5 Sloth (*Accidia*)

Sloth, according to the learned,[[1]](#endnote-1) is weariness or forsaking the spiritual good owed to God.

Therefore, sloth is compared to the willow,[[2]](#endnote-2) which is an unfruitful tree,[[3]](#endnote-3) shady, and always green, Job 40[:17]: “The willows of the brook shall compass him about,” that is, the devil. Where Gregory says, *Moralia,* book 33,[[4]](#endnote-4) the willow is an unfruitful tree, but of so much greenness, that it can hardly dry up. Thus, these slothful ones often grow green carnally in the felicity of the world, but spiritually they lead sterile existences. They are “trees of the autumn, unfruitful, twice dead,” as it is said in the canonical epistle of Jude 1[:12]. And it is well said “twice dead,” because the willow is barren, and its seed makes the one drinking sterile, according to Isidore, book 17, c. 7.[[5]](#endnote-5) Thus the slothful one in himself is sterile, and makes others barren by the example of evil, Jer. 22[:30]: “Write this man barren, a man that shall not prosper in his days.”

Again, Gregory,[[6]](#endnote-6) for example, the slothful name is compared to the reed or the cane which internally is empty and externally bright, Isaiah 19[:6-7]: “The reed and the bulrush shall wither away,” and below, “it shall wither away, and shall be no more.” Job 40[:16], it is said about the devil that “he sleeps under the shadow, in the covert of the reed.”

Again, by comparison with the barren fig tree which Christ cursed,[[7]](#endnote-7) because he found only leaves there, and on it no fruit, Matt. 21[:18-22]. Again, the slothful is compared to the barren tree and the paralyzed. Wherefore [1] Macc. 9[:55]: “Alcimus was struck, he was taken with a palsy, and his works were hindered.” Again, he is compared to the paralytic boy,[[8]](#endnote-8) who was badly twisted, because his exterior was as his interior, Matt. [17:14-21].

¶ Again, the slothful one is compared to a thrush[[9]](#endnote-9) from its slowness of flying. Thus, I say because finally from its own droppings in which it stands, Jer. 48[:11]: “Moab has rested upon his lees.” Again, the slothful one has the name that he is alive, but he is dead, Apo. 2[:8]. In truth it is read in Gen. 18[:6-7]: “That Abraham made haste in the reception of guests, his wife made haste, and the young man made haste. Because,” according to Origen, *Super Genesem*,[[10]](#endnote-10) in the house of wisdom, no one is indolent.[[11]](#endnote-11)

Again, the indolent and the murmurers among the sons of Israel did not arrive at the promised land. Therefore says wisdom, Eccli. 6[:26]: “Bow down your shoulder, and bear her, and be not grieved with her bands.” Again, it was commanded to the sons of Israel aiming toward the holy land, because they ate the Paschal lamb in haste, Exod. 12[:3-11]. Because one aiming toward heaven ought not to be lazy. And the Blessed Virgin, when she conceived, rose up, and went away with haste to the mountains. Because, according to Ambrose, upon that place,[[12]](#endnote-12) “she did not know a slow effort by the grace of the Holy Spirit.” And it is said about the boy after the sheep and the bundles had been cast off, [John 10:11-15], 1 Kings 17[:48], he hastened to the battle against Goliath, thus the Christian ought to do against the devil.

Again, sloth is compared to fever[[13]](#endnote-13) and paralysis which render members dry and feeble, Psal. [113:15]: “They have hands and feel not.”

Again, it is compared to a hungry dog[[14]](#endnote-14) all whose senses desire to eat, Psal. [58:7]: “They shall suffer hunger like dogs.” For the slothful mouth desires delicate foods, vain words on the tongue, vile or no works in the hand, honors of the heart, rumors for the ear,[[15]](#endnote-15) and vanities for the eyes, Prov. 21[:25]: “Desires kill the slothful.”

Therefore, it would be useful to the fruitful man to occupy himself, because his plough,[[16]](#endnote-16) by easy use, attracts rust;[[17]](#endnote-17) land uncultivated, thistles; standing water, uncleanness.

Wherefore, the verse of Ovid, *De ponto*,[[18]](#endnote-18) “You see how laziness spoils an idle body, ¶ How water acquires a tang unless it’s flowing.”

Lest a powerful enemy[[19]](#endnote-19) find a man unoccupied, that is, his house vacant through sloth. Having returned, the place is occupied with “seven other spirits more wicked than himself,” Matt. 12[:45].

Again, sloth injures greatly because, according to Jerome,[[20]](#endnote-20) the dregs of every evil is said to be inactivity, and as if the other evils accumulate to it,[[21]](#endnote-21) Prov. 24[:30]: “I passed by the field of the slothful man, and behold it was all filled with nettles,” etc. Nettles[[22]](#endnote-22) are said to be sloth, because in its soft leaf it has a pricking sting, on which another might freely feed upon, thus it is with the lazy indolent one with thoughts like the nettle to his disgrace.

The indolent one[[23]](#endnote-23) should be put to school with the ant,[[24]](#endnote-24) so small and scorned an animal, Prov. 6[:6]: “Go to the ant, O sluggard,” etc.

And certainly, sloth is blamed for many things,[[25]](#endnote-25) because we have a great journey to heaven,[[26]](#endnote-26) 3 Kings 19[:7]: “For thou hast yet a great way to go,” and our time for journeying is brief. Wis. 2[:5]: “For our time is as the passing of a shadow.”

Again, we are expected by great ones,[[27]](#endnote-27) and we are called to great things, and because great impediments are in the way. Therefore it would be salutary for us to interrupt, in a timely manner, the rule which the devil has already begun in our soul through sin, and this by confession and tears, because it is said in Eccli. 17[:26-27]: “Give glory before death. Give thanks while you are alive and in health you shall give thanks.”

Again, sloth is blamed because a great good is offered to us,[[28]](#endnote-28) namely, grace, if we wish to receive it.

And therefore,[[29]](#endnote-29) it is exceedingly perilous to let pass the time of mourning, cleaning, sowing, reaping, and salting down new meats, which all ought to be done quickly, Apo. 1[:19].

1. Bonaventure, *Diaetae Salutis* 1.7 (Peltier, 1866, 8:257a): Acedia est parvus amor boni, cum taedio et inordinata animi tristitia, et impatientia rei divinae.

Cf. Hugh of Pisa, *Derivationes* (Firenze: SISMEL; Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2004), (2:21): A 47 **ACCI** grece, cura latine, inde hed **accidia** -e tristitia, molestia, anxietas vel tedium, unde hec **accidiola** -le diminutivum, et **accidiosus** -a -um, idest sublestus, idest tristis, anxius, et **accidior** -aris id est tristari, anxiari vel indignari, unde verbalia.

Cf. Siegfried Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth: Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1967). This is a thorough investigation of the matters of this chapter. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Bonaventure, *Diaetae Salutis* 1.7 (Peltier, 1866, 8:257a-b): Primo comparatur acedia salicibus, quae sunt arbores infructuosae, et solum faciunt umbram: sic acediosi et otiosi nullum faciunt fructum, sed solum umbram diabolo et refrigerium. Unde dicitur de diabolo in Job: *Circumdant eum*, scilicet diabolum, *salices infructuosae*. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Cf. Morton W. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins: An Introduction to the History of a Religious Concept, with Special Reference to Medieval English Literature* (Michigan: State College Press, 1952), (p. 84): the pseudo-Hugonian work, *De fructibus carnis et spiritus*, which set the fasion for the tree image...was immensely influential and popular both in literture and in art. Here there are two trees, the tree of vices, springing from the root of pride and called the *vetus homo* (or *vetus Adam*) and *civitas Hierosolymae*. This writing was the first to portray specifically the seven capital sins by a tree with seven main branches. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Gregory, *Moralia* 33.5.11 (PL 76.676): Mali salicibus similes: virent quidem, sed fructum non ferunt. --Infructuosae quidem arbores sunt salices; sed tamen tantae viriditatis sunt, ut arescere vel abscissae radicitus et projectae vix possint. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Isidore, *Etymologiae* 17.7.47 (PL 82.617): Salix dicta, quod celeriter saliat, hoc est, velociter crescat, arbor lenta, vitibus habilis vinciendis. Cujus seminis hanc dicunt esse naturam, ut si quis illud in poculo hauserit, liberis careat, sed et feminas infecundas efficit. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Gregory, *Moralia* 33.3.8 (PL 76.673): Mentes saecularium gloriae temporali deditae, arundini similes. --Hoc ergo loco quid aliud appellatione calami, nisi mentes saecularium temporali gloriae deditae designantur? Qui tanto apud semetipsos intus inanescunt, quanto alti et nitidi exterius ostenduntur, quia dum ad exteriorem gloriam per superficiem defluunt, nulla intus firmitate solidantur. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Cf. Siegfried Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth: Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1967), (p. 119): The biblical injunction to burn a barren tree, etc. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Cf. Siegfried Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth: Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1967), (pp. 108-109): Almost as long as the list of animals is that of diseases to which *acedia* was compared. Paralysis takes the first place, which “unloosens the whole man and renders him useless for any good work.” [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Cf. Siegfried Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth: Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1967), (p. 107): The viced is likened to the thrush and the turtledove (*turdus* and *turtur*, because of their “etymology” of *tardus* [slow]). [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Origen, *Homiliae in Genesim* 4.1 (PG 12:184): Nullus piger est in domo sapientis.

Cf. Augustine, *De vetero et novo testamento* 5.3 (PL 39.1747): Ecce ipse Abraham currit, uxor festinat, puer accelerat. Nullus est piger in domo sapientis. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Cf. Siegfried Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth: Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1967), (pp. 160, 163): Citing the Franciscan David of Augsburg (fl. 1250): “The second kind is a certain indolent torpor which loves sleep and all comforts of the body, abhors hardships, flees from whatever is hard, droops in the presence of work, and takes its delight in idleness. This is laziness (*pigritia*) proper.” [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Ambrose, *Expositio Evangelii secundum Lucam* 2.18 (PL 15.1560): Nescit tarda molimina sancti Spiritus gratia. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Bonaventure, *Diaetae Salutis* 1.7 (Peltier, 1866, 8:257b): Secundo comparatur acedia febri hecticae, vel phthisicae, vel lassae, vel paralysi. ... Comparatur etiam paralysi, quae facit membra arida et impotentia.... Unde de talibus dicitur in Psalmo: *Manus habet, et non palpabut; pedes habet, et non amulabunt.*

Cf. Siegfried Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth: Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1967), (p. 19): Ciiting Cassian’s *Instituta* 10: “*Acedia* ... like some fever which seizes him at stated times, bringing the burning heat of its attcks on the sick man at usual and regular hours.” [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Bonaventure, *Diaetae Salutis* 1.7 (Peltier, 1866, 8:257b): Quarto comparatur otiosus cani famelico: hujusmodi enim piger et otiosus ad modum canis esurit, et omnes sensus universalem famem patiuntur, juxta illud Psalmi: *Famem patientur ut canes:*  os enim ejus esurit cibaria delicata, lingua verba vana, manus vilia, cor honores, auris rumores, et oculi vanitates. Ideo dicitur in Proverbilis: *Desideria occidunt pigrum*.

Cf. Siegfried Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth: Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1967), (p. 107): *Acedia* was often compared to a hungry dog who craves for vanities and impurity and lets the flies (of evil thoughts) creep into its ears. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Cf. Siegfried Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth: Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1967), (p. 120): She hates manual work but lives on prattling (*verbositas*), sleep, and restlessness of body and soul. Listening to rumors and looking at novelties is bliss. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Bonaventure, *Diaetae Salutis* 1.7 (Peltier, 1866, 8:257b): Quinto comparatur otiosus vel piger ferro, terrae, et aquae, et vesti, sholari negligenti, homini stanti et non ambulanti: istis enim sex eadem ratione adaptatur. Ferrum quidem, quod non tractatur, cito rubiginatur. Terra quae non colitur, malas herbas general. Aqua quae non movetur, cito corrumpitur. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Cf. Siegfried Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth: Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1967), (p. 105): Bromyard likened the vice to fallow ground, stagnating water, and an unused plow, driving home the lesson that exercise is necessary to prevent spiritual decay. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Ovid, *Ex Ponto* 1.5.5 (LCL 151: 290-291): Cernis ut ignavum corrumpant otia corpus, ut capiant vitium, ni moveantur, aquae?

You see how inactivity spoils an idle body, how water acquires a taint unless it is in motion. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Bonaventure, *Diaetae Salutis* 1.7 (Peltier, 1866, 8:258a): Facilius enim diabolus occupat illos, quos in bono opere non invenit occupatos. Nam *immundus spiritus cum invenit domum vacantem,* scilicet per aceddiam, *assumit alios septem spiritus nequiores se*, id est universa vitia, *et ingressi habitant ibi*, ut dicitur in *Matthaeo.* [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Jerome, cf. Guigo V, *Epistola* 1.8 (PL 184.321): Omnium autem tentationum et cogitationum malarum et inutilium sentina otium est. Summa etenim mentis malitia est otium iners. Nunquam otiosus sit servus Dei, quamvis a Deo feriatus sit.

Cf. William of Auverne, *Sermones* Dominica 7 post Trinitatem (Paris: Andraeam Pralard, 1674), (2:311b): Omnium tentationum et cogitationum malarum et inutilium sentine est otium. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Bonaventure, *Diaetae Salutis* 1.7 (Peltier, 1866, 8:258a-b): Quintum est vitiorum accumulatio: replet enim acedia hominem universis vitiis. Nam dicitur in Proverbiis: *Per agrum hominis pigri transivi; et ecce totum repleverant urticae.* Urtica recte figurat acediam; nam urtica habet molle foliu, sed in folio habet aculeum pungitivum: sic acedia, ad modum urticae, habet in mollitie remissionis aculoeum pungitivae tentationis. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Cf. Siegfried Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth: Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1967), (p. 125): Sloth is responsible for the brambles, nettles, and weeds in one’s garden. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Bonaventure, *Diaetae Salutis* 1.7 (Peltier, 1866, 8:258b): Et ideo ad confusionem suae begligentiae, immittitur otiosus in scholam formicae ad discendum, juxta illud quod scribitur in Proverbiis: *Vade ad formicam, o piger.* [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Cf. Siegfried Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth: Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1967), (p. 108): two important counter-examples, the ant and the bee. Following the scriptural injunction, “Vade ad formicam, o piger, et considera vias eius” (Prov. 6:6), medieval writers often went to great lengths to moralize the nature of ants in minute detail. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Bonaventure, *Diaetae Salutis* 1.7 (Peltier, 1866, 8:258b): Et nota, quod pigritia vel negligentia est praecipue reprehensibilis in decem casibus. Primo, quando est magnum iter, et tempus breve: sic nos habemus magnum iter, scilicet usque ad coelum, justa quod dictum est Eliae: *Grandis enim restat tibi via;* et tempus est valde breve, scilicet vita nostra quae est  *quasi transibus umbrae*, ut dicitur in libro *Sapientiae*. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Cf. Morton W. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins: An Introduction to the History of a Religious Concept, with Special Reference to Medieval English Literature* (Michigan: State College Press, 1952), (p. 12): This Sins are a by-product of an eschatological belief which has been called the Soul Drama or Soul Journey. ... The seven cardinal sins are the remnant of some Gnostic Soul Journey which existed probably in Egypt or Syria in the early Christian centuries. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Bonaventure, *Diaetae Salutis* 1.7 (Peltier, 1866, 8:258b): Secundo est reprehensibilis negligentia, quando quis expectatur a magistris, et pigritat venire: sic nos periculose pigritamus, qui expectamur ab angelis et sanctis. Tertio, qndo quis vocatur ad magna; sic pigritari est periculosum, quia vocamur ad magna, scilicet ad regnum coelorum. Quarto, quando multa impedimenta sunt in via.... Quinto, quando res impignorata non redimitur in termino.... Sexto, quando praescriptio est prope terminum suum: sic nobis est valde periculosum, cum diabolus praescripserit hominem seu animam per peccata multo tempore, si non inquiratur ejus prascriptio, scilicet, lacryma, confessione et oratione, et hoc ante terminum praescriptionis, scilicet ante diem mortis, quia dicitur in Ecclesiastico: *Ante mortem confitere*. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Bonaventure, *Diaetae Salutis* 1.7 (Peltier, 1866, 8:259a): Octavo, quando magnum donum offertur: hoc donum est divina gratia; et si illud negligimus accipere, haec negligentia est valde periculosa. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Bonaventure, *Diaetae Salutis* 1.7 (Peltier, 1866, 8:259a): Decimo, quando tempus est plantandi arbores, et non plantantur; putandi vineas, et non putantur; seminandi agros, et non seminantur; metendi messes, et non metuntur ... saliendi carnes, et non saliuntur.... Haec enim decem predicta sunt *quae oportet fieri cito* ut dicitur in *Apocalypsi*. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)