprehend how to care for the well-being of our

souls, to nurture our most reverent relationship with the Divine, and to grasp the need to understand our role and responsibility toward the world at large.

As we look at the lineage of definitions for acedia, we can observe it moving from ‘noon-day demon,’ to despondency, sorrow, sloth, restlessness, apathy, disconnection – to what will acedia become next? It is perceivably and then perceptually like an ancient antagonist – a mythical figure that lurks and travels in the shadows of time, and history. Influencing perhaps both, like a fictional time warp, its power, sustainable and dangerous. Regardless of whether it is the mind of a monk, layperson or secularist, seems irrelevant, for I do not consider that acedia discriminates. That might be the ultimate danger of its power.

As we scour the Earth with destruction, where will this ‘absence of care’ lead us? If acedia is woven into our social fabric, or is an inherent contagion, with the lapse in pastoral education regarding its healing, where are we headed? I am not sure of the answer, but I find the possibilities frightening and alarming. A critical review of both historical and contemporary reads of ancient Christian practices has led me to this conclusion: in order to heal from acedia, you need to know acedia. You need to face and understand your self at the deepest of intimacies – and know ‘thy mind.’ You need to understand patience with its deepest of challenges, and yes, like the monks said: perseverance, hard labour and prayer.

This spiritual prescription has movement – it can and should be interpreted contextually as it is bound to translate itself differently within cultural, societal and religious boundaries. Despite the potential for various interpretations, there are common spiritual rewards: joy and peace of mind, and the experience of God’s Divine Love.

These graces are potentially anyone's to receive – regardless of how one might define what they believe to be their truth and understanding of Life itself – if only in the name of Love. And so, it is with ecumenism, multi-faith dialogues, inter-denominational and inter-faith conversations, and beyond-faith possibilities – while offering at least a reasonable understanding of acedia, and while recognizing the dangers of acedia which potentially could lead to the world's destruction – may wisdom, beauty, and the Spirit of the imagination prevail.

APPENDICES

Appendix A – Recruitment Letter

Additional copies with the heading addressed to: ‘Dear subscribers to The Songroom’ as well as ‘Dear inquirer,’ were also used for those inquiries outside of denominational support.



|December 2016.

Ref: Review Ethic Board File Number: 1360.12/16

Chair, University Saint Paul University/223, Main Ottawa (Ontario) Canada K1S 1C4 - 613-236-1393

Dear members of the congregation,

I am a Doctoral Candidate at Saint Paul's University in the final phase of the Doctorate of Ministry program. This stage includes a qualitative research study oriented toward the shape of my ministry presently known as The Songroom. My focus is a pastoral practice known as *The Art of Soul: Care* presented in the form of a retreat: a 9:00 – 5:00 pm Saturday for four consecutive weeks. I am seeking five to eight people, ages 35 and up, to participate in the active part of this project. Commencement date will be January 2017, though a preliminary interview will be held in December 2016.

A focal point of my research is on a particular disease of the soul known as acedia, historically referenced, as the 8th deadly sin. *The Art of Soul: Care* is designed to help one not only understand the trajectory of acedia, but also help one self-define acedia and to discern its presence in one's life. At its core is the question: Who am I? *The Art of Soul* espouses to the convergence of art and spirituality, using arts a form of spiritual expression. Participation is strictly on a voluntary basis. There is no stipend offered or honorarium.

If you would be interested in participating in this Doctoral Study, please contact me and you will be provided with detailed description of what is involved as well as a consent form.

Thank you,

Vivianne LaRivière

viv@thesongroom.ca

450 458 7906

Dates of participation for four Saturdays: (9:00- 5:00)

Possible dates: January 7th, 14th, 21st, 28th, 2017

The location The Songroom ~ studio Cote St. Charles, St. Lazare, QC.

Appendix B – Recruitment Poster

Have you ever asked yourself...

"Who am I?"



Who am I called to become?

Looking for participants for a
Doctoral Research Study

- Have you ever wondered about your true purpose?
- Are you interested in finding out using art and spirituality as a way into the answer?
- Are you over 35+?

If interested in participating please
contact me for further information.

Vivianne LaRiviere, 450 458 7906. viv@thesongroom.ca



Research Ethics Board File Number 1360.12/16 • Chair, University Saint Paul University/223, Main Ottawa (Ontario) Canada K1S 1C4 - 613-236-1393

Appendix C – Letter of Consent – Four Pages



I will be asked to read a text written by Kathleen Norris: *Acedia & me – A Marriage, Monks, and a Writer's Life*, Riverhead Books, NY, © 2008

Additionally, I will be asked to participate in a preliminary interview. I also be will be asked to keep a journal, and share what may be pertinent contents of the journal as I see fit, and to fill out a questionnaire after every session.

I will be asked to give my consent for the use of my art in photographic form taken by Vivianne, LaRiviere, the researcher. I maintain the creative intelligence of all of my art.

I acknowledge that the retreat days and the interview both preliminary and final will be audio taped. I acknowledge that the preliminary interview and the final interview will also be recorded.

Risks: The risk level has been cited as minimal. My participation in this study will entail that I volunteer personal contact information, including whom to contact in the case of emergency. I understand that I may be faced with vulnerable topics, not only within myself, but others in the group as well. I understand that my personal involvement in the retreat may cause me to feel emotional, and that I could find some of the discoveries – both my own and that of the other participants – emotionally unsettling.

. I have received assurance from the researcher that every effort will be made to minimize these risks. I acknowledge that I have been informed of the names of two contact persons, an Anglican Church minister and a psychologist. Also available is the link to an online resource directing me to the 'Centre de Crise de Quebec' (Quebec Crisis Centre) where phone intervention is available 24/7.

Benefits: My participation in this study will benefit not only my personal understanding of a practice that can help me address my purpose in life, and the joy and challenges I face, but will also benefit further study in the area of practical theology and the arts. And, by understanding acedia, it can be more easily recognized within our society. In naming acedia, we can work toward gaining further insight into how to address the challenges of acedia.

Confidentiality and anonymity: I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential. I understand that the contents will be used only for the sake of this research study, and for the publishing of the thesis. If, for whatever reason there is additional reason or purpose for the use of the material, e.g. for a book, I am to be contacted, and another consent form signed. I cannot hold the researcher responsible for a breach of confidentiality by others, though every measure will be taken to highlight the importance of confidentiality and trust.

I consent to maintaining the confidentiality of everyone involved.

I consent to maintaining the anonymity of other parties involved.

I understand that all of the data collected will be kept under lock and key. My name will become coded.

The purpose of the collected data is to corroborate the researcher's findings, to provide proof of testimony, and to also offer additional, i.e. auditory, and visual presentations to the project, as they play a formidable role in the type of research described.

Anonymity will be protected in the following manner

Names will be coded in all reports, including field notes. And coded names only will be used in the final dissertation.

No mention of the names of the participants from the researcher is to be made publicly, without anyone's permission.

All files are to be kept under lock and key.

Conservation of data: The data collected – all consent forms, all field notes, journals, questionnaires, copies of audio transcripts, photographs of art, and copies of e-mail, and USB sticks and back-up drives, will be kept in a secure manner, in a locked file cabinet, or in a space in the studio of the Songroom which is locked when the researcher is absent. It is noted that original data or a copy of the data must be kept on university campus during the full period of retention.

Compensation: There is to be no compensation, honorarium or stipend offered, before, during or after the retreat.

Voluntary Participation: I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. I understand that I can withdraw my participation at any time. If such a decision is made, I will be asked if what I have offered, including photos of my art and the preliminary interview and correspondence may still be used. I understand that I need not give consent for this, and can withdraw any or all of my participation, or allow some of it to stand. I will be asked to clarify my decision in writing.

If I decide not to allow my written material, i.e. journal, any questionnaires rendered or part or all of my art work, all collected data will be returned to me and signed for accordingly.

Acceptance: I, _____

agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Vivianne LaRivière, Doctoral candidate of the theology department, Doctorate of Ministry Program, Saint Paul University, whose research is under the supervision of Lorraine Ste-Marie, Saint Paul University.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or her supervisor.

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Office of Research and Ethics, Saint Paul University, 223 Main Street, Ottawa, ON K1S 1C4
Tel.: (613) 236-1393

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

Participant's signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix D – Preliminary interview questions

A preliminary interview would begin with an informal approach, allowing the participant to relax, settle in, and giving us a bit of a chance to get comfortable with each other. I would begin with explaining the nature and details of the retreat, and allow room for any questions.

I would then pose six structured questions:

- What drew you to this project?
- What do you presently know about acedia?
- What do you hope or think you might discover along the way?
- What is the nature of your spiritual or religious affiliation?
- Are there any concerns you have and might like to share?
- Do you require any additional information?

Given the nature of these questions, I would leave room for a semi-structured conversation revolving around their responses. There would be time allowed for any additional questions the participant may have. I would ask for permission to have the session recorded, as pointed out in the consent form. Confidentiality would be affirmed. The approximate time given for the preliminary interview would be approximately an hour.

Appendix E – End-of-the day questionnaire

To be completed after every session

1. What is your overall impression of today's session?
2. What part of the module did you like the least, and why?
3. What part of the module did you like the most, and why?
4. Can you put into words your experience of the art that you created?
5. What did you discover about yourself today?
6. How has that affected you in any way?
7. What did you discover about another participant today?
8. How has that affected you in any way?

Additional Comments:

Appendix F – Final Questionnaire followed up with Semi-Structured Interview

1. How was the overall experience for you?
2. What did you discover about yourself along the way?
3. Where there particular moments you favoured over others?
4. What where they?
5. Least favorite moments?
6. Did the convergence of art and spirituality help you discern acedia in your life?
7. If so, how?
8. If not, why not?
9. How did the method – *The Art of Soul* – work for you?
10. Was reading the text instrumental in your learning?
11. In what ways?
12. Was the retreat transformative for you?
13. In what ways?
14. How did the retreat not work for you?
15. How did you find the environment of the retreat? Location, geography, space, etc.
16. What would you change?
17. At any time, did you feel hampered or uncomfortable, or unsafe?
18. If so, what did you do about it?
19. Do you think your life is or has been affected by acedia?
20. If so, in what ways?
21. In your opinion, do you think that acedia could be defined as a causality of identity crisis?

22. How would you now define acedia?
23. In your opinion, what do you think works as far as the healing of acedia goes?
24. Do you agree that the way of the desert fathers is best when it comes to the healing of acedia, in today's day and age?
25. Is there anything else you could recommend?
26. What did you discover about others?
27. How did the art work for you?
28. Are there any moments of your artistic expression that stand out, or that you favour over other moments?
29. For what reason?
30. And the least favourable?
31. For what reason?
32. Have you kept your art?
33. Is there a particular piece or expression you wish to highlight and have observed in the final evaluation?
34. Has the way you see or understand beauty changed for you?
35. If so, how?
36. Has the way you understand the role of your imagination changed for you?
37. If so, how?
38. Has the way you understand the nature of your soul changed for you?
39. If so, how?
40. Did you experience something that one would name as transformative?
41. Please give details.

42. What was your experience of the style of facilitating?
43. What would you recommend to keep, and to change?
44. Where you able to manifest a renewal of covenant?
45. If so, do you mind providing any details?
46. If not, why not do you think?
47. Do you think the retreat was instrumental in discerning acedia in your life?
48. Would you recommend the retreat to others?
49. Where do you think the church lacks in educating about acedia?
50. In your opinion, how could this be improved?
51. Any final comments?

Appendix G – Approval of Thesis Committee



UNIVERSITÉ
SAINT-PAUL
UNIVERSITY

✓ (SIS)

APPROVAL OF PROPOSAL BY THE THESIS COMMITTEE

The Art of Soul: Care

Title: Converging Art and Spirituality as a Pastoral Theology of Discernment for Acedia

Name of candidate:

Vivianne La Riviere

Doc Theo.

My signature attests that I have read the research proposal of thesis project and that I approve it.

Director of thesis:

Name Lorraine Ste-Marie

Faculty Faculty of Human Sciences

Signature

L. Ste-Marie

Date

August 12, 2016

Thesis Committee members

Name Myrtle Power

Faculty Faculty of Human Sciences

Signature

Myrtle Power

Date

August 19, 2016

Name Fabrice Blee

Faculty Faculty of Theology

Signature

Fabrice Blee

Date

23/08/2016

Appendix H – Erikson’s chart of the stages of personal development

https://www.google.ca/search?q=erikson%27s+stages+of+development+chart&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiwsY_ViK7ZAhWC5YMKHTPhDHYQ_AUICigB&biw=1223&bih=687#imgrc=CzIknFwGC0955M:

Group	Age	Virtue	Crisis
Infants	0 to 18 mo	Hope	Trust vs. Mistrust
Toddlers	18 mo to 3 yrs	Will	Autonomy vs. Shame & Doubt
Preschool	3 to 6 yrs	Purpose	Initiative vs. Guilt
Childhood	6 to 12 yrs	Competence	Industry vs. Inferiority
Adolescence	12 to 18 yrs	Fidelity	Identity vs. Role Confusion
Young Adults	19 to 40 yrs	Love	Intimacy vs. Isolation
Middle Adulthood	40 to 65 yrs	Care	Generativity vs. Stagnation
Seniors	65 yrs +	Wisdom	Ego Integrity vs. Despair

Appendix I – Environment, Studio, house, location

Main residence



Sunset



Studio outside



Nearby fields



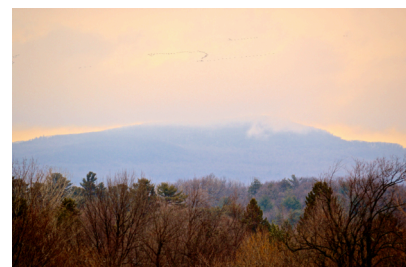
Studio entrance



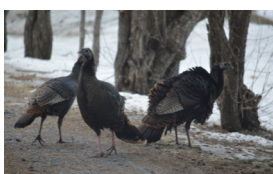
Grounds



Mountain view



Turkeys!



Interior Studio

Art table 1



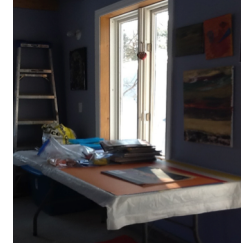
Art tables 2, 3



Art supplies 1



Art supplies 2



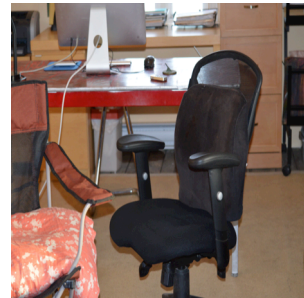
On our way upstairs!



Some chairs



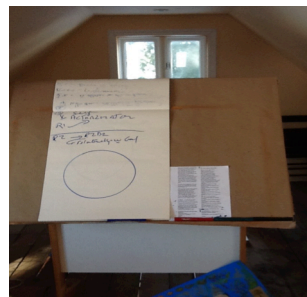
... chairs



...chairs



Flip chart



Appendix J – NoNotes.com – Non-disclosure agreement



Non Disclosure Agreement

THIS AGREEMENT dated as of the 3rd day of April, 2017.

BETWEEN:

Vivianne LaRiviere
- and -

NoNotes.com

This Agreement will confirm the agreement between NoNotes.com and the Client in regard to transcription, translation and related services

("Receiving Party") for the purpose of preventing the unauthorized disclosure of Confidential Information as defined below. The parties agree to enter into a confidential relationship with respect to the disclosure of certain proprietary and confidential information ("Confidential Information").

1. Definition of Confidential Information. For purposes of this Agreement, "Confidential Information" shall include all information or material that has or could have commercial value or other utility in the business in which Disclosing Party is engaged. If Confidential Information is in written form, the Disclosing Party shall label or stamp the materials with the word "Confidential" or some similar warning. If Confidential Information is transmitted orally, the Disclosing Party shall promptly provide a writing indicating that such oral communication constituted Confidential Information.

2. Exclusions from Confidential Information. Receiving Party's obligations under this Agreement do not extend to information that is: (a) publicly known at the time of disclosure or subsequently becomes publicly known through no fault of the Receiving Party; (b) discovered or created by the Receiving Party before disclosure by Disclosing Party; (c) learned by the Receiving Party through legitimate means other than from the Disclosing Party or Disclosing Party's representatives; or (d) is disclosed by Receiving Party with Disclosing Party's prior written approval.

3. Obligations of Receiving Party. Receiving Party shall hold and maintain the Confidential Information in strictest confidence for the sole and exclusive benefit of the Disclosing Party. Receiving Party shall carefully restrict access to Confidential Information to employees, contractors and third parties as is reasonably required and shall require those persons to sign nondisclosure restrictions at least as protective as those

in this Agreement. Receiving Party shall not, without prior written approval of Disclosing Party, use for Receiving Party's own benefit, publish, copy, or otherwise disclose to others, or permit the use by others for their benefit or to the detriment of Disclosing Party, any Confidential Information. Receiving Party shall return to Disclosing Party any and all records, notes, and other written, printed, or tangible materials in its possession pertaining to Confidential Information immediately if Disclosing Party requests it in writing. The receiving party is not to disclose the client's identity to a third party.

4. Time Periods. The nondisclosure provisions of this Agreement shall survive the termination of this Agreement and Receiving Party's duty to hold Confidential Information in confidence shall remain in effect until the Confidential Information no longer qualifies as a trade secret or until Disclosing Party sends Receiving Party written notice releasing Receiving Party from this Agreement, whichever occurs first.

5. Relationships. Nothing contained in this Agreement shall be deemed to constitute either party a partner, joint venturer or employee of the other party for any purpose.

6. Severability. If a court finds any provision of this Agreement invalid or unenforceable, the remainder of this Agreement shall be interpreted so as best to effect the intent of the parties.

7. Integration. This Agreement expresses the complete understanding of the parties with respect to the subject matter and supersedes all prior proposals, agreements, representations and understandings. This Agreement may not be amended except in a writing signed by both parties.

8. Waiver. The failure to exercise any right provided in this Agreement shall not be a waiver of prior or subsequent rights.

This Agreement and each party's obligations shall be binding on the representatives, assigns and successors of such party. Each party has signed this Agreement through its authorized representative.

Client/Company:

Client Authorized Party:

Client Authorized Party Signature: _____

Authorized Party: Matthew Whitteker

Authorized Party: Title COO

Authorized Party Signature: 

Appendix K – Handout on acedia

Acedia - Vivianne LaRiviere (2015)

Joy is an art in and of itself. Although it may only unfold as a result of suffering, it also is its own reward. It is the second kindling of the fire of an integrated sense of being; peace of mind striking the first match. Companionship of these two flames is sequential to love. As a trinity of balance and authenticity, peace is rooted in acceptance, forgiveness, and surrender, as love is gnarled deeply in action, and joy being the final culmination and grace bestowed for a good life led, as a participant of care – caring for and being cared for. They stand on their own merits, and yet so intertwined that subsequently the question begs if one ember is missing, will the sparks of the other two be reduced to a smoldering ash? The faithful strive toward such authenticity manoeuvring the efforts of virtue.

However, as the sojourner climbs steeper echelons harkening to a deeper stillness may be necessary so as to be attentive to the voices of vice that become known as the prevalent demons along the way. These demons have been mythologized as archetypes of ‘bad thought’ (Funk, “Thoughts Matter,” 1998) or what used to be known as the eight deadly sins, now reduced to seven. One of these demons can not only destroy your ground of joy, but also rob you of your beauty – and thus your imagination – and placate itself as a pathogen of disease within your soul ultimately leading to your destruction, as this has the power to drive a sufferer to suicide. The most detrimental of these demons is the vice of acedia. This soul thief is characterized as apathy, loneliness, despair, anguish and sloth. The sufferer does not care, and lacks empathy. As it is anxiety bearing and restlessness prevails, acedia may also be masked in a storm of do-good busy-ness, denying one the capacity to be soothed by time in solitude.

Historically, acedia was a Christian dilemma, most prevalent in the compounds of silence that accompanied the monastic tradition. Though first named as a ‘demon’ in the old testament (and maybe even as futility and sorrow in Gilgamesh?) and defined as ‘despondency’ by the Christian fourth-century monk Evagrius, (Bunge, “Despondency: The Spiritual Teaching of Evagrius Ponticus on Acedia,” 2012) given today’s diverse sea of religious and spiritual beliefs, I believe acedia is commonplace in today’s society regardless of our belief system. For ‘thought’ is part of the human condition, and virtues are celebrated amongst everyone regardless of denomination or approach to faith. And so are vices.

Evagrius testifies that despondency is rooted in anger, and though indeed anger may be a forbearer of the ailment, I believe acedia occupies common ground with identity crisis as I see both conditions rooted in a common distortion – doubt: doubt of self, and doubt of Self. Which inevitably calls into question the evidence of faith. Acedia is incarnated in indignation, unworthiness, and shame, and dare I say trauma, and even narcissism? Regardless of the reasons for its onset, I name doubt as the culprit that may lead to acedia as it casts its most ominous shadow on the faithful, leading toward apathy of self: and Self.

*I am not talking about doubt here, as the philosopher of faith. I am talking about a plaguing doubt (Kierkegaard’s despair?) that brings into question the realm of one’s existence, and purpose in the world: the type of anxious doubt that casts aspersions on one’s ability to care, and to be charitable. (Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1265-1274) The sufferer wishes not to engage with the principles of being as synonymous with the dynamics of care. (Heidegger, “Being in Time,” 1927) I am inclined to defend that this doubt leads to hopelessness. And ambivalence. Acedia as ambivalence: suffering when there is a distortion or clash of values, unexpressed needs, and a lack of one’s emotional vista. What happens if the cry of the soul is left unattended, or through some cause has been silenced?*

Appendix L – Reading choices, first module: “What do I Believe?”

1. Genesis: 1: 1- 13 (New Revised Standard Version Bible)

1. In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth; the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Then God said, “Let us make human kind. In our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

So God created human kind in his image,
In the image of God he created them;
Male and female he created them.

2. Tortoise Family Connections

By David Herbert Lawrence (1885-1930)

“On he goes, the little one,
Bud of the universe,
Pediment of life.
Setting off somewhere, apparently.
Wither away, brisk egg?
His mother deposited him on the soil as if he
were no more than droppings,

And now he scuffles tinily past her as if she were
an old rusty tin.

A mere obstacle,

He veers round the grow great mound of her –
Tortoises always foresee obstacles.

It is no use my saying to him in an emotional
voice: “This is your Mother, she laid
You when you were an egg.

He does not even trouble to answer: “Woman,
what have I to do with thee?”

He wearily looks the other way,

And she even more wearily looks another way
still,

Each with the upmost apathy,

Incognisant

Unaware,

Nothing.

As for papa,

He snaps when I offer him his offspring,

Just as he snaps when I poke a bit of stick at him,
Because he is irascible this morning, an irascible
tortoise

Being touched with love, and devoid of
fatherliness.

Father and mother,

And three little brothers,

And all rambling aimless, like little
perambulating pebbles in the garden,

Not knowing each other from bits of earth or old
tins.

3. Lord Buddha

All that we are is the result

Of what we have thought.

The mind is everything.

What we think we become.

Appendix M –

Readings choices for “What do I Value?”

1. Andrew Horton – What do you Value Most in your Life? Excerpt from an online/financial coaching blog

–

If you thought about this question for just a second, the first thoughts that would pop into your mind would be, “my family”, “my children” or “my spouse”. Now take the time to look a little deeper, is the way you are living your life indicating that you are actually living your life, like those three areas are most important to you. Or is the picture that is reflected back at you telling a very different story? Most people are very quick to state what they value most, as being their relationships or families. When in reality their deeds are painting a completely different picture. Your values are clearly shown by what you do, how you fill your space and how you spend your money. The easiest way to check what you value most is to look at two things, namely your dairy and your spending patterns. How you choose to invest your time and money are clear indicators of what you truly value most.

2. A Soldier’s Cry on Christmas Day.... Ravi Sathasivam / Sri Lanka All rights are reserved @ 2016

I Live far away from my home in the military barracks
Where I have given one bed room cabin to live myself.
I live there alone myself in my cabin and
my loneliness is kills me most of the times
I know the Christmas is also around the corner and

It’s keeps my heart beat with thoughts and tears.
Since, I have locked up myself in the barracks due to my work
I miss my home known as sweet home with love and loved ones I miss our family get together with dine and dances.
I miss to watch our dearest kids make fun and run around the house
I miss carols and candles aglow in the night
I miss to see hearth fire blazing and well lit Christmas tree
I miss to see stockings are hanged on the mantle
Always, the true meaning of Christmas shining in my mother’s eyes
And its counts the value of love thrown in to our family
What a wonderful time to be with my parents and my siblings to celebrate Christmas night.
But I miss all those beautiful memories begin here alone in my barracks
But, we are the soldiers who take care of our nation round the clock
And tell Santa to “Carry on Santa, it’s a Christmas night, all secure now and our kids are awaiting for you”
Merry Christmas.

3. An Invitation to Heartbreak and the Call of the Loon

**B Y P A R K E R J .
P A L M E R (@ P A R K E
R J P A L M E R) , C O L U
M N I S T**

Heartbreak is an inevitable and painful part of life. But there are at least two ways for the heart to break: it can break *open* into new life, or break *apart* into shards of sharper and more widespread pain.
A brittle heart will explode into a thousand pieces, and sometimes get thrown like a fragment grenade at the perceived source of its pain — there’s a lot of that going around these days. But a supple heart will break open into a greater capacity to hold life’s

suffering and its joy — in a way that allows us to say, “The pain stops here.”

The broken-open heart is not restricted to the rare saint. I know so many people whose hearts have been broken by the loss of someone they loved deeply. They go through long nights of grief when life seems barely worth living. But then they slowly awaken to the fact that their hearts have become more open, compassionate, and welcoming — not in spite of their pain but because of it.

So here’s a question I like to ask myself: What can I do day-by-day to make my heart more supple?

In the poem below, Mary Oliver invites us into heartbreak — not because she wants us to wallow in suffering, but to help us become more open and responsive to a suffering world.

I spent last week in a part of the world where loons like the ones Mary writes about make their summer homes. If ever there were a sound that could break your heart open, it is the cry of a loon late at night on a moonlit lake.

P.S. I’m convinced that heartbreak is a powerful political as well as a personal experience, which is why I titled the prelude to the new paperback copy of my book, “The Politics of the Brokenhearted,” which you can read for free here.

Lead

by Mary Oliver

Here is a story
to break your heart.
Are you willing?
This winter
the loons came to our harbor
and died, one by one,
of nothing we could see.
A friend told me
of one on the shore
that lifted its head and opened
the elegant beak and cried out

in the long, sweet savoring of its
life
which, if you have heard it,
you know is a sacred thing.,
and for which, if you have not
heard it,
you had better hurry to where
they still sing.
And, believe me, tell no one
just where that is.
The next morning
this loon, speckled
and iridescent and with a plan
to fly home
to some hidden lake,
was dead on the shore.
I tell you this
to break your heart,
by which I mean only
that it break open and never
close again
to the rest of the world.

And false to none;
Born to its own affairs,
Its own joys and own cares;
By whom the work which God
began
Is finished, and not undone;
Taken up where he left off,
Whether to worship or to scoff;
If not good, why then evil,
If not good god, good devil.
Goodness! – you hypocrite,
come out of that,
Live your life, do your work,
then take your hat.
I have no patience towards
Such conscientious cowards.
Give me simple labouring folk,
Who love their work,
Whose virtue is a song
To cheer God alo

4. Conscience - Henry David
Thoreau (1817–1862)

Conscience is instinct bred in
the house,
Feeling and thinking propagate
the sin,
By an unnatural breeding in
and in.
I say, turn it out doors,
Into the moors.
I love a life whose plot is
simple,
And does not thicken with
every pimple,
A soul so sound no sickly
conscience binds it,
That makes the universe no
worse than 't finds it.
I love an earnest soul,
Whose might joy and sorrow
Are not drowned in a bowl,
And brought to life to-morrow;
That lives one tragedy,
And not seventy;
A conscience worth keeping,
Laughing not weeping;
A conscience wise and steady,
And for ever ready;
Not changing with events,
Dealing in compliments;
A conscience exercised about
Large things, where one may
doubt.
I love a soul not all of wood,
Predestinated to be good,
But true to the backbone
Unto itself alone,

Appendix N – Reading choices for 3rd Module – What is my purpose?

1. Ecclesiastes – 3: 1-8

For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven:

a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
a time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and a time to build up;
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
a time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to throw away;
a time to tear, and a time to sew;
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace.

2. Allan Watts - Is there a purpose to living?

You tube - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=21RwqnB8GrE>

3. Alan Watts – The secret of life.

You tube - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iZ8so-ld-l0>

4. Victor A. Shepherd – “The Committed Self” © 2015, Bastian Publishing Services, p. x.

“I maintain that we can benefit from probing the philosophy of Existentialism as we recognize its core tenet – self commitment – as akin to the biblical notion of faith, the faith by which one becomes a new creature in a renewed cosmos.”

Existentialism as a lived philosophy (x1) whole person, (1)

‘one of most prominent themes in existentialism – freedom.’ (5)

“We are characterized by our ability to *choose*; and this freedom is what underlies our responsibility.” (5)

“Existentialism is concerned with the affective or emotional dimension of human existence....After all, in the long run do we not all think and act in conformity to what we *love*?” (6)

“Existentialism is concerned especially with the feelings that hamper that self-commitment, such as anxiety, boredom, and ‘nausea.’” (7)

Appendix O – Module 3 – Day 2 Norris Highlights

Intro ‘Evagrius: ‘a hatred...’

‘brings before the mind’s eye the toil of the ascetic struggle...’

Depression versus acedia – a question often asked

p. 3, 4 differences and similarities of depression and acedia

“Commitment phobia”

“Where depression is an illness treatable by counseling and medication, acedia is a vice that is best countered by spiritual practice and the discipline of prayer.”

Etymology – Greek root – *absence of care*. (see also back page, unable to care)

Also – as vice – *refuses or incapable of caring*. (3)

Care – etymology – ‘Indo-European/ “ ‘to cry out’ as in a lament.” (3)

“Caring is not passive, but an assertion...being present, doing our bit.”

Intro to the ‘relationship with time...’intensely aware of time...” (8)

“sense of helplessness, self-pity, and terror.” (ibid)

Our disposition toward time – “possible to reject time, as well as embrace it.” (12)

FREEDOM- “true freedom develops out of discipline and a healthy respect for necessity.” (13)

Ignoring basic needs, and ‘refusal of repetition.’ (14)

“Deceptive slight shift in thought...” (15)

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Beauty – and identity? “The person afflicted with acedia, even if she knows what is spiritually good for her, is tempted to *deny that her inner beauty and spiritual strength are at her disposal, as gifts from God.*” (21)
‘self-defeating thoughts.’ (Ibid)

“acedia lodged in the very soul.” (24)

“Inability to be alone is no reason to abandon my solitude...” (27)

“How radical to think that we can best know ourselves by embracing commitment, not rejecting it; by relating to others, not callously relegating them to the devilishly convenient category of ‘other.’” (29)

Viv – mention idea notion of ‘alien’ here.

‘memory and imagination.’ (31)

‘issues, demons.’ (33) Funk – Bad thoughts – (thoughts matter)

Sin as concept (34)

** “The word *crisis* derives from the Greek for ‘a sifting,’ and even in my distress I sense that there might be a purpose to our present upheaval: to jostle, sift, and sort things until only what was most vital would remain.” (74)

‘paralyzed with despair...prescribed physical exercise and spiritual direction. It worked.’ (77)

“Jesus does not impose any conditions.” (83) So...who does?

‘external distractions diminish, internal distractions increase..’ (88)

“Thoughts that are thought about become desires. Desires that are thought about become passions. While good thoughts have the potential to become virtues, bad thoughts are likely to become ‘bad passions or habits of action. The ancient monks would agree with Funk that taking measure of our thoughts and attempting to redirect them is of primary importance. It is also a discipline available to anyone.” 91)

‘love and commitment...source of strength and peace, instead of despondency. On then will I have defeated acedia. At least for now. (101)

Evagrius/despondency – ‘not respond’ – as opposed to respond and responsibility?

“For Evagrius, the struggle with acedia is worthy because it leads not only to peace, but also to joy....ultimate expression in love.” (101)

Appendix P – Reading choices, 4th Module – “What are my challenges?”

1 – “I don’t care.” Mary Margaret O’hara

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8zUu4ccvQ_I

2. Copied and edited from Wikipedia – retrieved 01/27, 2017

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siddhartha_\(novel\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siddhartha_(novel))

“*Siddhartha* is a 1922 novel by [Hermann Hesse](#) that deals with the spiritual [journey of self-discovery](#) of a man named Siddhartha during the time of the [Gautama Buddha](#). The book, Hesse's ninth novel, was written in German, in a simple, lyrical style. It was published in the U.S. in 1951 and became influential during the 1960s. Hesse dedicated the first part of it to [Romain Rolland](#)^[1] and the second to Wilhelm Gundert, his cousin.

The word *Siddhartha* is made up of two words in the [Sanskrit](#) language, [siddha](#) (achieved) + [artha](#) (what was searched for), which together means "he who has found meaning (of existence)" or "he who has attained his goals".^[2] In fact, the Buddha's own name, before his [renunciation](#), was Siddhartha Gautama, Prince of [Kapilavastu](#). In this book, the Buddha is referred to as "Gotama".^[3]

Siddhartha decides to live out the rest of his life in the presence of the spiritually inspirational river. Siddhartha thus reunites with the ferryman, named Vasudeva, with whom he begins a humbler way of life. Although Vasudeva is a simple man, he understands and relates that the river has many voices and significant messages to divulge to any who might listen.

Govinda [childhood friend, sic.] asks the now-elderly Siddhartha to relate his wisdom and Siddhartha replies that for every true statement there is an opposite one that is also true; that language and the confines of time lead people to adhere to one fixed belief that does not account for the fullness of the truth. Because nature works in a self-sustaining cycle, every entity carries in it the potential for its opposite and so the world must always be considered complete. Siddhartha simply urges people to identify and love the world in its completeness.

Major themes ~ In Hesse’s novel, experience, the totality of conscious events of a human life, is shown as the best way to approach understanding of reality and attain enlightenment – Hesse’s crafting of Siddhartha’s journey shows that understanding is attained not through intellectual methods, nor through immersing oneself in the carnal pleasures of the world and the accompanying pain of [samsara](#). ["cycle of aimless drifting, wandering or mundane existence"—[Wikipedia, sic.}] It is the completeness of these experiences that allows Siddhartha to attain understanding.

Thus, the individual events are meaningless when considered by themselves—Siddhartha’s stay with the [Shramanas](#) and his immersion in the worlds of love and business do not lead to [nirvana](#), yet they cannot be considered distractions, for every action and event gives Siddhartha experience, which leads to understanding.

A major preoccupation of Hesse in writing *Siddhartha* was to cure his "sickness with life" (*Lebenskrankheit*) by immersing himself in Indian philosophy such as that expounded in the [Upanishads](#) and the [Bhagavad Gita](#).^[4] The reason the second half of the book took so long to write was that Hesse "had not experienced that transcendental state of unity to which Siddhartha aspires. In an attempt to do so, Hesse lived as a virtual semi-recluse and became totally immersed in the sacred teachings of both [Hindu](#) and [Buddhist](#) scriptures. His intention was to attain to that 'completeness' which, in the novel, is the [Buddha's](#) badge of distinction."^[5] The novel is structured on three of the traditional [stages of life](#) for Hindu males (student (*brahmacharin*), householder (*grihastha*) and recluse/renunciate

(*vanaprastha*) as well as the Buddha's [four noble truths](#) (Part One) and [eight-fold path](#) (Part Two) which form twelve chapters, the number in the novel.^[6] Ralph Freedman mentions how Hesse commented in a letter "[my] Siddhartha does not, in the end, learn true wisdom from any teacher, but from a river that roars in a funny way and from a kindly old fool who always smiles and is secretly a [saint](#)."^[7] In a lecture about Siddhartha, Hesse claimed "[Buddha's](#) way to [salvation](#) has often been criticized and doubted, because it is thought to be wholly grounded in [cognition](#). True, but it's not just intellectual cognition, not just learning and knowing, but [spiritual](#) experience that can be earned only through strict discipline in a selfless life".^[7] Freedman also points out how *Siddhartha* described Hesse's interior [dialectic](#): "All of the contrasting poles of his life were sharply etched: the restless departures and the search for stillness at home; the diversity of experience and the harmony of a unifying spirit; the security of [religious dogma](#) and the [anxiety](#) of [freedom](#)."^[8] Eberhard Ostermann has shown how Hesse, while mixing the religious genre of the legend with that of the modern novel, seeks to reconcile with the double-edged effects of [modernization](#) such as individualization, pluralism or self-discipline."

Read: pages, 106 – 114.
Siddhartha – Herman Hesse.

3. TELL ME LIFE

© Vivianne LaRiviere © 2009

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BX4p-ulvuYM>

V - 1. (A)

Tell me life

tell me sky

tell me something that will move me beyond

why

Tell me deep

tell me wide

tell me (the)stories that made you cry and cry

tell me tears

tell me blue

tell me if you have a god

and what you believe to be true.

CHORUS I (B)

tell me love

tell me sadness

tell me pain and age and grief and sometimes

madness

tell me no

tell me wind

tell me water, fire, tell me skin,

tell me wild

tell me night

tell me touch.

V 2 – (A)

tell me yes

tell me maybe

how do we begin to know each others' crazies

tell me hope

tell me faith

is there anything in this world you truly hate?

tell me your passions

your deepest longings

tell me, if you ever lose your sense of belonging?

CHORUS II (B)

tell me love

tell me sadness

tell me pain and age and grief and sometimes
madness

tell me no

tell me wind

tell me water, fire, tell me skin,

tell me wild

tell me night

tell me touch.

tell me truth.

INSTRUMENTAL BREAK (high piano part)

vocal bridge (C)

Tell me more,

about your war

and all the vicious things you wished

you hadn't done before

tell me rage, hunger,

is forgiveness the question you'll ever ponder?

CHORUS III (b)

tell me love

tell me sadness

tell me pain and age and grief and sometimes

madness

tell me no

tell me wind

tell me water, fire, tell me skin,

tell me wild

tell me night

tell me touch.

tell me truth

tell me love

tell me life

Appendix Q – Readings choices, 5th Module – “Who am I called to become?”

Notes to cover:

1. Norris wrap – up
2. Healing Acedia – prayer, manual labour, (hard work) restraint, resistance, ‘stay in the cell.’
3. Difference between faith and belief – believe in....’ _____’, and in who or which I put my trust/faith.
4. Erikson (chart) psychology
5. Heidegger – Viv > coining “Circles of Belonging” (Being, Care, Home, Personhood) Philosophy
6. Kierkegaard – Suffering – take time to read – Existential philosophy

Kierkegaard's world, part 6: On learning to suffer

Clare Carlisle

Kierkegaard suggests that by courageously confronting suffering, a person can find great joy in life

Kierkegaard experienced much suffering in his relatively short life. By the age of 25 he had lost both his parents, and five of his six siblings. In addition to this, his sensitive temperament, his tendencies to melancholy and anxiety, and his difficult relationships to his father and his one-time fiancée Regine gave him an intimate understanding of various kinds of psychological pain. Rather than avoiding or denying suffering, Kierkegaard was unusually willing to confront it and investigate it. His sensitivity to suffering extended to others: one of his friends remembered that "he gave consolation not by covering up sorrow, but by first making one genuinely aware of it, by bringing it to complete clarity".

This approach characterises Kierkegaard's philosophical work as well as his personal life. In his 1844 book [The Concept of Anxiety](#), he writes that "Every human being must learn to be anxious in order that he might not perish either by never having been in anxiety or by succumbing in anxiety. Whoever has learned to be anxious in the right way has learned the ultimate." He expresses a similar attitude to despair in his later work [The Sickness Unto Death](#). So, what is the "right way" to suffer, and how can this be learned?

The first point to note is that Kierkegaard regards our capacity for anxiety and despair as a mark of our spiritual nature. We suffer in these ways only because we have some awareness that we are spiritual beings who are related to God, and that in many ways we fail to be true to this religious relationship. In fact, Kierkegaard suggests that when we're not faithful to our God-relationship, we are unfaithful to ourselves. He suggests that we have a tendency to lose ourselves – and this loss, together with the suffering it brings, is what he means by despair.

In *The Sickness Unto Death*, this account of despair is offered as an interpretation of the Christian doctrine of original sin. In this text, Kierkegaard suggests that despair, like sin, is a condition that is shared by everyone, whether or not they are aware of it:

"Anyone who really knows mankind might say that there is not one single living human being who does not despair a little, who does not secretly harbour an unrest, an inner strife, a disharmony, an anxiety about an unknown something or a something he dare not even try to know, an anxiety about some possibility in existence or an anxiety about himself."

Because the deep existential suffering of despair signals awareness of one's spiritual nature and relationship to God, Kierkegaard regards this kind of suffering as something positive, however difficult it is to live with. It is a sign of spiritual maturity. However, he also suggests that our tendency to lose ourselves is bound up with a tendency to avoid suffering, to ignore our spiritual being and instead let ourselves be consumed by "the world". But, in Kierkegaard's view, this strategy of avoidance is doomed to fail, because we are spiritual beings, and our very evasiveness only confirms this fact.

This account of human existence leads to an emphasis on the virtue of courage in Kierkegaard's works. Courage means confronting what one fears, instead of fleeing from it. A courageous person is prepared to suffer when she knows that this is required of her. For Kierkegaard, the "requirement" of suffering arises simply from being fully human. In [Fear and Trembling](#), for example, he praises the courage of Abraham, who did not attempt to avoid the suffering involved in taking the decision to kill his son. Instead, Abraham did what was necessary in order to honour his relationship to God.

Does Kierkegaard's insistence on suffering amount to masochism, and perhaps an unhealthy inclination to martyrdom? In response to this question, we should note that in his philosophy, the opposite of suffering is not joy, but rather cowardice and evasiveness. Since suffering is simply unavoidable, it is a matter of responding to it in the right way. In fact, Kierkegaard suggests that by courageously confronting suffering, a person can find great joy in life.

Many people regard suffering as an obstacle to religious belief, and even as an argument against the existence of God. They ask how we can believe that a loving, all-powerful God created a world like this one, so full of suffering. This presents theologians with the task of reconciling belief in God with the fact that life is so often unsatisfactory. For Kierkegaard, however, the problems posed by suffering are existential rather than intellectual: he is concerned less with the objective fact of God's existence or non-existence than with the individual's subjective relationship to a God whose existence is always an uncertainty, never a fact. Kierkegaard points out that one way of maintaining religious belief in the face of suffering is to give up hope of happiness within this life, deferring such hope to an afterlife – and he acknowledges that it is possible, but not easy, to relate to

God in this way. However, he argues that the Christian's highest and most difficult task is to endure suffering while continuing to believe that she is loved by God – that God cares about the smallest details of her life – and to regard this painful, difficult life as a gift from a loving God. Even in the midst of suffering, the person who relates to God in this way feels blessed.

7. Viv's acedia: *"The Soul Thief"* (© 2013)

robs one **Imagination, Faith – Trust = Beauty = Personhood= Spirituality**

Circles – Platform - Spirituality = Political Statement for Beauty – The Good, the true, the Beautiful – Plato – Value.

8. John O'Donohue, **Beauty: The Invisible Embrace**

"What you encounter, recognize or discover depends to a large degree on the quality of your approach. Many of the ancient cultures practiced careful rituals of approach. An encounter of depth and spirit was preceded by careful preparation.

When we approach with reverence, great things decide to approach us. Our real life comes to the surface and its light awakens the concealed beauty in things. When we walk on the earth with reverence, beauty will decide to trust us. The rushed heart and arrogant mind lack the gentleness and patience to enter that embrace."

"When you become vulnerable, any ideal or perfect image of yourself falls away.

Many people are addicted to perfection, and in their pursuit of the ideal, they have no patience with vulnerability.

Every poet would like to write the ideal poem. Though they never achieve this, sometimes it glimmers through their best work. Ironically, the very beyondness of the idea is often the touch of presence that renders the work luminous. The beauty of the ideal awakens a passion and urgency that brings out the best in the person and calls forth the dream of excellence.

The beauty of the true ideal is its hospitality towards woundedness, weakness, failure and fall-back. Yet so many people are infected with the virus of perfection. They cannot rest; they allow themselves no ease until they come close to the cleansed domain of perfection. This false notion of perfection does damage and puts their lives under great strain. It is a wonderful day in a life when one is finally able to stand before the long, deep mirror of one's own reflection and view oneself with appreciation, acceptance, and forgiveness. On that day one breaks through the falsity of images and expectations which have blinded one's spirit. One can only learn to see who one is when one learns to view oneself with the most intimate and forgiving compassion."

9. Faith – Imagination

Viv – Excerpt from Final Paper for Myrtle Power, directed reading course: *Reflections on the Art of Being: Personhood, Imagination, Beauty and the Ethics of Care*

"In The Inner Rainbow – The imagination in Christian Life, Fischer astutely names the connection between faith and the imagination. She also calls on the genius of Paul Tillich (one of my favorite theologians) to help us establish a liaison between faith and

the imagination:

“Faith reveals that these ordinary things ‘have unutterable depths, that they are indeed heralds of eternity, always vastly greater than they seem, like drops of water that mirror the immense vault of heaven.’ It is the imagination that grasps the realities of our world in terms of their dimension of depth. As the inner rainbow, it brings together the sacred and the secular, allowing us to meet them in one event.

Faith and the imagination are linked in a second way; both approach truth in terms of the total person. Faith involves not reason or emotion or will alone, but the total being of a person. Faith is as Paul Tillich has said, ‘an act of the total personality. It happens in the center of the personal life and includes all its elements.’ Through faith we participate with our whole being in what Tillich describes as our ultimate concern, that which is of ultimate meaning and significance in our life. Christian faith, then is more than a mental assent to propositions; it is the central relationship which affects our vision of reality. It leads to commitment and action. Love and action are implied in faith, and they cannot be separated from it.

The truth of the imagination is this kind of truth. The imagination involves the total person, on many levels, and calls for participation.”[1]

This is a simple yet articulate concept of how imagination shares a symbiotic relationship with faith. And how commitment may very well be the cornerstone of the faithful. When speaking to both acedia and identity crisis this is the key missing piece: commitment, and thus lack of care. Instead the sufferer is lost, and rampant with anxiety, and doubt, for there is no one or nothing to trust.

-

9. Alterity – “In order for practical theology, or as she would prefer, pastoral theology to continue develop into a sound contemporary movement of mutual regard then we need to consider ‘alterity’ as the way forward: **a common, mutual respectful and dignified regard for the other, and recognizing that we are powerless in the light of otherness.**” (Viv – excerpt, comprehensive exam)

10. Brainstorming the Q: Who am I Called to Become?

-Old Truth (Story)

- Meditation – Sleeping at Last - North

- Group Project – In silence

- Sharing

Lunch

--

Who Am I? Deitrich Bonhoeffer –

Who am I? They often tell me,
I come out of my cell
Calmly, cheerfully, resolutely,
Like a lord from his palace.
Who am I? They often tell me,
I used to speak to my warders
Freely and friendly and clearly,

As though it were mine to command.
Who am I? They also tell me,
I carried the days of misfortune
Equally, smilingly, proudly,
like one who is used to winning.
Am I really then what others say of me?
Or am I only what I know of myself?
Restless, melancholic, and ill, like a caged bird,
Struggling for breath, as if hands clasped my throat,
Hungry for colors, for flowers, for the songs of birds,
Thirsty for friendly words and human kindness,
Shaking with anger at fate and at the smallest sickness,
Trembling for friends at an infinite distance,
Tired and empty at praying, at thinking, at doing,
Drained and ready to say goodbye to it all.
Who am I? This or the other?
Am I one person today and another tomorrow?
Am I both at once? In front of others, a hypocrite,
And to myself a contemptible, fretting weakling?
Or is something still in me like a battered army,
Running in disorder from a victory already achieved?
Who am I? These lonely questions mock me.
Whoever I am, You know me, I am yours, O God.

Mission Statement – Renewal of Covenant – Promise to Self

(And Mandala if time permits)

Closure

FIGURES

Figure # 1A – Participants’ pre-knowledge of acedia

Participant # 1 “Very little...five sentences maybe...I have a vague idea. I find the concept interesting.”

Participant # 2 “Never heard the word before...googled it...definitions...I can capture what they’re saying.”

Participant # 3

“Nothing, I just saw the word for the first time.” “Will you tell me what acedia means?”

“I want to know what my problem...why am I lacking so much motivation and care? And it’s funny that you say acedia is like...lack of care.”

Participant #4

“I know it is listed as one of the seven deadly sins in the Roman Catholic tradition, which is not my tradition.” “I equate it with numbness of the soul.”

Participant #5

“I know that depression to mental health is acedia to spiritual health.... to me it’s an accumulation of things that I feel that are in my personality...the idea of apathy and boredom are just the sense of, I don’t know where to go.... there’s always something maybe to go to, or something else... a feeling that where you are in the present is enough...there’s always something else to go to...contentment in the present is not there...Always thinking of something else...don’t know what it is, because it’s nothing...acedia means, well, who cares? I mean who cares? Acedia is I don’t care, but I do care. That’s what I’m finding out about acedia right now.

Participant # 6

“Very difficult to actually find a group of scholars from various traditions to actually agree on what it means. Is it depression, is it torpor, is it...what is it? Is it a vice? How can it be a vice if you are – if you are simply the victim of some of negative spirit? It’s about those kind of feelings, apathy, a lack of caring, all that sort of stuff which everybody ...

Figure # 1B – What do you presently know about acedia?

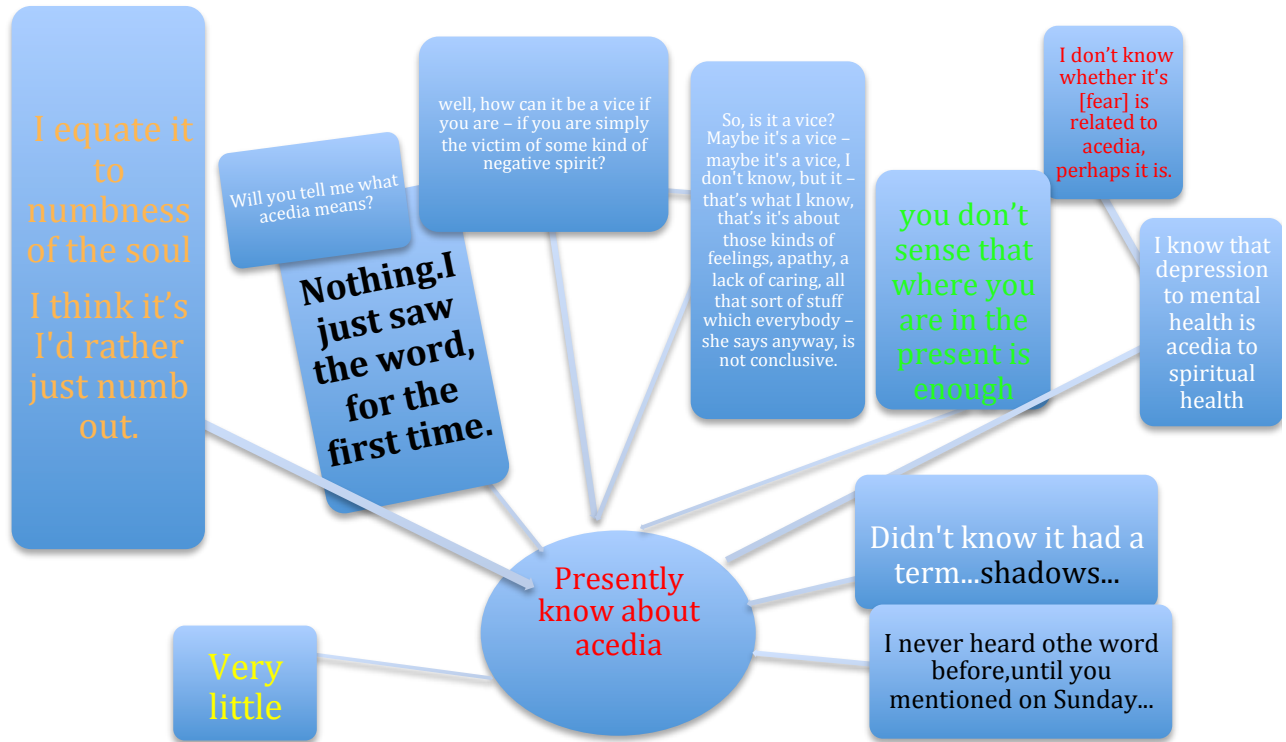


Figure # 2 – Spiritual and religious affiliation

Participant #1	Participant #2	Participant #3	Participant #4	Participant #5	Participant #6
“Is that still Presbyterian?”	Presbyterian then Anglican	Spiritual, not religious	You could call me a liturgical Christian, perhaps a postmodern Christian, perhaps a – I don’t know.	Anglican “I would consider myself more of a Universalist, I guess”	“Push, pull, love, hate, in, out, relationship with both God and the institution of the church.”

Figure # 3 – Edited comments of participants “What drew you to the project?”

Participant # 1

Existential wandering for the past two years, a need to tend to a ‘raw wound.’
“There is a tribe here, I just need to find it, right?” Local possibility of ‘tribe.’
‘Trying to figure out that darker side of ourselves in a good way.’

Participant # 2

The idea of converging art with spirituality “has to blossom or be let go or opened up or tapped into or something.”

Participant # 3

“The opportunity of doing kind of self-analysis, or better understanding what myself is or how to evolve or grow. So I was excited to do this again, do that kind of work.”

Entering into a new stage of life – with feeling ‘that kind of panic,’ as she was facing many unanticipated challenges.

Participant # 4

“It’s a call. It’s the same kind of call to express one’s existence. So, yes, I feel a call to listen and to reflect and to share.”

Participant # 5

‘Something clicked when I heard about acedia: “There were some answers here, and there are some doors that are opening up...and when you said acedia, I started looking up some information...my answer is something inside my spirit said ‘okay, I’m really interested.’”

Participant # 6

“I was wondering what the heck was going on in me, and so, acedia was a new word, was a new concept, and it was like, oh, maybe this is me. And I decided ultimately that it wasn’t, but I’m still open to the fact that it might be...”

Figure # 4 – “What do you hope to discover along the way?”

Participant # 1

Areas that are ‘locked,’ may be related to “what you’re putting your finger on.” An inability to “speak publicly, or speak out, and the not being able to paint, or draw...” “What’s not allowing me to go there?”

Participant # 2

“Deeper understanding of my spirituality and what it means to me and how I want to be more present in it, give it more of a voice and I enjoy learning from others.”

“An interesting environment to tune into my spiritual growth.”

Participant # 3

“I had so much motivation! But lately...sluggish. I opened the page on sloth or something ...(Norris): “I’ve lost the certain spark in my work... hoping to learn some answers about my own, myself, and what could potentially be blocking...the flow, and my own connection with myself. My work expresses my fundamental beliefs, and my understandings about the world, and I’m talking about it with people, I have such passion, with others....So why am I so slow in actually turning out the work to help share this knowledge with people?”

Participant # 4

“I do not expect anything but I hope that this will be another step along a road toward maturity of spirit.”

Participant # 5

“I’m hoping to discover how to open myself up a little bit more to new things. I tend to fear a lot, I don’t if that’s related to acedia. Perhaps it is...I’m hoping it will open up some new avenues so I can express myself better, and overcome fears that I cannot do things, I cannot cope...I’m hoping... will open up some new doors for me that I can walk through.”

Participant # 6

“Oh, simply more clarity about me.”

Figure # 5 – Participants responses to brainstorming session

“What do you believe in?”

Participant #1 ‘Need to find a tribe,’ believes in nature, and “stories such as Turtle Island,” and how those “are transmitted from family to family or tribe to tribe and describing where we might have started...daughter connected right away, more than the story of Genesis. And there’s that continuity in that how nature is there to support you.” ‘Harmonious partnership.’

Participant # 2 Nature – “stops me in my tracks.” “Seeing how someone or something has gone before...how when seeing tracks reminds her of how important it is to leave a “positive footprint in life.... making a difference.”

Participant # 3 “Was going to say nature too... and live to be nature.” “How we live to be integrated in a kind of a natural system...and that we shouldn’t be against the system, like dumping all of our trash everywhere...but using nature’s lessons to design how we live in a more integrated way.” Can nature be our teacher, I asked: “yes!” she replied. “And that we are part of it, rather than separate from it, because lot of people separate it in the minds, and that takes us away from ‘us.’ She elaborates on how: these built systems that ‘seem separate but in the end they are all interacting with nature and affecting how it’s composing the soil, the water and the air all the time.’

Participant # 4 Genesis reading - it refers to the human being made in ‘our likeness,’ “Our? Our! In the beginning, there is ‘connectedness’ there, from what created us.” Suggests that the word ‘distinct’ as a more appropriate word than separate.

If the ‘we’ is the reference to an ‘organic collective from which we come...’ “God has always been a ‘we,’ and it’s been defined as in the trinity. The ‘we’ was there.”

Though Old Testament, the idea of the Trinity was always there. “I believe in love. Even when I am not feeling it.”

“We live to announce our existence. To be. It comes from my field, from someone I really respect said ‘when I sing I announce my existence,’ and I have a feeling that when I sing or when I create art, I make an expression of being alive, I announce my existence...and I believe it is part of my calling, I believe everyone’s calling is to be! To be who we are.

‘what does it mean to announce?’ I asked. “To me,” she says, “ it goes back to ‘and God spoke and there was dark and there was light - announce, to speak.”

Participant # 5 The dance of life. “Yeah, ebb and flow, that’s part of it, but part of it is what you actually do to become part of the dance of life.” How to engage? “the will and the intention to jump into life with both feet, maybe not knowing where you are going, but you have to jump - and making choices, despite not knowing, risking...trusting...engaging...” ‘continuity.’ across our timelines of from when we’re born to when we die there is a continuity to after we die. Part of it is because I work in volunteering palliative care so I see end of life and it’s a continuity of a line. It’s something we deny a lot in our society. So I believe in continuity.”

Participant # 6 “Light and dark. And the ‘and’ is big.” She continues later on in the session with ‘connectedness.’

Figure# 6 – Participant # 1 “What do I believe in?” Images of Meaning

“Being in something.” Gardens, mother, circles, “connectedness of human bonds.”



Figure # 7 – Participant # 4 “Crucible”

Participant #4 Inspired to write poetry. A spiral as a symbol of “another circle thing.” Poetry gave meaning to her spiralling thoughts. Starting from the inside moving outward, key ideas being uplifted were about God, connection, responsibility, community, restoration, create, communion, love, flowing, believing, nature, and lover. Hope, suffering and relationship. ‘Choosing’ becoming a reoccurring theme for this person. She ends the poetic prayer with ‘crucible.’

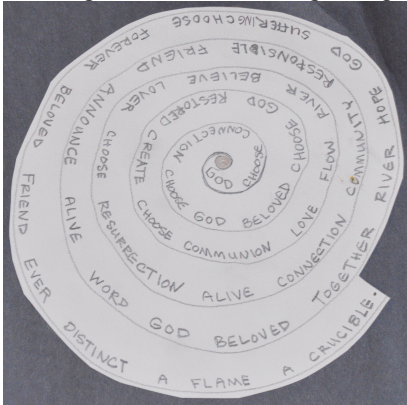


Figure # 8 – Participant # 5 “What do I believe in?” Images of Meaning

Participant #5

“Interconnectivity.” Conversation about connectedness, expressing it as a pattern of ‘interconnecting lines.’ ‘Different colours’ reflect ‘different identities,’ and we are reminded of our living selves where the intersections occur. He struggles with ‘seeing things,’ also reminded of ‘the seeds of faith,’ and how ‘pain, suffering and tears’ (thus the Kleenex) are prevalent in our faith journey. Issued again was the ‘credence to the light and the darkness’ as a pendulum of balance, Seeds of faith become an expression of meaning.



Figure # 9A – flip chart

JANUARY 14TH 2017
1ST MODULE "The ART of Soul Care"
Present: C, T, R1, R2, R3, D

Q: #1

What do you believe in? ①

Light + dark family
AND
P/B + Connectedness
Kindness our
In the beginning - Connectedness
TRINITY

Figure # 9B – Atlas: ti –word cruncher – connection and derivatives

Connect	40	Disconnect	23
Connection	42	Disconnected	17
Connected	45	Disconnecting	3
Connectedness	20	Disconnection	6
Connecting	19		
Connections	10		
Connective	2		
Connectivity	5		
Connector	1		
Connects	2		
	--		--
	186		

Figure # 10 – Participant # 2 “What do I value?”

Participant # 2

“I believe very strongly in the value of being in nature.” “I taught it to my students and I could often very clearly see the value of bringing young people there. And there’s a desperate need for it more and more.”

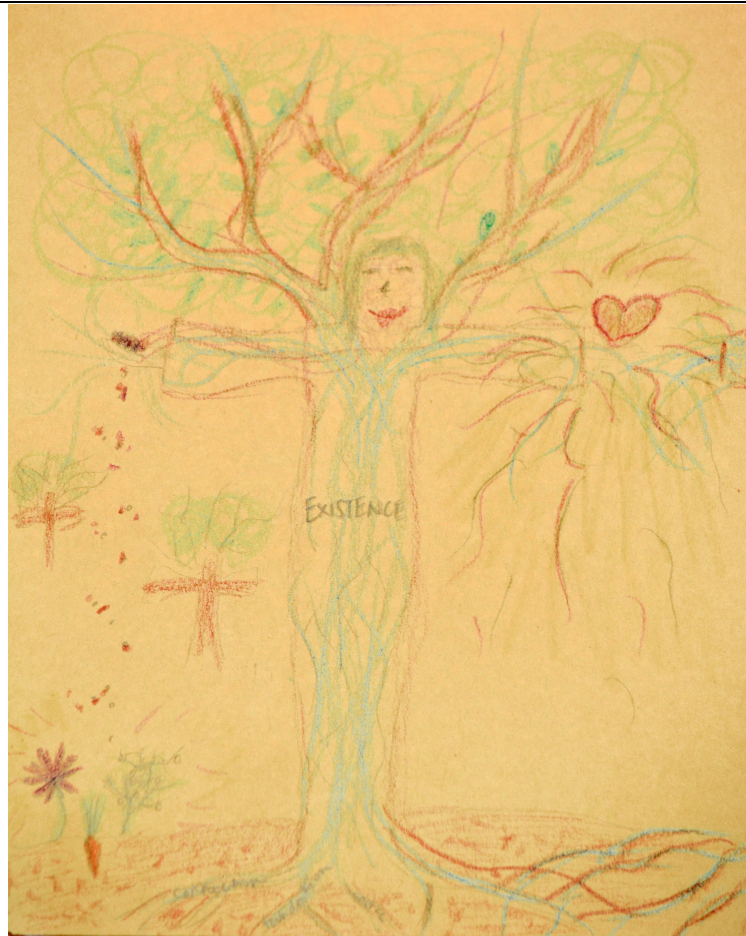
“The calmness out there, the disconnect from technology and everything. We feel the need to be so connected to...I appreciate the time of being in the moment without any other distractions, isn't really a hard thing to be forced to do, but it's not something that in our normal day at home, we engage in.”

Growing older, facing new challenges: “find myself liking to push the boundaries and to be out of the comfort zone a little bit,” and that her ‘passion’ was and still is ‘sharing nature with other people.’

Describes how ‘nature deficit disorder is now being documented: “very pervasive in our society, and particularly with young people.”



Figure # 11 – Participant # 3 “What do I value?” “Existence”



“Existence.”

“A woman who was also the tree, and I was going to put more words on it. I started with that...few words on the roots...foundation, source, connection.” The colour blue, ‘kind of like water,’ with energy flowing through as she describes: “Then these are arms, it kind of looked like a cross at first - I’m not religious ...she has seeds, they’re falling down, and they’re growing and then there’s a heart.”

“kind of connect it all...the energy coming out of the heart is like flowing into other things. She concludes: So I value existence, connection, connection to nature, and...like roots coming in and like... sharing the heart and they’re holding together.”

Figure # 12 – Participant # 1 “What do I value?” ‘Sacrifice?’

New version of a self-portrait done during university. Found belief question to be more ‘cerebral,’ the value question went down into ‘something closer to the heart.’ Mentions her mother as part of her, relationships with animals, (horse and cat) and she reflects now 25 years later:

I now have two children...it's some symbiosis that sort of family, that cycle, that circle. We're all a little bit animal but we are human and we look after each other. The horse looks after me, I look after the baby, the cat nurtures. So there's continuity and all of that in a flow. And there's some aspirations that by putting that centeredness, when we ask for ourselves some centering questions, it's about finding that balance and trying to strive for between the ebb and the flow, coming back to some sort of central point. So that's why that central act is sitting on very stable ground ...so there's a lot of dichotomy in and things.

There is an almost illegible marking of a word on her painting. When ask if she would elaborate, ‘no,’ she laughingly replies. When we look at the artwork, we can see the word sacrifice along with a question mark in the form of the number 2.



Figure # 13 – Participant # 5 “What do I value?”

Participant #5

Two-part presentation: “The first part of what I saw was I believe a lot of significance and my value is in service. So I really did envision hands – my open hands like this.”

He believes that his value “comes from the cross actually. So my value is I find working with people that have maybe some physical challenges or mental challenges or emotional challenges. And I feel like it is just part of what I value in my life is about...” Conversation about simplicity, led to ‘s’ words: “security, safety, significance, signature. Did I say service?” He continues: “sensitivity, symbols, searching, seeking, stepping out, struggle, solitude, simplicity, synchronicity, and salvation...and how all of these are connection with relationship, whether it be with “each other, spouse, partner, God, creator, and it's all connected to all these hearts.”

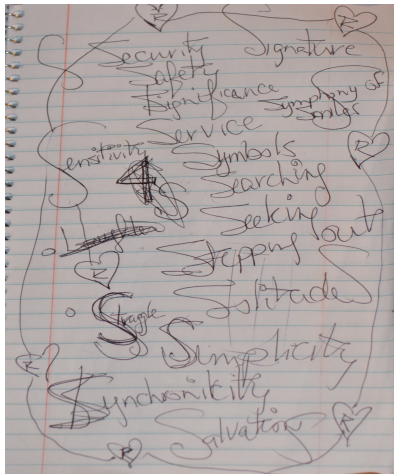


Figure # 14 – participant # 2 “What is my purpose?”

Participant # 2

I like the way they give you depth and even though they're two-dimensional they give you depth or movement and can be large or can be infinitely small. They're constantly going somewhere.... I realized that I liked ripping them because I like the messy edges and not the sharp edged...I liked the flow and the mess. I try to embrace messy edges.



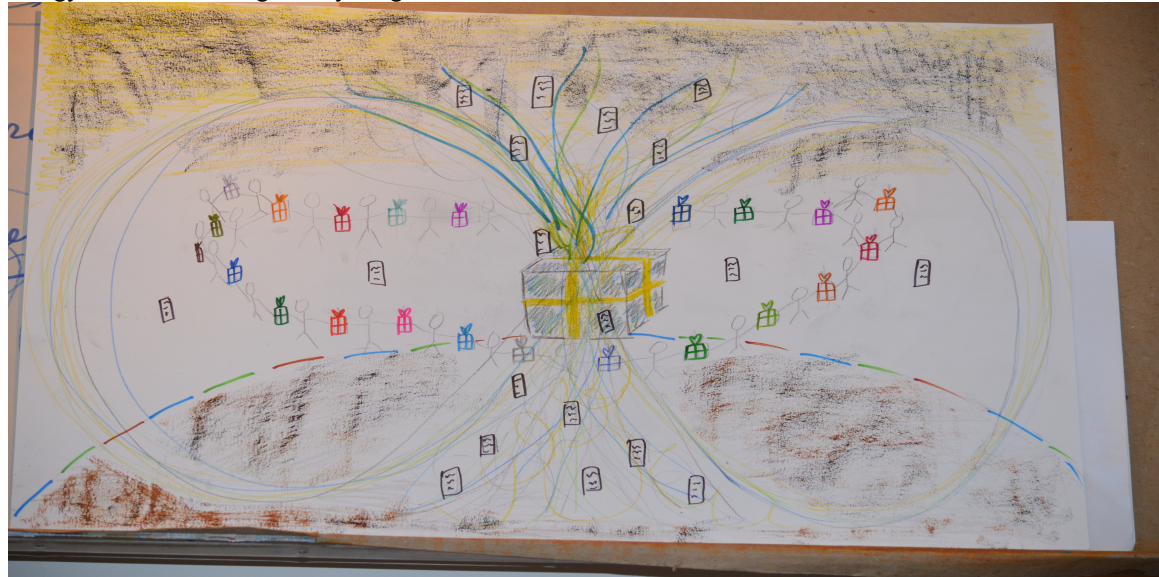
She continues: “I guess one of my purposes is to bring joy to others in this world, and I like colors, I like being colourful and sharing that, making people smile and just making a difference. So that was just something funky and perky.” As I noted the movement in her pieces, from starting off with a framed piece, going into something over the edges, and now full of colour and ‘overflowing with joy...’ she commented: and that was part of the mindfulness.”

Figure # 15 – Participant # 6 “What do I value?”

“The oneness with God,” and how “theologically, I believe we are already one – we with God, we with other humans, and we with all creation. God for me is a oneness that includes it all. So god wants to be in a relationship to self and we want to be in relationship to god, i.e. to self...this wholeness is what I value. So what I believe in is also what I value. The glimpses I get and or feel and or experience give me great joy. The beauty I see as I drive the back roads of farm country bring me a sense of this oneness, this wholeness, and it is joy. Make me yours, I said, 35 years ago to the divine. And right now, it feels like I have agreed to enter deeper on this dipsy-doodle passage...but what a struggle to get there. I know it is or I have called it loneliness because maybe it's acedia, but I care so very deeply that it strikes me that it's just loneliness. I am empowered by the quote on my kitchen windows so, 'Loneliness is the human condition cultivated the way it tunnels into you, allows room for your soul to grow.' For what I value is what I believe in that is the connectedness of everything.”

Figure # 16 – Participant # 3 “Telling of stories.” “What do I value?”

“There’s still this theme...connective energy.” She speaks of the earth, being ‘more conscious,’ and ‘flow.’ The idea of circles surfaces here too, and thoughts about ‘the tree again.’ She presents the idea of ‘people connected through gifts,’ and “wanted to have it as a whole web of people holding on to gifts.” “In the middle, everybody is ...sharing in part of that connection between the earth and the universe in which it exists...we all have to share these resources...and all of these are pieces of paper with writing on them...they’re kind of our shared stories...all the different stories that collectively tell the story about these things. She emphasizes how ‘strongly she feels about this work:’ “ It’s a kind of transition in our society away from really messed up value system that’s destroying the planet and ourselves and health and community. I felt really very strongly that my purpose is this like paradigm shifting and like helping to do that through telling stories. When referring to the colours: “I originally saw this as being more galactic looking with all these colors...like the pinks and the blues and brown of the soil. The soil, water, vegetation and then...I did the outline brown and then those colors are in here and then the yellow which is like this energy that flows through everything it’s kind of the ribbon.”



I reflected back: “This gift that has a ribbon around it and this was in the same place as you put your existence piece last week. And so I’m wondering what would happen if you opened the gift?” Someone else noted: “I do want to point out that the box might be wrapped but there is a tree growing through it. There’s roots in bottom too, coming out of the bottom of the box. It could well be that what’s in the box is nourishing the tree.” Participant # 1 ends her sharing: “I love these exercises.”

Figure # 17 – participant # 4 “It’s a different mountain.” “What do I value?”

“It is a different mountain.” colours as those of the bluffs in Nova Scotia...water wears down the clay...part of what I saw during the meditation...and thinking about today...water words keep coming... I keep thinking about the waves and how they ebb and they flow and how I’m like that. I’ll learn something and then unlearn it and it just, it keeps flowing but what I did was that I built myself a proper way to climb up this cliff and I gave myself a handrail because I’m not so good at walking up anymore. So I gave myself a bit of security and so I made it to the cliff. It’s pretty windy but there I am. And the conclusion of what I think my purpose in life. It comes to two pieces, I think. My purpose in life is to be and then my purpose in life is to be useful. And that’s about love, I think.

As I asked about this love, and how does that generate itself: “I’m not quite sure the answer to that but the direction that I’m getting is just to be and to stop forcing, just learn the lesson, just do the ebb and flow.” When asked about the wind and what it might signify, “why is it windy?” After several moments of silence she replied: “well it’s high. It’s high up and there’s usually wind when you’re high up. It’s not still up there, it’s windy. It’s windy enough to bend the trees over and change the way that they grow.... Oh! (Laughter)” I encouraged her to continue: I think it has to do – let me meditate on that. Wind, I mean, spirit, flow, purify but wind also gives direction. Yeah, let me meditate on that.”

Some members of the group point out some of the similarities to last week’s drawing. Additionally, I point out the head dress and something in her hands: “I don’t know what I have, I don’t know why head dress came out of my fingers and I seem to be speaking something. There’s something at the mouth and... I meant to draw it as a tree but when I stopped to look at it, it looked more like an embryo.”



Figure # 18 – Participant # 1 ‘purpose, flow, balance, connector’

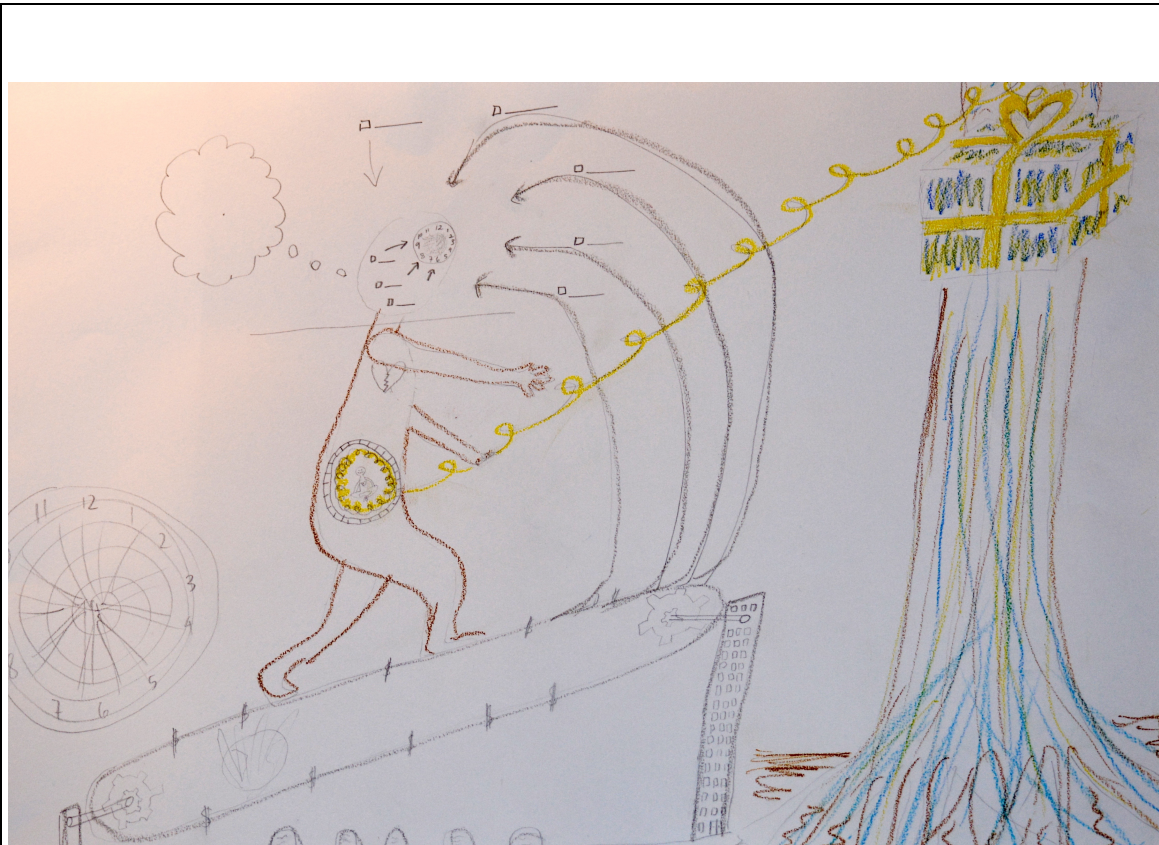
My purpose? Is flow and discovering where all of this leads. There's no particular purpose in what I do. I'm just a connector." She reflected on a meeting with a local artist: Modern...and he was describing one of his favorite pieces as being water and earth and I hadn't looked at it that way and I thought, wow why would you go start with water? He described his painting... I looked at in a completely different way...well again starting with water and then blue. I would start with blue. And then I thought maybe that's what connects us, like that vastness. That vast starting with air and blue and just starting from something that might be so big that you say to yourself I am this small, even smaller in something that big where you start from. So his sense of balance was this ying-yang between earth and water and for me the blue is always a great place to start from because no matter what color you put to it, it reacts and gives you something fresh to start with.



Figure # 19 – “Choose to care more, do less.”

2) NORRIS — COMMENTS 1-100
VULNERABILITY — open
R2 - p. 225
barn what do real nobles
Choose To care more + do less
Create Something new
Choose To know yourself as you
Truly are
— Read the psalm
(p. 10 'cocoon of adolescence

Figure # 20 – Participant # 3 “Avoidance.” ‘What are my challenges?’



“And that’s probably one of my challenges – avoiding. Avoidance in general. I feel very disconnected right now, because I feel like I put myself in that place...that’s my challenge... sometimes I ... feel extremely connected, and very clear, or like the opposite. So I’m probably going to cry.” “I’m on a treadmill...there’s dollar signs on it. And that’s another thing ...I’m so unmotivated, I was excited, and I wanted to like, share, and complete it. So I was just like, I want to do this stuff. But I was just like... ‘oh, I’m done.’ Like that disconnection... I don’t want to address it....that...”

At this stage, I felt the need to ask her how she felt. “No, no, I’m fine. It’s okay to cry, like I’m okay to cry. I’m going to – like, I’m a – I’m a crier, I cry.” I asked her again: “How do you feel?” “Right now?” “While drawing it,” I asked.

I felt grumpy... I just felt like – numb. I see this is like society, or not... economic. Economic systems based on environmental destruction, and profit, and I think this is... cemetery. In my head – it’s got a clock in it, and it’s swirling around like this. And then there are all of these things that I need to do, these are all like to do with the little things that I’m supposed to be checking them off. And here, I’m thinking here just

a dot...I almost just did that just one dot, because I just feels so alone a lot of the time. Those are big buildings holding on the treadmill. Behind me is a bigger clock with lots of time passing.

And a broken heart, and...

She continued to say that though she felt 'connected, there was a wall around that.' She also carried forward "her present from last time, ...my purpose, or whatever..." With this person's permission, I mentioned part of a conversation we had, about the sharing of gifts, carried over from her last drawing: "there is a story in the box." Person # 3 admits that the drawing is on her desk, and how she keeps going back to it, as I had asked her to contemplate the wrapped gift. We hear about another spiral:

At first, that scared the crap of me, because this looks really dark, the colors of dark. And then the stories look like graves... "What does that mean?" Maybe it is like kind of ancestry, or like this story sounds like my past, so then I kind of warmed back out to it... 'Oh, this is really cool' and there's like spirals going through so I thought...connecting with stories together, and weaving them.

As she is on the verge of tears I stepped in:

I have to wonder if what you're experiencing in the feeling, you say you're not motivated. But in actuality, you are feeling a very deep empathy, or frustration, or anger for what is going on in the world. And we all do have big concerns about this. And you're part of the next generation, and that is something that we probably all should be crying about.

She began to weep. I say to the group:

We're hearing it out of the mouths of babes...and so you are right, cry. You are expressing a care, and in some ways you might be very hard on yourself, because it is painful. It's shocking. It's very overwhelming, time, and consumerism, all of these things. But you have a gift that is rising out of the earth (pointing to the art) that is much bigger than some of this stuff. ...And you're doing your best to do something about it." "Yeah, I am," she replied.

One of the participants asked her how she saw the word disconnect – as a negative or a positive?

Negative. I feel like.... this is kind of like the Divine, and then all of these things...like chopping. Not able to access it. I feel like I want to go home and watch Netflix for five days.

Figure # 21 – Participant # 1 collage

“You’re faced with all of these platitudes. All these ready made. All these easy to grab onto and sort of scatter all over your page and go, okay, how do you place that?” She furthers her description: “In acedia there's sort of a funny play between what's safe and what you were drawn to in order not to have to push yourself too far but then there's also that, okay, well, maybe that's a little bit too easy. I need to go a little bit further because if I keep creating this easy balance *then* I'm really not challenging myself and going to the maximum potential that I have or that we all have, and so I'm at this point where I can keep duplicating solutions that I have found in my work or I can keep trying to go into the surface and to push myself...much higher quality of space that's more evocative. So how do you capture that when you're stuck in a computer world, when you're stuck with ready-mades has been my challenge basically, right? So looking for that medium, I think it's a mix medium and I think it's song, it's talk, it's sharing and it sounds like this. It's going to church. It's gardening. It's knitting. It's planting trees.... So it's a huge — it's a challenge but I have made a conscious choice that I won't do platitudes and — well, I will only do the stuff that is really challenging to me and so there is going to be gap ...so I can help others get better at producing what they have to but for me to find what is that mode of discovering and then bringing it out, and then building, so it's a cycle.” When asked how she felt about her piece: “Flow...I gave up expressive modes of expression...the sentiment that came in my head a lot today was self-effacing. And it's something that I do a lot. Just allowing myself to wander. I — you spoke of the shame and couple of words that are key...the power of vulnerability but the things that we say to ourselves like the subtext.

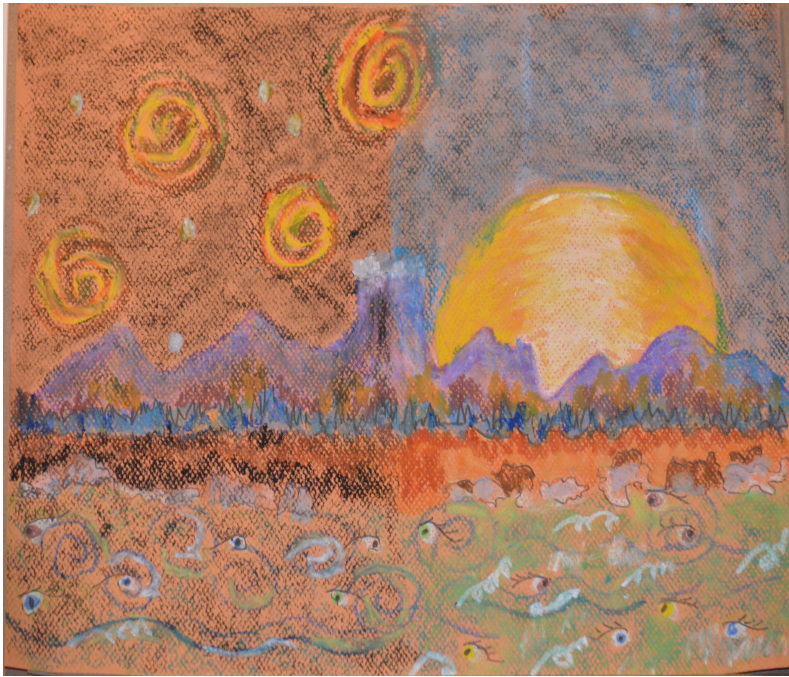


Figure # 22 – The mountain, death. Participant # 4

“The contrasts and thinking about the river with a thousand eyes,” as she began to provide the details of her painting ‘with a bunch of eyes.’ She ‘chose to go through the river.’ As opposed to building a ‘bridge over the river’ she chose to be ‘in the river,’ as it is with life. “Of course there is day and night, and no matter what, we’re in the river and on the journey.” “Yeah...there’s mountains and there’s a kind of a plateau that would be the highest mountain.... called a plateau.” She went on to say that it was a ‘funny experience,’ not knowing what she was ‘going to do,’ and it simply ‘emerged from my fingers...it just kind of emerged.’ When asked how she felt about it: “Well, I was pleased that at least I produced something pretty! Actually I felt a real freedom and I think it’s because of some of the distance I made this week and actually a joy in the doing of it.”

I inquired: “How does this represent challenge for you?” She replied: “Through the river. Through the river of a million eyes, and through the wilderness and the forest and under the mountain. My thought was that the challenge never stops. You don’t sleep. You don’t turn away from it. The challenge continues night and day. I’ve just thinking so much about contrast this week and the night-day contrast that’s — ya’ just gotta live it, I think.”

Discussion took place about the split in the piece, or was it about holding tension. Regardless of which, she points out: “The mountain and actually as I drew it I thought that’s my death. That’s my final transformation.” When asked ‘how did you see that mountain as you,’ by someone she reflected: I think I thought of Christ ascension when he went up in the mountain but He still have some people witness it but — yeah. They just — I think that’s the end....I’m not afraid of death. I am — I don’t really like the idea of dying and that thought came to me backing and to say I was doing that that the truth is that we die every day and when my challenges is that I’ve just so aware that I’m 67. I don’t necessarily feel what I — how does one feel when we’re 67? I just — I know that my life is coming to an end and, well...



I'm glad I'm in the river.

Figure # 23 – participant # 1 – covenant

I don't think I can read it, because it wasn't intended to be read. I think I was still almost searching ascension path and was trying to look for patterns and the words.

So ascension is very important. The reconciliation is what it came down to the end - is looking for a line basically, discovering the line and all of these came through remembering being very fortunate as a child where my father, being on his own wanderings, would take us on a very, very long walks, and one of his favorite walks was to follow the paths that the cow herdsman would take in Switzerland. And the cows go up to the pastures in the summer and the farmer goes up with the cows so he separates himself from his family, from the village, from basically his job and the cows go up to eat fresh grass but also to get a break from the cycle of producing pumped milk and everything. So the ascension to the chalets des... so it has a very - liberating a very spiritual feel to it, so these men spend a couple of months up there. And they go back down to get bare necessities or something that happened and they're followed by their dogs, so it was a sort of reliving that walk with my father who wasn't one to share many words but often to take us on these six-hour long walks, where we didn't really know where we were headed, because he didn't necessarily describe where we were going. And then to find that in our backpacks, he had packed the food for the night, and so we just spent basically hours in the valley des Alpagnes, listening to the bells of the cows and each herd has their own harmonies of bells. And if there's a missing calf or the cow is far away because of the harmony is played, they know which cow is far enough or just - so I feel very fortunate to have lived that and to have found that balance really early on in life. But then (she begins to choke up here, with tears) in moving all of that was gone and I'm still looking for that balance, for that harmony, for the cows, for the bells and I'm not finding them... so I keep looking and I keep looking and I keep going. Climbing. But I know that eventually I will just go back to the mountains, and the cows.

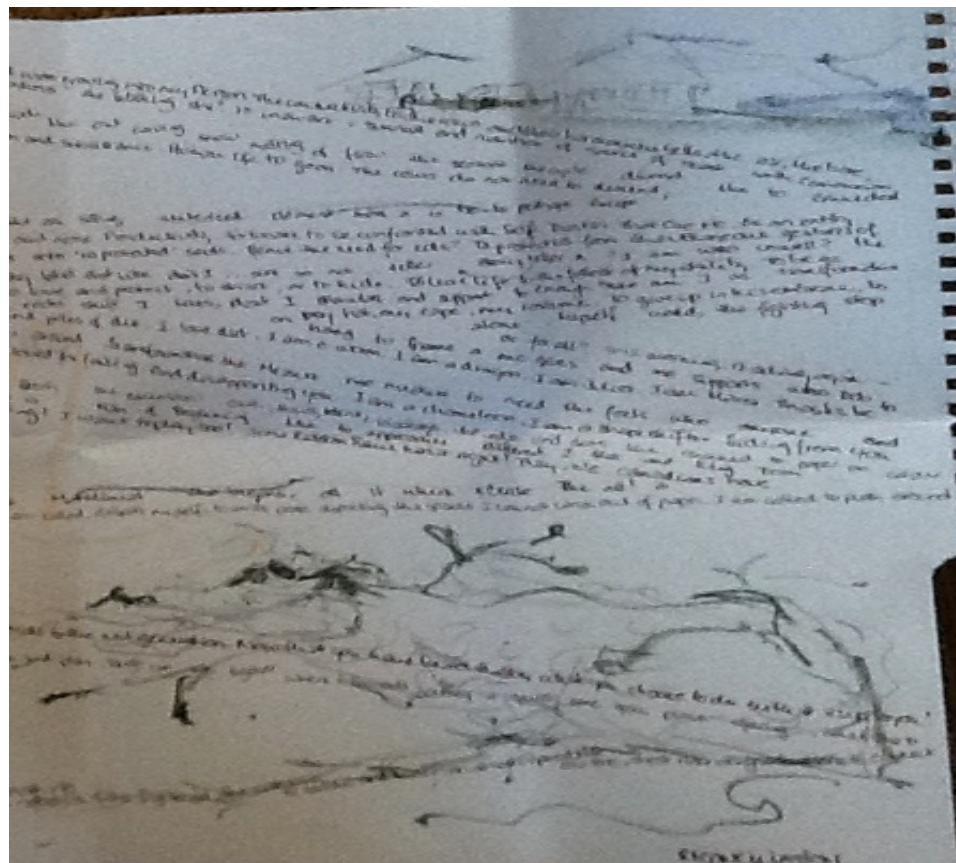
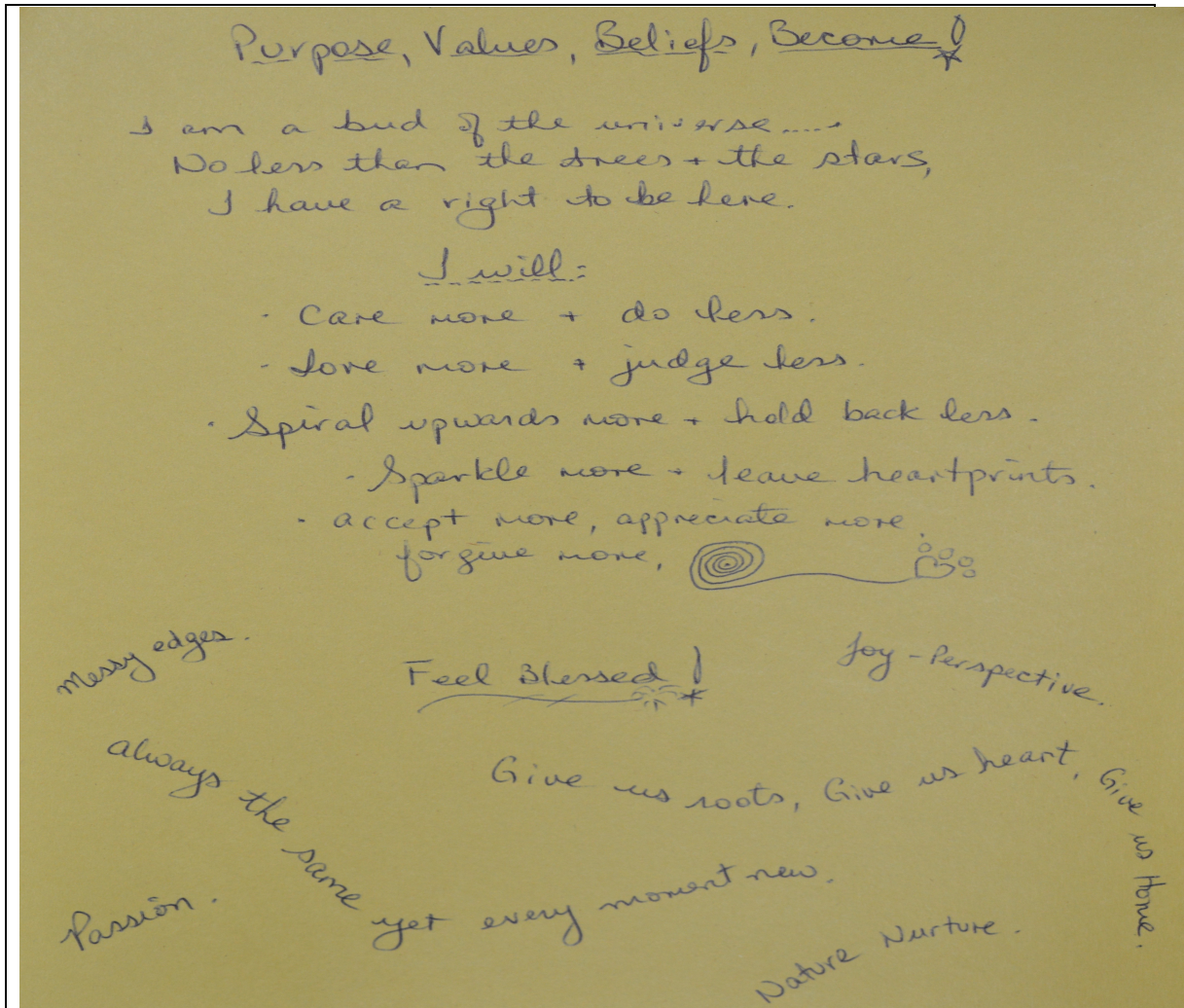


Figure # 24 – Participant # 2 – covenant



This is kind of a bit of a completion because what I saw on the previous pieces of art that we did in the last three weeks, I saw somehow putting them together in a larger frame, maybe a small, but I saw a larger frame with four different sections and this would be the last one which would be the words that will sort of bring them altogether. So I use something bright, but when I finished it I felt I didn't need to put more color on, I like it just the way it was. So what I said was 'purpose, values, beliefs, become!' That's an exclamation mark. I – and this part of this is what – some captured in some of the things we've read that resonated with me and I've had some other things. "I am a bud of the universe, no less than the trees and the stars and I have right to be here." I will care more and do less, love more and judge less, spiral upwards more and hold back less, sparkle more and leave heart prints, accept more, appreciate more, forgive more. And then I have a spiral here with a little heart print. I feel blessed, messy edges, joy, perspective, give us roots, give us heart, give us home. Passion, always the same yet every moment new, and nature, nurture.

Thank you for listening. It was part of this was a process. I do not feel like it had to be perfect, or I had to capture everything. But certainly with the notes and things, there are some things that I knew needed to be in there. So I really liked the process. Thank you.

Figure # 25 – Participant # 3 – covenant

I believe in nature and the ecological cycles that sustain us, in our oneness with the interconnected planetary living system and its wholeness. I value existence. I value life. I value soil. Its capacity to nurture life as a foundation to the food web that sustains us all. It's capacity to absorb, to filter, to clean. The water as it seeps back down into the reserves. I give thanks for the designs that allow us to live. I value water, how it cycles through all, over and over again. I give thanks for the cycles that keep us alive. I value seeds, how they grow, how they draw out the nutrients in the soil to manifest and to adapt diversity of resources of beauty, of life. I give thanks for the systems that sustain life. I value the sun, and the moon, and the stars. I give thanks for the energies that pulse through life. I value us, our gifts, our connections. I give thanks for the relationships that nurture life. I value life itself. I value my life. I value your life. I value our lives. I give thanks for breath, for blood, for selves, for the life that flows through me, through you, through us. I am but one in a web of stories. I'm here to listen, to hear, and call to connect us to ourselves, us to each other, us to the earth, we are part of it. It flows through us. I give thanks for life on earth.

Figure # 26 – Participant # 4 – covenant

I broke it down to who am I, who will I be... so, I am a child of God, unique yet a product of my experience of one culture. I will be grateful for my existence and gentle in my self-assessments. I am a Christian. I know the voice of the lover of my soul. I will be constant, measured, and true in this relationship. And when I fall with god's help, I will get up. I am married in a loving relationship, a mother, a grandmother, a friend. I will be constant, measured, and true in these relationships. And when I fall with god's help, I will get up. I am a human being, I care about this world, the oceans, the air, the trees, and all living things. I will be constant, measured, and true to this place, protecting and serving as I am led and when I fall with god's help I will get up. I am an artist, I care about music, and color, and form. I will order my days to approach my art with integrity, constant, measured, and true. And when I fall with god's help, I will get up. I am white Caucasian woman, I have never known searing bigotry, hungry, or famine, or war. I will employ my gifts to make this world kinder, more just. I will not hide from the suffering of others.

Figure # 27 – Participant # 5 – covenant

I am called to be an encouraging, empathetic individual who listens first to the calling of the creator, the heart of everything. I am called to listen in the silence of contemplation for direction and guidance and then to act and call to differentiate between the false thoughts of my ego self and the true thoughts of my true self. I am called to embrace choice as a way to jump into the flow of life, to embrace its paradox, ambiguity, mysticism, and search for connectivity, intimacy, vulnerability, and beauty, joy, wonder, and the laughter. I am called to find direction in the flow of life. I am called to be an anchor, to underlie everything I do with kindness, humility, and compassion.

Figure # 28 – Participant # 6 – covenant

You called it a promise to self and I wrote it down. And then I wrote the way I normally do that, and that is to covenant which the one and I'm wondering as I listened, if I'm not capable of promising to myself. I'm an old woman. I will treasure my wisdom. I will treasure and share and cherish me, I didn't write this down but I don't very well do that. I will look upon myself and cherish insight. You have kept your promise; I am yours. I belong to you. I will value me. I will find ways to share the mystical oneness that we are and I will watch for the ways you bring me, the opportunities you send me for sharing our mystical oneness... I will listen to the silence and I will be. Somehow, I didn't write this down, but somehow, I understand that the gift of my four-legged animals is teaching me something. And so, I get so – maybe that's why I'm hot and heavy to go the barn every morning so that I can learn what I've got to learn for today, because it really matters. That's it.

Figure # 29 – Participants defining acedia

Participant # 1: “Acedia for me is that part where it’s easier to step away from the pain, and just sort of say...I can’t reach the clarity, I can’t reach the truth, I can’t reach the connectedness...the shadow around the edges of our days, of our years, of our loneliness. It seeps into our lives and can bleed into the bright colours of our clarity and our happiness. It taunts us; it shields light and lightness of being. It is a human condition, which is there to help us keep balance.”

Participant # 2: “Lack of a sense of purpose, value, disconnection....from... meaning, a greater purpose, God, a connection to other things, some would say Spirit, nature...”

Participant # 3: “There’s a sense of dislocation that I would call acedia.”

Participant # 4: “A ‘soul’ illness, something that is insidious, hidden, and very dangerous to our very being.”

Participant # 5: It made me realize that if, indeed, it is acedia, I certainly have been held prisoner by it for a long time. The ‘I don’t care ‘ attitude, the lack of discipline, the pushing through tasks feeling that they are not at all important, the fear of moving forward, often feeling stuck. Yes, it is a spiritual dilemma.

Participant # 6: I slept on this question. I think, in my mind, I just want to keep describing acedia because I cannot come up with a definition!

Figure # 30 – Considering acedia as a causality of identity crisis

Participant # 1: “Sure, we all question who we are, what is our purpose and our value through out life. To know it is human and to recognize its little suggestive, defeating ways, its recurrence not necessarily triggered by anything but time and human nature helps a lot....It is one of those sine waves....if you accept that it might be that, and look at it straight on, usually it dissolves.”

Participant # 2: “I would need to think about how I define identity crisis. Who am I? What is my purpose? What makes me worthwhile? “As we discussed and she came to understand the meaning of causality: “Well then, I would say yes.”

Participant # 3: “Yes. A disconnection from our true self often caused by a disconnection of actions and values and an unwillingness to move through the discomfort in order to continue to connect deeply with ourselves and our callings.”

Participant # 4: “If I knew that my life was in stone mode and I also knew that there was nothing I wanted to do about it I’d be having an identity crisis, yes!” In the interview she stated: “Personally, I think it is a lie of the devil...I believe that acedia can certainly precipitate a personal crisis about what you are. To me, that would be the first step out.”

Participant # 5: “Possibly. But it is much more than that - this statement is too simplistic.”

Participant # 6: “Possibly.”

Figure # 31 – Has acedia affected your life?

Participant # 1: My mother and probably her mother and my sisters and I have all had run ins with darker edges of our happiness, feeling unable to shake it off, a sadness an ineptitude to be free and happy like the others, or so we thought. My father too....so sensitive. He just travelled, went away on business for long periods, probably to hide and/or study the dis-connect.”

Participant # 3: “Absolutely. I have often felt unexpectedly or suddenly very ‘disconnected’ or ‘paralyzed’ without understanding where the feeling was coming from or how to describe or label it.”

Participant # 4: “Yes, for me it manifests as a running away, shutting down and not wanting to deal with issues in my life. I get very anxious and start drinking too much. I often think that I am just pretending to be who I am, there’s a sense of dislocation that I would call acedia.”

Participant # 5: “Yes, I feel that acedia has held sway over me over the years. I tend to think little of myself at times, to become discouraged and I lack the motivation to move forward.

Participant # 6: I lost everything that mattered to me. And that ultimately included my relationship with God. I have stopped loving me. I have lost faith that I matter and have purpose...NOT intellectually, but emotionally and spiritually. But like all things spiritual and emotional I ebb and flow, in and out connected in some moments, but mostly not. I feel dead inside and I know it’s my own undoing, not God’s. On the other hand God has given me the AMAZING gift of the horse and a relationship with the horse that unlike any I have ever had. My love for this creature puts me in touch with God and I see her (the horse) almost every day. On the other hand (is there another hand?) I feel disconnected from the human community, I am lonely, but I have been lonely all of my life. It is just more obvious...

Figure # 32 – Addressing the healing of acedia

Participant # 1: “Talking about the doubt, the fear, the loneliness. Setting it part from everything else as we did here, to name it, to look at it in its many forms and to grow comfortable and to make friends with it. To stop being afraid of the disease we thought we carried apart from others. Healing acedia in groups is most important...I think you can heal it through talking, and being expressive in groups, not shutting yourself away from people.”

Participant # 2: She cited a personal story of someone she knows, who she now believes is suffering with acedia, noting that when she is working outside, doing manual labour, “lifting hay bales,” she feels much better. She agreed with the monastic remedies.

Participant # 3: I think it would come with a consistency of connectedness.... willingness to be with the self through our evolution. A commitment to doing the work we are meant to be doing. Intentionality of being and a grounded alignment of actions and behaviours with values.”

Participant # 4: “In my limited experience, I think that knowing the name, knowing how it feels when it comes on helps to deal with it. I can say “hello acedia” just like I have learned to say “hello anger, hello lust, hello pride.” What works? Grace, grace works.” Agreeing with the Desert Fathers? “I don’t think human nature has changed all that much. Then again, I’m not about to go and live in a monastery and live a life of prayer reflection and manual labour either.”

Participant # 5: “To name it, to see it, to historically understand it, to know that it is something humankind shares and to know that it is a part of our collective lives - to see it for what it is - a soul eater, and to know that we have to be aware of its presence. “In agreement with the Desert Fathers: “It is good to reflect on what the Desert fathers thought about acedia. New garments, same body underneath. Silence, and the art of true listening must be cultivated along with clear guidelines. We are in a battle for humankind.”

Participant # 6 does not necessarily agree with the approach of the Desert Fathers. However, when we take the idea of cell, and prayer, and solitude and adjust to our contextual environment...then yes.

Figure # 33A

Looking at the convergence of art and spirituality as a practice of discernment

Participant # 1: The convergence of art and spirituality “helped place a finger, a thought...on a blocked emotion. It helped place continuity where words and thoughts failed.”

Participant # 2: No. It was foreign to me when I first chatted with you about it. I still don’t see it in my life although I wonder about it with other people I know.” As I furthered the description of what discerning was about during the interview she then remarked: “Discern? Identify? Then yes, obviously now I can think about it more. I am certainly aware of the term now. I had never heard the word before. I can be sensitive to it in others.”

Participant # 3: I felt that the art did help provide the connections and tools to connect with myself – my beliefs, values, purpose, challenges, calling. Module 4 (challenge) was most related to acedia... the things that lead me to disconnect from my beliefs, values, purpose, calling... the things related to acedia. But it was the book (although I only read it in part) and discussions that helped me to discern acedia in my life.

Participant # 4: In the interview: “It helped me explore around the concept of acedia.... was more giving a name to it, through the book and the discussion ‘Oh, wow, I’m connecting with this, this is what I’ve been feeling! This is happening! Then, when I understood there’s this concept...then the art help me explore around it, and what it was keeping me from.”

Participant # 5: Did the art and spirituality discern acedia? Not sure ... if you incorporate the K. Norris book and her written experiences as art, then, yes. Also, the art I created was deeply meaningful and insightful. It, with the book and conversations that ensued was highly appreciated. It made me realize that if, indeed, it is acedia, I certainly have been held prisoner by it for a long time. The ‘I don’t care ‘ attitude, the lack of discipline, the pushing through tasks feeling that they are not at all important, the fear of moving forward, often feeling stuck. Yes, it is a spiritual dilemma.

Participant # 6: More so than the convergence of art and spirituality helping to discern acedia, she “learned from the book. My art was more an expression of positive and hopeful things I have in my life.” During the course of the interview: “And I totally trust that doing the art says something that I need to express.”

Figure # 33 B – The experience of the art

Participant # 1: “I was frustrated by the tight time limitations, I was frustrated by the mediums but understood that art was not the central theme of each module, even though I kept wishing for more. This was a good discovery!” She preferred her ‘earlier pieces’ of art, finding them more ‘spontaneous, more of a surprise,’ for her. The last one was: “painful. I was caught between time and words when I was still wishing I had all day to explore the release happening inside.”

Participant # 2: Loved the colours that I created but also the nature collage. Confirmed my love of nature, the observations skills that allow me to see subtle beauty and wonder in nature. Also, it brings me great serenity to be in the natural world.... usually alone or with my dogs.... quiet. Also confirmed my love of bright and sparkly colour – a contrast. I liked how my second piece evolved...coloured chalk then bright tissue paper twisted and glued on top of the swirls of colour. Then, as I believe you pointed out, holding it in different ways provided different perspectives. I like searching for different perspectives when pondering moments in my life.

Participant # 3: “The art was intimidating at first and sometimes frustrating in that I did not always feel I had the capacity to translate my visions and messages onto the paper so that others could see the details and fullness of my perspective...There was a moment...I think it was during the module about purpose, where I felt a real, calming flow happening. It was like a kind of mindless mindfulness... a oneness, a peace. I felt confident in what was coming through my fingers onto the page. Like it was right and true and clear.”

Participant # 4: “ I found it opened a lot of pathways I wasn’t counting on. It was helpful to me as I sought to reconcile myself with the past. All of the art had messages for me. The last piece I did, the day to night piece is in my kitchen. I really like to look at it.” Her least favorite art piece: “The fenced in soul with the prickly hedge and the rickety black ladder. All true, but not so pleasant to behold. It strikes me as rigid, uncomfortable, purposeless.”

Participant # 5: The art very meaningful, and somewhat challenging. Challenging in that it looks straight at you. When you see something like that, it’s not like looking in a mirror. It’s more like looking straight into your soul.” Did it work? “It revealed a lot more than expected. I found it difficult to be lead by the " spirit " of it. I found myself becoming analytical when trying to be carefree, and spontaneous. However, the art, no matter what my expectations were, revealed many important things about who I am. All was relevant. All was meaningful with the help and questions from the convener.” The least favorable art moments: “The naked, vulnerable insights that I realized through the art. That I have sense before, but now it is physically before my eyes. It is held before the light of my eyes.”

Participant # 6: “ I have mentioned art above, but I would add that it did help me to stretch in my seeing myself.” Moments of artistic expression that stand out: “I appreciate the truth telling in my writing.” Was there something transformative for this person? “Yes. New days. Deeper thoughts. Spiral. Same me but deeper.”

Figure # 34

How has your understanding of beauty, imagination and soul changed?

Participant # 1 Beginning with beauty: “meditation as a way to short cut through the superficial pretty stuff is a great relief. I think having to deal with the want to make a pretty picture has kept me from producing short time pieces, which are in fact so helpful, so healing, so revealing.” When asked how does this connect with beauty: “The superficial, the glossy pleasing, the seductive, whatever it is...it’s about getting to the next layer, which actually was the hidden beauty, not about the image, but about the message, but the message that was reflecting back to me. Not the one I was trying to communicate.” Her thoughts on how she understood the role her imagination: “It is both more structured, more precise, able to take me to deeper places which were inaccessible before unless I dove into endless hours of art, a retreat rarely available to me as a mother/professional.” Her comment on how she understood the nature of her soul: “I did not realize how trapped and stuck my soul is/was.”

Participant # 2 Her understanding of beauty did not change, but there was change in how she understood the role of her imagination: “I need to let my imagination wander, dream a little, explore, try various modes of expression.

Participant # 3: Her understanding of beauty did not change: “I see beauty in most things and I continue to do so through this process.” Though her understanding of the role her imagination did change: “Although I understood symbolism in art and the communication of the self and lessons through such a medium, I have never engaged in anything like this – the process was more powerful than I had expected.” And the understanding of the nature of her soul: “I think so, yes. Not just related to the Art of Soul process but also how it fits into my life and other experiences and realizations...I am understanding my soul as more and more deeply, connected to the earth and bio-ecological forces, and these understandings are grounding to me.”

Participant # 4: The understanding of beauty changed for her: “I notice more, I am giving more time for reflection, contemplation.” And the role of the imagination has changed as well: “Yes, I listen more.”

Participant # 5: “I look for it more. I try to be present more. Beauty is within as well as without.” And a similar response regarding the imagination: “Yes, I listen to it more...as I remember to make contemplation more of my existence. My imagination has always been an integral part of my existence. I but I see to have forgotten it through the years.” In addressing the nature of the soul: “I value the knowledge of myself more. I realize that my existence includes soul now. I wish to become more integrated with my salvation, my wholeness – and that includes my soul and connecting with the soul of others.”

Participant # 6: She does not believe that acedia has robbed her of her beauty or imagination, but she did suggest during the interview that acedia robs us of “energy. And Spirit. And will to God. Maybe faith.”

Figure # 35 – Participants share about their personal discoveries

Participant # 1: Around the importance of art in their lives, and how ‘helpful’ it is to ‘unblock painful memories.’

Participant # 2: Elaborated on what she learned about judging of another. Her perspective was changed on several occasions, and for this she is grateful.

Participant # 3: I am moving in the right direction – that I was able to uncover answers to the questions...That I’ve come a good way on my journey of discovery and that through the consistency of the answers coming up through various means of exploring these kinds of questions, I am able to feel more and more confident in the answers I am uncovering.”

Participant # 4: “I discovered that I am an affirmation junkie. However I am very slow to give affirmation to myself. I can change this. I rediscovered my tendency to rush into things with great passion and burn out quickly.”

Participant #5: I discovered that I still have an active false self that really hampers my flow. That ‘choice ‘ is always before me and I often choose not to choose. That I can make changes and be connected through a multitude of the arts, and through nature. That I wish to plug in to all this flow - not to always hear ‘I can’t, because ... ‘ I can.

Participant # 6: I learned that I suffer from/participate in acedia. I find it difficult to know that I suffer from this “sin.” But it explains a lot about how I have been feeling for the last 10 months (or a little less). But I have also learned that I have certain wisdom and an insight into life, theology and the church.

Figure # 36 – Discoveries of another

Participant # 1: That people are kind and patient, sincerely interested in each other's innermost strife, respectful, loving and grateful to be sharing the transformation."

Participant # 2: "People carry burdens and pains and may try to mask them. But, it becomes part of who we are, how we see the world and how we interact in it."

Participant # 4: "We share common struggles. We can learn from our art. We all bring gifts to the table. They can be used to help with our common life and the healing of us."

Participant # 5: "Grief shares grief. Vulnerability shares vulnerability, joy shares joy. We are all connected on the deepest of levels, and we need to realize that, respect each other's opinions, and to move forward seeing the bigger picture of existence, not the little things. We do not need to "sweat the small stuff."

Participant # 6: "We all have joy and pain and need to be heard."

Figure # 37 – Church and lack of education about acedia

Participant # 1: Church has flattened out the teaching of ‘soul care’ and projected it onto the story of another, a special one, which took place centuries/millennia ago, telling us that one should keep behaving well, keeping our fingers crossed while waiting for the next coming... Meanwhile, we all know that this day will not happen in our lifetime, we all sense in fact that the coming is a daily one, if you choose to live by the good rules of society and stretch beyond your realm of comfort and ease.

“Drop hierarchy and pyramidal models. Look to the wisdom and spirit of the first nations to understand how we went wrong when we separated our souls from the land and the animals.”

Participant # 2: “We need to open ourselves, our committees, and groups....“he church people now? Ouf! I think society is so for sure, if you are part of the church, you are. Technically, the church should be a place where people can go and be accepted, and welcomed, and connected, and valued, and supported, and sometimes that happens, but it’s almost clique. It’s almost like you gotta work your way into these cliques... the Church ‘should have a responsibility’ to teach about acedia... The Church could be more inclusive and accepting of differences, emotional needs, etc....build on the good and not judge while still holding people accountable for their actions.”

Participant # 4: Which church? The one focused on somehow maintaining itself as it dwindles? To the best of my knowledge, there is no education whatsoever in the church with regards to acedia. We could name it, talk about it, acknowledge it.”

Participant # 5: “The church has so many problems at this time. I sincerely do not know whether this will impact at all. There is nothing to improve. There is no knowledge to base improvement on.”

Figure # 38 – Method of retreat

Participant # 1: “worked, ‘very well,’ and hoped that it would have lasted longer. She found that reading the Norris text to be “helpful in keeping the follow between modules...it helped put acedia in the perspective of every day life...”

Participant # 2: “An interesting blend of reading, writing, talking, creating, walking. I don’t do a lot of art, it gave me the opportunity to explore that....a chance to see the inner stuff that gets translated into art...curious about that...There was never too much of anything, not too much reading,” she continued: “Nothing felt too tedious, too long, overwhelming...”

Participant# 3: It worked for me – I value the experience and feel that it has played a role in connecting me to the path I am meant to be living by helping me to connect more deeply to my gifts, the perspective that I bring, the values that ground me, and...that feeling that I have been feeling or perhaps more precisely that state that I get into, kind of trance like, a kind of carelessness, a disconnect from myself, others, the earth, the work, existence, oneness.... It has a name! Thank goodness. I felt connected and comforted by the authors telling of her experience and connecting it to others who have felt similarly and gone on quests to describe this seemingly universal experience. How comforting to give this state of being a name.

Participant # 4: “I appreciated the way the material was presented. I appreciated the fact that it was not judgmental and not rooted in any one particular religious tradition. I felt it was an opportunity to listen to other people talk about their soul struggle. It’s good to find common ground even if the ground is one of suffering.”

Participant # 5: “I loved it. I loved the format; the revealing of different souls searching for the same thing coming from different belief systems and environments. I loved the art of ‘soul’ because soul is a word almost lost in our culture today. In looking at soul, we reacquaint ourselves with the experience of soul, and we can see more clearly the affect of acedia on the soul.”

Participant # 6: “It worked! It pushed me out of my comfort zone (with the art). It helped me understand I am a western person! It engaged me with other people. It engaged me with the Source of life. I was invited to look at my own life.”

Figure # 39 – Style of facilitation

Participant # 1: “Excellent,’ and would recommend. Perhaps more doing, less talking, but then again, I really learned a lot from listening to others.

Participant # 2: “Very flexible and accepting. Created a warm, hospitable and open space.... Kept the environment supportive. That was done well. Very ecumenical and open minded.”

Participant # 3: “I felt well led through the process. I appreciated the diversity of skill from leading respectful discussions during which I felt everyone was heard; to guiding meditation sessions; to bringing in a diversity of perspectives and mediums into the process.”

Participant # 4: “I think it was well done. I wondered that you chose to share your own vulnerabilities and difficulties. When you shared your life statement it helped me know what I wanted to say to myself. Your affirmation of the young woman’s tears moved me deeply. Some things are worth crying about indeed.”

Participant # 5: “I think it was well done. Our convener shared her vulnerabilities, made it easier to share ours, and she had bold, searing questions that pierced our souls.”

Participant # 6: “FABULOUS!” and recommended not to change anything.

Figure # 40 – Final recommendations

Participant # 1: I would certainly recommend lengthening the retreat...too much to sort through in such a tight time frame.” The retreat was instrumental in discerning acedia in her life, and she would definitely recommend it to others.

Participant # 4: Shortening the days might help, and spread it over more weeks.

Participant # 5: The final recommendations were to simply to make the retreat into six sessions rather than five.

Participant # 6: “Two things: 1 – Not just anyone could facilitate this. It takes the skills and life experience that our facilitator had. 2 – And not just anyone could participate. (Like psychoanalysis, it takes a certain amount of intelligence (spiritual/emotional/intellectual.)

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