

## Evagrius on Acedia

Acedia uses thoughts but is also tied up with irascibility (the part of us that responds impulsively and sometimes excessively to our immediate circumstances), which adds to the thoughts an intensity and power of movement (*Refl.* 40)

Thoughts can become particularly intense when

- (1) a person is by themselves;
- (2) when a person is using great energy and is applying this energy to themselves (turning this energy back on themselves)
  - Devoting one's energy to anger prepares the way for acedia
  - Devoting one's energy to activities that feed vainglory (focus on gaining honor from others for good behavior: "Work, acquire possessions, entertain guests!") lead later to insensibility (unable to feel or be moved by divine things: *Th.* 11), negligence and acedia (*Eul.* 26.28)
    - One way this can occur is through being tempted to take up an extreme pattern of devotion (which one is not yet ready for and cannot maintain). After overstraining the soul to achieve something more honorable than what has been achieved by others and should gain approval by all, one collapses. Believing that one has failed and the goal is unattainable, one gives up and diverts one's attention to other, more immediate things (*Th.* 35).

This misguided use of energy (motivated by anger or vainglory) leads first to agitation (excessive and misdirected activity that is unproductive) and then to slacking off, powering down, becoming careless, giving up.

- This involves
  - an inability to not being able to read the Bible, pray or apply oneself consistently to anything, while
  - feeling that being by oneself or finding being where one is oppressive and unbearable, and
  - yearning for some kind of diversion (other places, other people, other circumstances).

Having relaxed one's soul and given up on structure or application one becomes unable to resist temptation or maintain boundaries.

## Negligence

- Careless about divine things
- Inattentive to God
- Not aware of supernatural evil/temptation
- Derides talk of existence of supernatural evil and believes he or she will remain strong in temptation
- Underestimates difficulty of a task/achieving something, then overestimates it

Evagrius' most detailed discussion of acedia is in *Pr.* 12 (see and read), where he describes it as the noonday demon (based on Ps. 90:5-6 LXX: "You will not fear nocturnal terror, or the arrow that flies by day or the deed that travels in darkness, or mishap or noonday demon [δαίμονίου μεσημβρινοῦ]); contrast Ps. 91:6 in our English Bibles: "the destruction that wastes at noonday").

- The reason there is a difference between the Greek (Septuagint, abbreviated LXX) and the Masoretic Hebrew text, is that the LXX read *v*<sup>e</sup> "and a/the demon" (shed occurs in the Hebrew Bible as a certain reading only in the plural form in Dt. 32:17 and Ps. 106:37 "sacrificed to demons (?)") and has been considered a loanword from Assyrian, where *šêdu* signifies the protective spirit represented by the winged bulls that guarded the gates.
- The Masoretic text read *yāšūḏ* "that wastes"  
For discussion of this textual problem and its history and significance, see P. Stamatopoulos, "A mistranslation or a liberal rendering in Psalm 91/90:6 (LXX)?" available online at [http://www.academia.edu/4167142/English\\_A\\_mistranslation\\_or\\_a\\_liberal\\_rendering\\_in\\_Psalm\\_91\\_90\\_6\\_LXX](http://www.academia.edu/4167142/English_A_mistranslation_or_a_liberal_rendering_in_Psalm_91_90_6_LXX)

Acedia involves accepting the idea that our agitation, regrets and problems would vanish and we would be happier and better off if only we were in some different place (i.e., believing that our happiness or unhappiness depends only on our external circumstances). Roughly, what Evagrius is describing is this:

"I would be a better monk if I lived in a better monastery. That's why I'm not doing well and I'm restless and unhappy; it's because I'm here and not there. Oh, if only things were different! It is so unbearable here that I must find someplace else where things are better."

- One believes that circumstances are responsible for one's feeling of agitation, unhappiness, desolation and abandonment (sadness)--the feeling that one's life is not productive or meaningful and that escape and radical change are necessary.

Cf. *Eul.* 13.12: "When thoughts transport us to places which they have suggested we will like, then they in turn make us feel regret in order that they may render us completely unstable and unproductive. Therefore let us not disperse ourselves from place to place..."

Cure:

- One must avoid evasion (fleeing, making excuses, using diversion to avoid dealing with things) (*Pr.* 28) and return one's focus to God.
- Applying oneself to physically involving work and persevering in it, especially work that produces
  - something that can be offered to others (*Fnd.* 8) or
  - tears that produce repentance toward God (*Vg.* 39), which allows us to both offer ourselves to God and receive forgiveness, hope and consolation from God (*Pr.* 27).
- Continuing to pray and sing psalms (i.e. persevering in worship when one does not feel like it), without giving up or being diverted by inward agitation (*Eul.* 9.9).
- Meditation on the cross
- Joy calms the angry soul and drives away the acedia and sadness that follow from anger (*Eul.* 6.6)