

ABSTRACT

The Ordinary Works of Daily Life in Medieval Spirituality: St. Benedict, *Our Daily*

Work, and Walter Hilton

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This thesis is a study of ordinary work in medieval spirituality and is focused on several texts selected for their continuity of themes: *The Rule of St. Benedict* (6th century), the Middle English pastoral treatise *Our Daily Work*, and the Middle English writings of Walter Hilton, namely *The Scale of Perfection* and *Epistle on the Mixed Life*. In this thesis, I use the term “ordinary work” to refer to manual labor and deeds of mercy. In all these texts, ordinary work is good not just for the sake of the things it produces, but has intrinsic goodness. First, ordinary work can be offered to God in loving service. The Hebrew concept of *avodah*, a term for both work and worship, can be seen in the use of the Latin term *opus* or the Middle English term *werke*. Second, ordinary work is good for man, serving as a remedy for *acedia* and helping to cultivate virtue. Finally, for these authors, manual labor and deeds of mercy are an integrated part of a life of prayer. Prayer overflows into all ordinary work of daily life.

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THE ORDINARY WORKS OF DAILY LIFE IN MEDIEVAL SPIRITUALITY: ST.

BENEDICT, *OUR DAILY WORK*, AND WALTER HILTON

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PREFACE

This thesis is a study of the role of ordinary works of daily life in medieval spirituality and is focused on *The Rule of St. Benedict* (6th century), the Middle English pastoral treatise *Our Daily Work* (14th cen.), and the Middle English writings of Walter Hilton, namely *The Scale of Perfection* and *Epistle on the Mixed Life* (also 14th cen.).

In this thesis I use the term “ordinary works of daily life” largely in the sense of popular parlance; I use this term to refer to the everyday activities of manual labor and deeds of mercy. In the term “ordinary works of daily life,” *ordinary* takes on a nuanced meaning. It first evokes one popular understanding of the term. The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives one definition of “ordinary” as “Belonging to the regular or usual order or course of things; having a place in a fixed or regulated sequence; occurring in the course of regular custom or practice; normal; customary; usual.”¹ Manual labor and deeds of mercy are, in this sense, “ordinary” because they are a normal part of the rhythm of daily life. They are also “ordinary” in the sense of appearing to be plain, “of common quality”²; there often does not outwardly appear to be anything striking about them. In using the term “ordinary,” however, I am certainly *not* using it in any popular negative or depreciative sense, such as “of low quality” or “unimportant.”

¹ “ordinary, *adj.* and *adv.*,” *Oxford English Dictionary*.

² *Ibid.*

The term “ordinary works of daily life” can also be understood in light of the distinction between the terms “ordinary” and “extraordinary.” Manual labor and deeds of mercy are *ordinary* works for man because they are, in a way, natural to man. It is natural, usual, normal, or “ordinary” for man to labor for his food and to feed his family. In contrast, a special kind of grace from God is needed in order to pray; St. Paul writes that “the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words.”³ If “ordinary work” refers to manual labor and deeds of mercy, then pray is a kind of “extraordinary” work for man, going beyond (*extra*) the ordinary. Prayer is not opposed to man’s nature, but grace grants man to soar beyond nature’s limitations, allowing corporeal beings to commune with the Triune God.

I also use the term “ordinary works of daily life” with in the context of the ecclesial term “ordinary time.” The etymology of the English term “ordinary” originally comes from the classical Latin term *ordinarius*, “regular, orderly, customary, usual, arranged in regular lines or courses.” Yet *ordinarius* itself comes from the Latin term *ordo*,⁴ or “succession” or “order” and is related to *ordinalis* (as in ordinal numbers). Ordinary Time in the Church calendar is not time devoted to celebrating a specific aspect of the mystery of Christ,” as in Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter seasons. Instead, “especially on the Sundays, they are devoted to the mystery of Christ in all its aspects.”⁵ Ordinary is also time numbered and ordered around Christ. In this sense of “ordinary,” every ordinary work of daily life is ordered toward God. And just as St.

³ Romans 8:26, *Revised Standard Version, Catholic Version*.

⁴ “ordinary, *adj.* and *adv.*,” *Oxford English Dictionary*.

⁵ Congregation for Divine Worship, “General norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar.”

Benedict focuses on obedience in the monastic life in order to reshape and reorder the monk's desires, so the daily rhythm of life – monastic and layman alike-- helps reorder one's own desires to the end of the union of the soul with God.⁶

In *The Rule of St. Benedict, Our Daily Work*, and Walter Hilton, *opus* or work is not “just something one does,” but is essential to the central purpose of one's life:⁷ “God has sent man his time in order that he might serve Him, and to gather with good works his grace to attain to heaven.”⁸ This thesis will touch upon both aspects of this statement in relation to ordinary work. Manual labor is not good just for the things it produces, nor are deeds of mercy their tangible results. More than that, in the context of a life of prayer, the ordinary works of daily life are a way of serving God and a means of sanctifying one's soul.

First, ordinary work can be offered to God in loving service. The Hebrew concept of *avodah*, a term for both work and worship, can be seen in the use of the Latin term *opus* or the Middle English term *werke*. Second, ordinary work is good for man, serving

⁶ See especially Ch.5 of the *Rule*, “On Obedience.” Thanks to Dr. Ralph Wood and Dr. Ralph Nodes for their help

⁷ With special thanks to Dr. Jeffrey for his explanation of *opus*.

⁸ *Our Daily Work*, trans. Jeffrey, 237. This strongly resembles what St. Ignatius of Loyola will write less than two hundred years later for the Principle and Foundation in the first week of the *Spiritual Exercises*: “Man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul.” The *Baltimore Catechism* reads in the first lesson, “The End of Man”: “Q. Why did God make you? A. God made me to know Him, to love Him, and to serve Him in this world, and to be happy with Him forever in the next.”

as a remedy for *acedia* and helping to cultivate virtue. Finally, for these authors, manual labor and deeds of mercy are an integrated part of a life of prayer and service to God. Prayer overflows into all ordinary work of daily life, and deeds of mercy are a special way of serving the Lord in light of Matthew 25, other teachings of Christ, and the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ as found in St. Paul. Additionally, through its aid in the cultivation of virtue, ordinary work prepares one for deeper worship.

I initially selected the texts I will write about because I noticed a continuity of spiritual themes within them during my studies at Baylor University. All three texts have a central theme of the ordinary works of daily life and seem to approach them in a similar way. After I selected my texts, I realized that this selection works especially well because it focuses on just two wide-spaced periods of medieval history: early medieval Italy and fourteenth-century England. I hoped this large difference in time period would help me to have a broader picture of the role of ordinary work in medieval spirituality in general. I could also connect these two time periods by studying several available Middle English rules of St. Benedict for women. I will sometimes, in fact, refer to the Middle English rules when I find that it helps shed light on the translation of the *Rule* or on Benedictine thought. In addition, my selection of texts is helpful because very different audiences are addressed. St. Benedict's work is a rule for monastics, *Our Daily Work* is for the laity, and Walter Hilton writes for both audiences. This variety of selection enables one to see that the medieval spirituality of ordinary work is not confined to the monastic life alone.

Throughout this thesis, I will use the *Douay-Rheims* translation of the Bible when quoting Scripture in English because it is directly translated from the Latin Vulgate. Since the Benedictine writers, Walter Hilton, and probably the Yorkshire pastor would

have read the Scriptures in Latin, the *Douay-Rheims* best conveys in English how they would have received. To reflect this even more closely, I will sometimes quote Scriptures in Latin. When I need to reference to the Hebrew Old Testament, I will use the *King James Version* because of its ease of use with Strong's concordance. Most (but not all) of the time, I quote from the Latin *Rule*, the Middle English rules, and Walter Hilton using my own translations. When I quote another's translation, I will note it in the footnote.

So that the reader does not need to rely only on my translation, and for ease in reference to the original, I usually will provide the original text in a footnotes. Doing so will also enable the reader familiar with the language to get a sense of the style of the author. Walter Hilton especially has a wonderful pastoral style that might otherwise be missed in my translation. I chose to quote the translation in the body of my thesis and the original in footnotes, not visa versa for the ease of potential readers of my thesis who are not familiar with Latin or Middle English. When quoting from *Our Daily Work*, I will mostly use Dr. Jeffrey's translation into modern English. I find that *Our Daily Work* is more difficult Middle English to read than Walter Hilton's, mostly beyond what I was comfortable providing a translation for. I still reference to the Middle English in the footnotes.

I would like to give a special thank you to Dr. David Jeffrey, my teacher and thesis director. Thanks to your guidance, this thesis process has significantly shaped my understanding of the Christian vocation, and your example and counsel helps me to live it out. Thank you. Thank you, Dr. Nodes and Dr. Wood, for reading my thesis and giving your helpful input. And thank you to all my professors, to my family, friends, and church community; it is a blessing to work and worship with you every day. Thank you to the

monks and nuns, especially those (unnamed here) who have been a part of this thesis, who continue to offer your prayers for and hospitality to us. And though we have not met, I could not go without especially thanking St. Benedict, the Yorkshire pastor, and Walter Hilton.

CHAPTER ONE

The Daily Life of the *Servus Dei*

a. Introduction

Before exploring the role of the ordinary works of daily life in medieval spirituality, I think it would be helpful to first sketch out the place of manual labor and deeds of mercy in daily life. In this chapter, I will give a brief background of the *The Rule of St. Benedict*, Walter Hilton, and *Our Daily Work*, and then outline the rhythm of daily life lived according to these texts.

b. The Rule of St. Benedict

i. Brief Background

Benedict of Nursia, also known as St. Benedict, was born in Nursia, Italy around 480 B.C. and died in Monte Cassino, Italy, on March 21, 547 B.C.⁹ Called the father of Western monasticism, Benedict established twelve monasteries guided by his rule, known as *The Rule of St. Benedict*. He specifies that his rule is for cenobites, a “very strong kind”¹⁰ of monk who live “in a monastery serving under a rule and an abbot.”¹¹ His *Regula* is concerned with “regulating the life of a community of [lay] men who live and

⁹ Benedict XVI, “General Audience.”

¹⁰ Benedict, *The Rule of St. Benedict*, Ch.1 v.13. Trans. Bruce Vernerde, 19. *His ergo omissis, ad coenovitarum fortissimum genus disponendum, adiuvente Domino, veniamus*, 18.

¹¹ Benedict, *The Rule of St. Benedict*, Ch.1, v.2. Trans. Bruce Vernerde, 17. *Primum coenovitarum, hoc est monasteriale militans sub regula vel abbate*, 16.

work and pray and eat together”¹² in a monastery, seeking to grow in holiness and love for God through a life of intensified obedience, prayer, and the works of the ordinary life apart from the world. Yet this life is never set wholly apart from the world. Besides the monks needing to leave the monastery occasionally for necessary business, St. Benedict envisions interaction with the local community, as I will show in section iv.

ii. Common Prayer and Personal Prayer

The life of the monk is made up of a rhythm of common prayer, private prayer, and manual labor. Common prayer has the first priority in the life of the monk and is the highest form of his service to God. The Divine Office or *Opus Dei* was the common prayer of the monks. The Divine Office, or the plural “Divini Officii” as St. Benedict terms them, is “in ecclesiastical language, certain prayers to be recited at fixed hours of the day or night by priests, religious, or clerics, and in general by all those obliged by their vocation to fulfill this duty.”¹³ This custom of prayers at fixed hours began in Jewish tradition, was handed down to early Christians, and developed through St. Benedict’s day.¹⁴ By the fifth century, each hour included set sung or chanted psalms, (either uninterrupted (tract), in antiphons by two choirs, or with responses and versicles), lessons (readings from Scripture, both Old and New Testaments), and various prayers.¹⁵ This prayer of the Church would have also been central to the prayer life of St. Benedict Walter Hilton and probably the author of *Our Daily Work* as well.

¹² Ford, “St. Benedict of Nursia,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*.

¹³ Cabrol, “The Divine Office.”

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

During St. Benedict's time, monasteries were allowed some liberty as to the form of the Office,¹⁶ and St. Benedict spends much of the *Rule* setting forth how the Divine Office should be prayed. He specifies that the Benedictine monks were to pray eight hours total: seven day hours (Matins, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers, and Compline) and one night hour (Vigils). St. Benedict points to the Psalms for the basis of these eight hours. He quotes Psalm 118(119):164 as fulfilling the "sacred number seven" hours of prayer: *Septies in die laudem dixi tibi* or "Seven times a day I praised you."¹⁷ Similarly, the custom of Vigils fulfilled the exhortation, *Media nocte surgebam ad confitendum tibi* or "In the middle of the night I arose to confess to you" (Psalm 118[119]:62).¹⁸ Each hour began with the prayer *Deus, in adiutorium meum intende; Domine, ad adiuuandum me festina*,¹⁹ followed by the Gloria and a hymn,²⁰ and each hour was devoted to the praying of the Psalms. Depending on the hour, the monks would pray other prayers such as the *Kyrie* or *Te Deum*, hear readings from the Old and New Testaments, and sing canticles

¹⁶ See Cabrol, "Divine Office." Because the Divine Office had become more formalized and uniform throughout the Church, there is not as much regulation of it in some of the Middle English rules. The Northern Prose edition contains much regulation for the Divine Office because follows the Latin rule closely. In contrast, the Caxton Abstract refers to the distinct chapters of the *Rule* for reference to the praying of the Office and simply instructs that the nuns ought to pray the whole psalter every day of the year as did the Fathers (126). Similarly, except for instructions for the night offices in the winter, the Northern Verse only mentions, *Mor how þai sal serues do, / Nedes not her' to tel þam to; / Þai knaw þer salmes & ilka verse. / Þarfor þe rowle I wil reherce, / How þai sal do wirchep alway, / When þai to god sal sing or say*(79). Or "More how they shall services do / Needs not here to tell them to; / They know their psalms and each verse. / Therefore the rule I will rehearse / How they shall do worship always / When they to God shal sing or say." (126). While this version gives instruction for how the nuns should pray, there is no regulation of the ordering of the psalms and the like because the Divine Office is well known to the nuns. It is still the most important part of the day, shown by this familiarity as by the chapter on signaling the Divine Office (97).

¹⁷ Benedict, *The Rule of St. Benedict*, 78.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ This is the first verse of Psalm 69, traditionally prayed at the beginning of every hour of the office accompanied by the Sign of the Cross. See Holweck, "*Deus in Adjuvatorium Meum Intende.*"

²⁰ Benedict, *The Rule of St. Benedict*, 84.

from the Scriptures. St. Benedict gives very specific instructions as to the ordering of these hours. He does, however, stress that others might change the ordering of the psalms if his is displeasing to them.²¹ No matter the ordering of the Psalms, he emphasizes, the Benedictines must pray the entire psalter every week, with a cycle beginning on Sunday Vigils.²² The Divine Office, also called the *Opus Dei* in the *Rule of St. Benedict*, was prayed together by the monks in the oratory. It was to be brief and the monks should arise together.²³

The Divine Office or *Opus Dei* had the highest place in Benedictine life. Its importance can be seen in the way that the Latin *Rule* is written, the structure of the monastery, and the structure of the monk's day and night. First, about nineteen of 73 chapters of the *Rule* concern the praying of the Divine Office; he begins treating it in Chapter 8, followed by twelve more chapters on the subject. The structure and content in the *Rule* alone shows the importance of the Divine Office in Benedict life. So too does the function of the oratory. St. Benedict regulates that nothing else should be done in the oratory except pray, and nothing else should be stored there (except, presumably, books needed for prayer).²⁴ A special place set aside for prayer, among other things, indicates the importance of prayer. Moreover, the Divine Office was the most important activity in the monk's day, which can be seen in St. Benedict's regulation concerning the structure of daily life. Since its eight hours were fixed, everything else in daily life had to be structured around the Divine Office. St. Benedict regulates that the abbot must signal the

²¹ *Ibid.*, 84-87.

²² *Ibid.*, 86-89.

²³ *Ibid.*, 92.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 170.

times for prayer and that once heard, monks should immediately leave behind whatever they are working on and hasten to the oratory.²⁵ St. Benedict writes that *Ergo nihil opera Dei praeponatur*, or “Therefore nothing should be placed before the work of God.”²⁶ The Divine office had priority over every other work. Even those monks who were working too far away from the oratory to make it back in time St. Benedict instructs to pray wherever they are. Likewise, the monks who are traveling must pray the hours as far as they are able.²⁷ Even the night was punctuated by the Office of Vigils, and the monks would all immediately pray after rising in the morning.²⁸ The Divine Office has the first priority in the monk’s daily life.

The Divine office or *Opus Dei* is the highest form of service to God in Benedictine life and must be treated reverently as such. This can be seen through the very names of these prayers. Concerning the expression “divine office,” Fernand Cabrol notes that “this expression signifies etymologically a duty accomplished for God.”²⁹ Similarly, *opus Dei* implies a special kind of work or service which is for God. St. Benedict emphasizes that it must be prayed with utmost reverence. In Chapter 50, St. Benedict instructs that the monks who must pray on their own because of their work far from the monastery should *cum tremore divino flectentes genua*, should bend their knees with divine trembling. This echoes Psalm 2:11, *servite Domino in timore et exultate ei in*

²⁵ Ibid., 147.

²⁶ A memorable exhortation (Ch.43, ln.3).

²⁷ Ibid., 166.

²⁸ Ibid., 96.

²⁹ Cabrol, “Divine Office,” In *The Catholic Encyclopedia*.

tremore,³⁰ or “serve ye the Lord in fear and rejoice unto him with trembling.”³¹ As the monk is serving God by his prayers, his prayer should be accompanied by a holy trembling at the greatness of the task, and from the fear of the Lord. Similarly, the brothers should approach the oratory *cum gravitate*,³² with gravity or seriousness at the importance of their task. The monks should approach God with all humility, reverence, and purity of devotion.³³ The Divine Office or Work of God is the highest form of service to God in Benedictine life, and should be treated with appropriate reverence.

Personal prayer also was a major part of the monk’s day, especially *lectio divina*. In Chapter 48, “On Manual Labor,”³⁴ St. Benedict regulates that certain periods of the day should be set aside for *lectio divina*. From Easter until October, the monks were to read from the fourth hour to almost the sixth-hour, or about an hour and a half to two hours. From October until the beginning of Lent, they should read until the end of the second hour. During Lent, the monks should read from the morning until the end of the third hour. On Sundays, everyone was to be free in order to read, except those who were assigned necessary duties.

The private prayer of the monks is an internalization or extension of common prayer. *Lectio divina* allows monk to pray and internalize the Scripture proclaimed in Mass and the whole Divine Office, making it a part of his *memoria*. In *lectio divina*, *divina* refers to the subject of the study, Sacred Scripture. *Lectio* itself means “reading” or

³⁰ Psalm 2:11, *Biblia Sacra Vulgata: Editio Quinta*.

³¹ Psalm 2:11, *Douay-Rheims*.

³² Benedict, *Rule of St. Benedict*, 146.

³³ *Ibid.*, 92. This passage is referring to both common and private prayer.

³⁴ Benedict, *Rule of St. Benedict*, 161-163.

“study,”³⁵ but it is much more than this. The reading of the text consisted of the first step in *lectio divina*, but *meditatio* or meditation is the “activity which, in each individual reader, must succeed *lectio* in order to make it profitable.”³⁶ *Meditatio* is

a repeated mastication of the divine words is sometimes described by use of the theme of spiritual nutrition. In this case the vocabulary is borrowed from eating, from digestion, and from the particular form of digestion belonging to ruminants. For this reason, reading and meditation are sometimes described by the very expressive word *ruminatio*.³⁷

Meditation is included in St. Benedict’s understanding of *lectio divina*: on Sundays, he writes that everyone should be free for reading, except those unwilling *legere aut meditare*.³⁸ *Lectio divina* includes reading and meditation. As Dom Leclercq put it simply, “a *lectio divina* is a prayerful reading”³⁹ It is a reading “done by two people, with God, a heart-to-heart message with him. Even more, it is reading that bears a love message for me from the *God who seeks me* (one of Bernard’s favorite expressions).”⁴⁰ (I will touch more on *lectio divina* in Chapter Three).

This message is both communal and personal. As Archbishop Magrassi explains, “...all personal reading of the sacred text finds its center in liturgical hearing—as preparation for, and as its continuation.”⁴¹ By praying the Scriptures privately, the monks could internalize the Scripture readings that they would hear proclaimed in common

³⁵ Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 202.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, 73.

³⁸ Benedict, *Rule of St. Benedict*, 162.

³⁹ Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, 73.

⁴⁰ Magrassi, *Praying the Bible: An Introduction to Lectio Divina*, 19.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

celebration. This would have been internalized in his *memoria*, his memory. The medieval concept of holding something in memory was far more than rote memorization. St.

Augustine explains to Francesco Petrarch:

Whenever you read a book and meet with any wholesome maxims by which you feel your soul stirred or enthralled, . . . make a point of learning them by heart and make them quite familiar by meditating on them.⁴²

Through *lectio divina*, the monks were able to “hide the fruits” of reading “in the recesses of memory,” to make the Scriptures “one’s own.”⁴³ Or, as St. Pope Gregory the Great puts it, “We ought to transform what we read within our very selves.”⁴⁴ In the *lectio divina* the monk internalized in his *memoria* the Scriptures proclaimed to the whole Church.

A monk also could spend time in private prayer in the oratory, allowing him to extend the prayers of praise, contrition, thanksgiving, and petition of the Divine Office. St. Benedict writes, “If someone by chance wishes for himself to pray privately, he should simply enter and pray, not in clamoring voice but in tears and in the intention of the heart.”⁴⁵ St. Benedict instructs that monks should be silent in the oratory so as not to hinder anyone’s private prayer. Here he is describing another kind of prayer besides *lectio divina* which might include meditation, mental prayer, prayers of contrition, or petitionary prayer. St. Benedict describes petitionary prayer in Chapter 20: “If when we wish to suggest something to powerful men, we do not presume unless with humility and

⁴² In *The Book of Memory*, 163 (Carruthers).

⁴³ Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 204.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 205.

⁴⁵ *si aliter vult sibi forte secretius orare, simpliciter intret et oret, non in clamosa voce sed in lacrimis et intentione cordis...* (Benedict, *Rule of St. Benedict*, Ch.52, v.4).

reverence, how much more should we petition the Lord God of all with all humility and pure devotion.”⁴⁶ This sort of private prayer should be simple:

And let us know that we are not understood in loquaciousness but in purity of heart and compunction of tears. And therefore prayer ought to be brief and pure, unless by chance it is extended from the influence of inspiration of divine grace.⁴⁷

(I will touch again on the brevity of personal prayer in Chapter Four). St. Benedict has described the Divine Office, *lectio divina*, and now here a third kind of private prayer. In the two instances where St. Benedict discusses such private prayer, the Divine Office is also mentioned. For example, after the *Opus Dei* is finished, monks may choose to stay in the oratory and pray.⁴⁸ Likewise, he discusses the brevity of private prayer and common prayer in the same section, showing their essentially similar nature.⁴⁹ This private prayer allowed the monk to extend the praise and petition of common prayer.

iii. Manual Labor

St. Benedict also regulates that the monk’s ordinary day be made up with sizable periods of manual labor.⁵⁰ Most of his instructions on manual labor are found in Chapter

⁴⁶ *Si cum hominibus potentibus volumes aliqua suggerere, non praesumimus nisi cum humilitate et reverentia, quanto magis Domino Deo universorum cum omni humilitate et puritatis devotione supplicandum est* (Ibid., Ch.20, v.1).

⁴⁷ *Et non in multiloquio sed in puritate cordis et conpunctione lacrimarum nos exaudiri sciamus. Et ideo brevis debet esse et pura oratio, nisi forte ex affect inspirationis divinae gratiae protendatur.* (Ibid., Ch.20, v.4).

⁴⁸ Ibid., 170-171.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 92-93.

⁵⁰ Sadly, over the centuries it became rare for monks to do manual labor . On p. 319 John Moorman notes that “Gradually...this manualwork was allowed to disappear from the monks’ time-table. Under the monastic revival in this country in the tenth century very little heavy agricultural work was done by the monks, and by the year 1200 it had become ‘a thing of the llegendary past’(Knowles, *Monastic Order*, p. 687). This change occurred in part because of the flourishing of the monasteries and the various skills excercised inside; business often became prosperous. Additionally, monasteries were receiving gifts

48, *De opere manuum cotidiano* or “On daily manual labor.”⁵¹ In this chapter, he writes that from Easter until October there should be two periods of manual labor in the monk’s day. The monks should begin their manual labor after the hour of Prime, which was about six a.m. or the beginning of the day,⁵² and work until nearly the fourth hour⁵³ or about ten a.m. So, one can count about three hours of manual labor, although this is a rough estimate. The second period begins after None, which was normally about three p.m. but said a little early at this time of year.⁵⁴ This work was to continue until Vespers, sometime between four and six depending on the season, probably on the later end in these summer months.⁵⁵ So, one can count about two to three hours of manual labor. Total, the monks had five to six hours of manual labor during these months, for six days a week.⁵⁶ From October 1 until the start of Lent, the monks were to do manual labor from after Terce,

from those in powerful positions, and monasteries found themselves as feudal lords by accident, with layman who would do the necessary manual labor. I hope to show in this chapter that monasteries in which manual labor was hardly done were not reflecting the instructions of Cassian and St. Benedict. Today, many Benedictine communities including the Abbey of St. Walburga in Colorado regularly perform manual labor such as farmwork and household duties. The Clear Creek monks of Our Lady of Clear Creek Abbey even have a time in the *horarium* specified as “Manual Labor” (“Horarium”).

⁵¹ *The Rule of St. Benedict*, Ch.48.

⁵² Cabrol, “Prime” and “None.” Lauds, in contrast, was at sunrise (“Lauds.”)

⁵³ *The Rule of St. Benedict*, Ch.48.

⁵⁴ St. Benedict mentions that during this time of the year None should be said a little early, *mediante octava hora* (half-past the eighth hour) (*Rule of St. Benedict*, Ch.48.6). Fernand Cabrol writes that None was usually about 3 p.m (“None.”)

⁵⁵ St. Benedict specifies in Chapter 41 that Vespers, at least during Lent, should be prayed while it is still light so that there would be no need for lamps, and early enough that the monks can eat dinner also while it is still daylight. (*The Rule of St. Benedict*, Ch.41.6-9). Cabrol Fernard in the article “Vespers” writes that Vespers was prayed sometime between the tenth hour and the twelfth, or about four to six p.m., depending on the season. While before the sixth century Vespers was the evening hour, now in the *Rule of St. Benedict* it is about sunset hour (in *Catholic Encyclopedia*).

⁵⁶ One can arrive at this number by counting. Steven John Lichtman in “The Body and Labor” says that it was a minimum of five hours to six hours. Sundays were a day of rest.

which was about nine a.m.⁵⁷, until None.⁵⁸ This is about five hours of work.⁵⁹ St. Benedict in his *Rule* clearly requires that a good portion of the monk's day should be spent in manual labor.

Manual labor is an integral part of Benedictine life, and this is substantiated by the fact that fourteenth century Middle English rules for nuns also regulate periods for manual labor. Similar to the Latin *Rule*, the Northern Verse version regulates that the nuns should do manual labor from Prime until the third hour and again from after the ninth hour until the evening.⁶⁰ The Northern Prose also sets out specific hours for manual labor. The Caxton Abstract only contains the explanation that: "wherefore lyke as the covent ben occupied certeyn howres aboute the service of god / soo certeyn other howres ben thei occupied in redyng and studying of heavenly thynges / and in laboures wyth theyr body...".⁶¹ Although certain hours are not designated here, the *Rule* is clear that just as there are designated hours for prayer, so there should be designated hours for bodily labor. St. Benedict's regulation that manual labor be an everyday activity is passed down through fourteenth-century English tradition through the Middle English rules for nuns, whether or not these ideals were actually practiced.

⁵⁷ Cabrol, "Prime."

⁵⁸ *The Rule of St. Benedict*, Ch.48

⁵⁹ "In this second section of the Chapter about Daily Manual Labor, we see about 5 hours of work, remembering that the hours in Saint Benedict's time are not counted as 60 minutes but during these days of winter would be a bit shorter." Abbott Lawrence, OSB ("Chapter 48: The Daily Manual Labor.")

⁶⁰ *Rule of St. Benet*, 99.

⁶¹ *Rule of St. Benet*, 132.

The early Benedictine monastery was “an independent family, self-contained, autonomous, managing its own affairs.”⁶² Each community would have sought to support itself financially, following the example of St. Paul and other Church fathers and apostles who labored for their own bread. St. Benedict makes this clear when he says that *veri monachi sunt si labore manuum suarum vivunt sicut et patres nostri et apostoli*,⁶³ or “they are true monks if they live by the labor of their own hands just as our fathers and the apostles.” Thus monks must do various kinds of manual labor necessary to support the community. In his *Rule*, St. Benedict does not limit the manual labor of the monks only to certain kinds, instead writing that the monks should do whatever labor is necessary, or *laborent quod necessarium fuerit and quod faciendum est*.⁶⁴ The monks should be engaged in whatever manual labor the community needs to be done, not only to support the monastery financially, but also like any household, to keep it in good running order.

St. Benedict gives a kind of list of the kinds of manual labors in Chapter 46, where he discusses faults that may be *committed in coquina, in cellario, in ministerio, in pistrino, in horto, in arte aliqua, laborat*⁶⁵ or while working in the kitchen, in the cellar, in serving, in the bakery, in the garden, or in any craft. St. Benedict writes about some specific kinds of labor throughout the *Rule*. In Chapter 48 he firmly says that the monks must do harvesting work if it is needed.⁶⁶ (St. Gregory the Great records occasions when

⁶² Alston, “The Benedictine Order.”

⁶³ *The Rule of St. Benedict*, Ch.48. v 8.

⁶⁴ *Rule of St. Benedict*, Ch. 48, v. 6.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, Ch.46, ln.1

⁶⁶ *The Rule of St. Benedict*, Ch.48, v.7.

the whole community, let by the abbot, worked in the fields.⁶⁷) Additionally, since St. Benedict regulates that two monks per year be assigned to the guest kitchen, one can assume that certain monks were assigned kitchen duty for the whole community.⁶⁸ St. Benedict also allows for the work artisans, or the manual labor of various crafts.⁶⁹ Doubtless manual labor would have also included other ordinary housework such as cleaning.

iv. Deeds of Mercy

Because of a vow of stability, and because of the monastic nature of their life, Benedictine monks and nuns traditionally do not have an apostolate which would bring them to do deeds of mercy outside the monastery. Still, as E.F. Morrison writes in his commentary on the *Rule of St. Basil*,

In his material requirements the monk had not only himself to consider. It was natural that from time to time he should have visitors, while the poor would be sure to come to him for help in their necessities. Hence we find that hospitality and charity are questions to which early monastic writers gave considerable attention.⁷⁰

St. Benedict was no exception to this tradition in early monastic writings; in fact, St. Benedict conveys that he was influenced by St Basil's *Rule*.⁷¹ Deeds of mercy are an integral part of Benedictine tradition through hospitality, as well as aiding the poor, caring for the sick, selling the fruits of manual labor, and, for the abbot, instructing the

⁶⁷ Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England*, 466.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 60-61.

⁷⁰ Morrison, *St. Basil and His Rule*, 120.

⁷¹ Benedict, *Rule of St. Benedict*, Ch.73, v.5.

ignorant.

Deeds of mercy were also an ordinary part of Benedictine life, especially through the ministry of hospitality, both in “putting up” guests and helping the needy who came to them. The importance of hospitality in Benedictine life is seen by the fact that a whole chapter is dedicated as *De Hospitibus Suscipiendis*, or “On the Reception of Guests.”⁷² Here St. Benedict describes the procedures for welcoming a guest, especially fellow monks, pilgrims, and the poor. This was so common an occurrence that Benedict says that two monks should be assigned to work in a guest kitchen that is separate from the kitchen of the monks. Benedict must have foreseen a busy kitchen, for he says that these two monks should receive help from other monks when needed. Even more significantly, this guest kitchen meant that the monastery itself was structured around offering hospitality.⁷³ The Benedictines ministered through hospitality in part by offering a place of lodging and nourishment during the stay.

Benedictines also performed deeds of mercy by feeding the hungry, assisting the poor and needy who came to them, and caring for sick brethren. This could be seen as an extension of Benedictine hospitality; Morison points out that Christ in Luke 14:13, “has shown us that the highest form of hospitality is to ‘bid the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind.’”⁷⁴ The Benedictines not only provided a place to stay and nourishment for the guests, but also aided the poor and needy who came to them. The porter is prepared to

⁷² Benedict, *The Rule of St. Benedict*, 172-173.

⁷³ Herbert Thurston keenly notes this in “Hospitality,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*.

⁷⁴ Morison, *St. Basil and His Rule*, 122. “But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind...” Luke 14:13, *Douay-Rheims*.

answer when a poor person knocks on their door,⁷⁵ and St. Benedict gives instructions for the cellarer, the monk in charge of the food supplies, to give special care towards the poor who came to ask for help.⁷⁶ Although this is less obviously a deed of mercy, the monks also served the larger community by selling the work of artisans for a little lower than the normal price.⁷⁷ This can be seen as a way of helping the poor, who will be better able to buy what they need. Feeding the hungry and caring for the poor was another deed of mercy that was an ordinary part of Benedictine life. St. Benedict also writes about deeds of mercy shown to fellow monks and the children living in the community by caring for the sick and by teaching. St. Benedict regulates the treatment of sick brothers in Chapter 36, *De Infirmis Fratribus*. The monastic family would care for those monks who were ill by giving them a separate room and a special server.⁷⁸ These are a few of the other kinds of deeds of mercy in Benedictine life.⁷⁹

In Benedictine life, deeds of mercy are often the same as the monk's daily manual labor. First, manual labor provides the physical goods necessary for deeds of mercy. Cassian explains that the monks in Egypt not only do manual labor to support themselves, but also to "refresh pilgrims and brethren who come to visit them, "to...collect an enormous store of provisions and food, and distribute it in the parts of

⁷⁵ Benedict, *The Rule of St. Benedict*, 215.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 185.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 131.

⁷⁹ Additionally, the abbot performs deeds of mercy by instructing and guiding the monks (*Rule of St. Benedict*, 20-27). In this paper I have chosen to confine my treatment of deeds of mercy to the life of the ordinary monk. Additionally, the children who were entrusted to the monastery would have needed to be educated, which would be another deed of mercy. Since St. Benedict does not treat the education of the youth in his *Rule*, however, I will not discuss it here.

Libya which suffer from famine and barrenness,” and to give food to those “also in the cities, to those who are pining away in the squalor of prison.”⁸⁰ The benefit of manual labor is not only to sustain the monastery, but also to offer hospitality and give food to the needy. St. Benedict expresses this idea in his *Rule* by assigning two brothers each year to a kitchen for guests, and explaining that all monks must help in the guest kitchen in order to provide food for the guests.⁸¹ Through the manual work of artisans, the monks can offer various goods to the people at a lower price than usual as another kind of deed of mercy.⁸² A benefit of manual labor is that it makes deeds of mercy possible. By extension, a manual labor done with the intention of giving to others could be understood as a deed of mercy in itself. In a life of community, where no one has any personal possessions and all things are held in common, each works to support the other. In such a community most if not all of the manual labor done in the monastery can be seen as a deed of mercy.

c. *Our Daily Work*

Our Daily Work, “while once associated with Richard Rolle of Hampole, was more probably written by an unknown Yorkshire pastor of the mid-fourteenth century”⁸³ in England. He probably received a university education at Oxford or Cambridge. This can be seen through the rhetorical quality of the text; it begins by succinctly listing three things necessary for the Christian life and then treating each

⁸⁰ Trans. Gibson. Cassian, *Institutes (Book X)*.

⁸¹ *The Rule of St. Benedict*, Ch.53, ln.17-18.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 65.

⁸³ Jeffrey, *English Spirituality in the Age of Wyclif*, 236.

individually, and this style continues throughout. He also demonstrates familiarity with the Scriptures and authors such as Seneca, St. Gregory, and St. Bernard⁸⁴. It appears to be a pastoral work, concerned with the “ideal that everything in our daily life should be offered up to God as a part of grateful stewardship.”⁸⁵

Like the *Rule of St. Benedict*, *Our Daily Work* is not written for the audience of hermits.⁸⁶ It could be helpful for those living the contemplative life. He explains that all Christians in general should never fail in his prayers, and that especially men and women in religious vocations, the clergy have an obligation to pray. Indeed, the whole world works in order to support them so “that they may serve God with rest and with their holy beads” and pray for all mankind. Maidens and widows who have vowed chastity also have a special obligation to pray over other people. He then counsels that he who will render prayer to God should “offir it to god with a free wil & louand [loving] hert.”⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Thanks to Dr. Jeffrey.

⁸⁵ Jeffrey, *English Spirituality in the Age of Wyclif*, 236.

⁸⁶ Rolle, *English prose works of Richard Rolle : a selection*, 141. “For-þi hali men bifore þis tyme þat knew þir lettyns: þai fled þe werld with all þe vanitees / as it had bien cursid, for þaim thoght þat þai might noght lede rightwise life þerin;& þerfore þai went in to wildernesse / whare þai trowid to serue god to paie. For-þi sais Seneke: *Auarior redeo & crudelior & inhumanior: quia inter homines fui.*” Trans. Jeffrey, 242. Here, the anonymous pastor depicts eremitic life as primarily an escape. This is vastly different from the portrait of eremitic life described by St. Benedict. He writes concerning anchorites, or hermits: *horum qui non conversationis fervore novicio sed monasterii probatione diuturna, qui didicerunt contra diabolum multorum solacio iam docti pugnare. Et bene extructi fraterna ex acie ad singularem pugnam heremi, securi iam sine consolatione alterius, sola manu vel brachio contra vitia carnis vel cogitationum, Deo axiliante, pugnare sufficiunt* (Ch.1, v.3-5). Bernarde translates: “Those no longer fresh in the fervor of monastic life but long tested in the monastery, who have learned by now schooled with the help of many, to fight against the Devil. Well trained among a band of brothers for single combat int eh dsert, by now confident even without another’s encouragement, they are ready, with God’s help, to fight the vices of body and mind with hand and arm alone”(17). Here, eremitic life is seen as a step after cenobitic life which is undertraken in order to more intensely fight against the vices and build virtues, not as an escape from the occasions of sin. For more, see my paper “From Cenobitic to Eremetic Life: Cultivating Virtue in the Rule of St. Benedict.”

⁸⁷ Rolle, *English prose works of Richard Rolle : a selection*, 141. “For-þi bihoues man eauer to prai & neuer fail....And nameli men of religion are halden to worschip god with praier, & men of hali kirke / for þai life bi almes & tendis—for al þe werld trauails to bring þaim to hand þat þaim nedis, so þat þai mai

Since he begins his advice about prayer after describing vocations to contemplative life, his work may be partially applicable for monastics.

His work is also partly applicable to all those living religious life or the clergy. He sets out a program of morning and evening prayers, referring to “matyns” and “compline.” He sets out that his audience should begin his morning prayers with the Latin prayers Psalm 50:17(Vulgate), the *Deus in adiutorium*, and the *Gloria Patria*, bowing. These are the opening prayers of the Office. He gives a translation and explanation of these prayers which the Christian can say in his heart.⁸⁸ In doing this he may be helping those whose vocation entails praying part of the Office every day to pray better.

The intended audience, however, is mostly those living the mixed life who are not part of a religious order; this text is one of lay spirituality. This could include virgins and widows who have privately vowed chastity, as previously mentioned, who live in world, as well as other laity living the mixed life. This is first seen in his advising that his reader pray his morning prayers in the Chapel if possible. If not, he should say them in his bedroom.⁸⁹ Those living in a religious community would generally have no difficulty

serue god with rest & with þaire hali bedis make saghtlyng bitwix god & man. And als wa maydens & wydows: þat has awowid chaste; all þir bifore oper are halden to prai. / He þat wil pai god with praier: offir it to god with a free wil & louand hert...”

⁸⁸ “After: bigyn þi matyns; bot first: crosse þi þi lippis & sai: Domine, labia mea aperies, þat is: lorde / oppen mi lippis: þat al night has bien stoken fra louyng of þe; & I mai nocht oppyn þaim: bot þou me help. And þen sai: Deus in adiutorium; with þis wordes: zette oute þi herte bifore god / & sai: lord / als mi domesman / bifore þe I stand: þou wreke me of mi faas: þat lettis me to serue þe, & þai assaile me keneli, so þat I be sone ouer-comen: bot þou me help. And at Gloria patri: bowe doune & sai with þi hert: lord, of þi blissyng I biseke þe” (Rolle, *English prose works of Richard Rolle : a selection*, 139).

⁸⁹ “When þou has þus done: wende to þe kirk or oratori; & if þou mai wyn to nane: þi chambre make þi kirk” (Rolle, *English prose works of Richard Rolle : a selection*, 145).

saying their prayers in a church, and thus they are not his primary audience. He also envisions a life in community, since he exhorts that the reader live as to be a witness to all those who dwell with him.⁹⁰ Most importantly for understanding the pattern of life sketched out by the pastor, he is writing for those who have necessary business to do in the world and gives advice concerning fulfilling such duties. These could include a wide range of duties, whatever his job may be. His day may also include deeds of mercy. The model he gives for a rhythm of life is St. Paul, who

from the first hour of the day until the fifth he worked with his hands to win his food; from the fifth to the tenth he preached to the people; from the tenth until evening he served the poor and pilgrims with such goods as he had; by nightfall he was at prayer, and thus he spent his time.⁹¹

He is to be diligent in his daily work and daily prayers, he is to fulfill them not on strict schedule, but with a freedom of spirit. His prayers should include the Office, as I have mentioned, as well as prayers for the souls in purgatory, the whole Church, and meditation on Christ's Passion.

Interestingly, the pastor also spends a lengthy portion discussing how to go about traveling, as if he expects his reader to do a fair amount of traveling. This can be taken into account in sketching out the life he envisions his readers to be living.

d. Walter Hilton

⁹⁰ Rolle, *English prose works of Richard Rolle : a selection*, 156.

⁹¹ Trans. Jeffrey, 239. "And als þe appostill oþer mene redis, hym-selfe did in dede, for as þir clerkes by saynt Paule sayse, euer he was styrrande in sum gude werkes: for fra þe fyrste houre of þe daye vn-to þe fyfte he trauelde with his hende to wyne his fode, & fra þe fyfte houre vn-to þe tende houre to þe folke he prechede, and fro none till euene he seruede to þe pure [&] pilgrymes with slyke [gude] als he hade, also by nyghte was he prayande: & thus spendid he his tyme" (Rolle, *English prose works of Richard Rolle : a selection*, 313).

Walter Hilton was born around 1330 and died in 1396.⁹² It is suggested that he began his religious life as a solitary or recluse.⁹³ Some connect him to Carthusians.⁹⁴ Even if this is not the case, it is certain that he became an Augustinian canon in Nottinghamshire, England, living under community rule.⁹⁵ He leaves behind almost no autobiographical information in his work; as David Jeffrey notes, “his life was...one of deliberate self-effacement, a hidden life of prayer.”⁹⁶ Walter, “as his writings make clear,...was preeminently thinking about Jesus, after that about his fellow Christians, and hardly ever about himself.”⁹⁷ The only discussion he gives about his own spiritual experiences is a humble mention that he is not personally experienced in higher forms of contemplation which he describes in *The Scale*. While Walter wrote in both Latin and Middle English, I have chosen to work with two Middle English texts.

The Scale [Ladder] of *Perfection* is “a practical guide to various states and levels of spiritual life...communicating the progress of spiritual life.”⁹⁸ The first book was written around 1380⁹⁹ was written with a cloistered nun in mind. He wrote book II years

⁹² Gardner, "Walter Hilton," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*.

⁹³ “Whether or not, as been variously suggested, Walter Hilton began his own religious life as a recluse, later moving from solitary life to his place with the Augustinian canons at Thurganton, the hypothesis accords with the concerns of his small but rich body of writing,” (Jeffrey, *English Spirituality in the Age of Wyclif*, 21). Dr. Jeffrey notes that this hypothesis can be found in *The Hermits and Achorites of England* (London: Methuen, 1914), 177 and in *Walter Hilton’s Directions to Contemplatives* (Rome: Pontifica Univ. Gregoriana, 1962), 6-7.

⁹⁴ Gardner, "Walter Hilton," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Jeffrey, *Spirituality in the Age of Wyclif*, 22.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 93.

later, sometime before his death “as a kind of sequel.”¹⁰⁰ The rhythm of life lived according to this text, then, is one similar to that outlined in the Benedictine section and to his own life as an Augustinian canon.

Although it is written especially for a cloistered nun, *The Scale* soon became popular among the laity as well as religious. Walter may have even have had a lay audience on his mind in the second book, where he has some discussion of the lay vocation. In this case the audience would be something like that of *Our Daily Work*, laity living a mixed life.

The *Epistle on the Mixed Life* is a series of two letters (c. 1370) written to a particular layman. From the letters, the layman appears to be a head of an estate. Walter refers to the children, servants, and tenants living under his care.¹⁰¹ There is no mention made of a spouse, so he may or may not have a wife still living. Walter also implies that the layman has a large involvement in the community at large when he says that fellow Christians other than his children and servants may come to him in their needs; Walter also mentions his neighbors.¹⁰² One also gathers from the letter that layman had a desire to become a contemplative, leaving his current state of life.¹⁰³ Hilton explains why he should not abandon his responsibilities as a head of an estate; doing so would be opposed to charity. More than that, he encourages the layman in his particular vocation, telling

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 93.

¹⁰¹ Hilton, *Mixed Life*, p. 10, 26 and 34.

¹⁰² Ibid., 10 and 34.

¹⁰³ “Y knowe weel the desire of þyn herte, þat þou zernest gretli to serue oure lord bi spiritual occupatioun al holli, wiþoute lettynge or trobolyng[e] o[f] wordeli bisynesse, þat þou myztest come bi grace to more knowyng[e] and goosteli feelyng[e] of God and of goostli þynges” (Hilton, *Mixed Life*, p.7).

him that God has put him in his current state of life so that the may serve other men.¹⁰⁴

Hilton also gives encouragement and practical advise for how to grow in the spiritual life while living an ordinary life in world.

Hilton advises that the layman live the *medeled* or mixed life, following the example of Christ.¹⁰⁵ Just as Christ both did deeds of mercy and spent times alone in prayer to His father, so should he one time give himself “to business of worldly things at reasonable need, and to the works of active life in profit of the fellow Christians here that you have care of,” and another time give himself “wholly to devotion and to contemplation in prayers and meditation.”¹⁰⁶ His duties of the active life would include a wide variety according to the responsibility of head of estate, such as raising his children, guiding servants and attending to their needs, caring for tenants, encouraging others, involving himself in necessary financial matters, etc.

Hilton offers suggestions for establishing a life of prayer, but does not set out a strict discipline of prayer for the layman. Hilton does emphasize the importance of saying at least brief prayers, or at least thinking a good thought immediately upon rising. This will draw him out of vain thoughts and to quicken his heart towards God before thoughts of one’s daily duties begin to distract.¹⁰⁷ He gives examples of prayers and meditations he could do, saying that he should use whichever works best for him—helping him feel

¹⁰⁴ “For it semeþ to me, siþen he haþ put þee in þat staat for to traueile and serue opere men, þat it is his wil þat þou schuldest fullfille it on þi miȝt” (Hilton, *Mixed Life*, 28).

¹⁰⁵ Hilton, *Mixed Life*, 28.

¹⁰⁶ “þis medeled liyf schewed oure lord [in himsilf] to ensample of alle oper that haþ taken þe [staat and þe] charge of þis medeled liyf, þat thei schulde oon tyme zeue hem to bisynesse of worldi þynges at resonable neede, and to þe werkes of actif liyf in profite of here euen-Cristene whiche þei haue cure of, and an oper tyme zeue hem hooli to deuocion and to contemplacion in praieres and in meditacioun” (Hilton, *Mixed Life*, 28).

¹⁰⁷ Hilton, *Mixed Life*, 35.

the most spiritual savor and rest—at a particular time.¹⁰⁸ They include examination of conscience and acts of contrition, prayers for mercy for his fellow Christians. They also include meditations on the life of Christ, the virtues, the examples of Mary, of all the saints, and especially of Christ, all God’s works, the mercy God has shown him and all sinners, the weaknesses of this life and the joys of Heaven.¹⁰⁹

In the *Epistle*, like in *Our Daily Work*, one’s life is to be lived with a freedom of spirit. The layman is to do his responsibilities as a head of estate, directing those under him and attending to their needs. After his duties he can go by himself and offer up his good works to God. He must always eventually leave his prayers to help his fellow Christians after a reasonable time.¹¹⁰ Sometimes his duties will call him away from his prayers, such as if his children, servants, and others interrupt him because they need something or have a reasonable request. If so he must not be angry with the one who needs his help, nor fearful that God will be angry with him; he must instead fulfill the command to “go do your debt and your service to your fellow-Christian as readily as Our Lord himself bade you do so, and suffer meekly for His love.”¹¹¹

CHAPTER TWO

¹⁰⁸ “*per aren mani maner þ[enk]inges; which aren best to þee can I not seie, but I hope þat þat þouzt bi which þou feelist [most] sauour and most reste for þe tyme is best for þee*”(Ibid., 51).

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 51-62.

¹¹⁰ Hilton, *Mixed Life*, 64.

¹¹¹ “*perfore, zif þou be putte fro [þi] reste in deuocioun whan þou were leuest be stille þerat, eiþer [bi] children or þi seruauntes, or bi ony of þyn euene-Cristene for here profite or ese of [here] heertes skilfulli asked, be not angri wiþ hem, ne heuy, ne dredefulle as zif God wolde bee wroþ wiþ þee þat þou leuest him for ony oþer þynge, for it is not soþ. Leue of lizteli þi deuocioun, wheþir it be in *praiere* or in *meditacioun*, and goo doo þi dette and þi seruce to þyne euene-Cristene as redili as oure lord him silf badde þe doo so, and suffre mekeli for his loue, wiþouten *grucching* if þou may, [and] wiþoute disese and trobelynge of þin herte bi cause of medelynge of sicke bisynesse*”(Ibid., 35).

Opus

a. Introduction

In the texts I have chosen, *opus* is not just work that one does, but is connected to the purpose of man's life.¹¹² St. Benedict, Walter Hilton, and the anonymous author of *Our Daily Work* all convey a connection between prayer and work which is similar to the Hebrew term *avodah*; the *opus* of prayer, manual labor, and deeds of mercy are opportunities for man to love and serve God. *Avodah* means both work and worship and is closely tied to the identity of the faithful Jew as an *eved Adonai*, or servant of the Lord. Christianity inherited the rich understanding of *eved Adonai* and *avodah*, and these concepts can be seen in the *Rule of St. Benedict*. Although not as explicit, the concept of *avodah* can also be found in the writings of Walter Hilton and in *Our Daily Work* through the term *werk*. In this chapter, I will first examine the meaning of *eved Adonai* and its significance in the Hebrew Scriptures and the concept of *avodah* before moving on to the connections in the *Rule* and the Middle English texts.

b. Eved Adonai and Avodah in Jewish Tradition

To begin, the identification of the Jew as an *eved Adonai* (עֶבֶד אֲדֹנָי),¹¹³ a servant of the Lord, is central to the Old Testament and therefore at the heart of Jewish spirituality. For example, Abraham and Moses are called servants of the Lord by God in the books of Genesis and Joshua. The author of Genesis records the Lord saying to Isaac,

¹¹² Ford, "St. Benedict of Nursia."

¹¹³ Hebrew characters taken from "Work and Worship." *Eved* can also be transliterated as *ebed*, as it is in Strong's dictionary.

“I [am] with thee, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed for my *servant* Abraham’s sake.”¹¹⁴ In the first line of the Book of Joshua, Moses is also called an *eved*: “Now after the death of Moses the *servant* of the LORD, it came to pass that the LORD spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses’ minister, saying, ‘Moses my *servant* is dead...’¹¹⁵ Later Samuel, as instructed by the priest Eli, says, “Speak, Lord, for thy *servant* heareth.”¹¹⁶ David, too, is called a *servant* of the Lord in Psalm 17:1¹¹⁷ and other psalms, as I explore in section c; the psalms were a central pray for the Jewish people. Additionally, in the Old Testament, not only specific patriarchs such as Moses and David but also the whole people of Israel are identified as God’s servant, as seen in this passage of Isaiah:

But thou, Israel, [art] my *servant*, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend. [Thou] whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called thee from the chief men thereof, and said unto thee, Thou [art] my *servant*; I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away.¹¹⁸

The first Jacob, who was renamed Israel, was an *eved Adonai*; now here, the whole of the Jewish people is identified as Israel and as God’s servant. By extension, each individual of the Jewish people, not just its most important figures, is understood to be an *eved Adonai*. This is reflected later in the prayer of Simeon, a Jewish priest, in the Gospel of Luke: “Now thou dost dismiss thy *servant*, O Lord, according to thy word in peace...”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ Genesis 26:24, *King James Version*, Blue Letter Bible, "Dictionary and Word Search for `ebed (*Strong's* 5650)."

¹¹⁵ Joshua 1:1, *Ibid*.

¹¹⁶ 1 Samuel 3:10, *Ibid*.

¹¹⁷ “[To the chief Musician , [A Psalm] of David, the *servant* of the LORD, who spake unto the LORD the words of this song.” Psalm 18:1, *Ibid*.

¹¹⁸ Isaiah 41:8-9, *Ibid*.

¹¹⁹ Luke 2:29, *Douay-Rheims*.

as well as the Virgin Mary's words, "Behold the *handmaid* of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word."¹²⁰ Both individuals and the Jewish people as a whole are understood to be servants of the Lord.

The Jewish understanding of the faithful one as an *eved Adonai* is closely related to the terms *avodah*, both linguistically and as spiritual themes.¹²¹ The root of both these terms is the Hebrew word *avad* (אָבַד),¹²² which means "to *work* (in any sense); by implication to *serve, till, (causatively) enslave, etc.*"¹²³ According to a search of the *King James Version* with Strong's numbers, *avad* occurs 293 times in 263 verses,¹²⁴ the first being Genesis 2:5: "there was not a man to *till* the ground."¹²⁵ Here *avad* refers to the physical labor of working the land. It also refers to work in general, as in God's command concerning the Sabbath day in Exodus 34:17: "Six days thou shalt *work*, but on the seventh day thou shalt rest."¹²⁶ It also refers to *service* in general of one person(s) to another, as in Hushai pledging his allegiance to Absolon, "And again, whom should I serve?"¹²⁷ Finally, *avad* means service as in worship, such as when God instructs Moses in Exodus 3:12: "When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve

¹²⁰ Luke 1:38, *Ibid.*

¹²¹ These words are all grouped together in "Work and Worship," adapted from Edith Samuel's *Your Jewish Lexicon*, 92-93.

¹²² Strong transliterates this word as *abad* ("SH5647") and Dave Huber as *avad* ("Avodah Word Study").

¹²³ Strong, "SH5647," in *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Hebrew Bible*.

¹²⁴ Blue Letter Bible, "Dictionary and Word Search for `abad (Strong's 5647)."

¹²⁵ Genesis 2:5, *King James Version*, Blue Letter Bible, "Dictionary and Word Search for `abad (Strong's 5647)."

¹²⁶ Exodus 34:21, *Ibid.* Thanks to Dave Huber ("Avodah Word Study") for pointing to this passage.

¹²⁷ 2 Samuel 16:19, *Ibid.* Thanks to Dave Huber ("Avodah Word Study") for pointing to this passage.

God upon this mountain.”¹²⁸ Also, in Joshua 24:14: “Now therefore fear the LORD, and *serve* him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers *served* on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and *serve* ye the LORD.”¹²⁹ *Avad* is work or service, both in physical labor and in general servitude. It is also service to God in worship.

As the noun version of *avad*, then, *avodah* (עֲבוּדָה) has a multi-fold meaning. Following the three meanings of *avad*, *avodah* means “service” in the sense of work and labor, “service” in general, and “service” in the sense of worship. Or, as Scott Hahn explains, “the verb ‘*avodah*, often translated as ‘serve,’ has in Hebrew a dual meaning: it can denote either manual labor or priestly ministry (as in a ‘worship service’), or it can suggest both meanings.”¹³⁰ The word for work and the word for worship is the same in Hebrew. This understanding of *avodah* is naturally paired with *eved Adonai*, *eved* (עֶבֶד) being the substantive form of *avad*. If the faithful Jew recognizes himself as a servant of the Lord, everything in his daily life is understood to be an offering to God. The essential unity of work and worship (*avodah*) naturally follows.

It will be helpful to add that because of the nature of the temple worship with its prayers and sacrifices, *avodah*, particularly when referring to worship, would have had a sacrificial connotation as well as one of servitude. This aspect will be particularly relevant in sections d and e.

¹²⁸ Exodus 3:12, *Ibid*. Thanks to Dave Huber (“Avodah Word Study”) for pointing to this passage.

¹²⁹ Joshua 24:14, *King James Version*, Blue Letter Bible, “Dictionary and Word Search for ‘*abad* (Strong’s 5647).” Thanks to Dave Huber (“Avodah Word Study”) for pointing to this passage.

¹³⁰ Hahn, *Ordinary Work, Extraordinary Grace*, 28.

c. Eved Adonai and Avodah in Benedictine Tradition

The Jewish men and women who became Christians maintained their understanding of themselves as servants of the Lord; early Christians inherited this tradition. It was handed down to the early medievals, including the Benedictines, through the Scriptures. The Latin version of the Old Testament clearly relates the theme of *servus Domini* or *servus Dei* (or, occasionally, *ancilla Domini*). Moreover, in the Gospels, Christ often uses servant imagery or analogies to refer to both himself and his disciples. One may recall, for example, the parable of the servants and the talents,¹³¹ or Jesus's words in Mark 10: "And whosoever will be first among you, shall be the servant of all. For the Son of man also is not come to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life as redemption for many."¹³² As Christ has come to serve, so His disciples must be servants to God and to all men. St. Paul picks up this theme in Philippians 2:5-8, and both he and the author of the book of Jude refer to themselves as a *servus Dei* or a *servus Ihesu Christi*.¹³³

Two of the strongest influences on the Benedictine understanding of *servus Dei* come from the Psalms and the Virgin Mary. The Psalms were prayed often by early and medieval Christians. Moreover, the Benedictines and other monastics structured their lives around the praying of the Psalms in the Divine Office, the Benedictines praying the entire Psalter every week.¹³⁴ The psalmist often refers to himself as *servus tuus*, "thy

¹³¹ See Matthew 25 or Lulitke 19.

¹³² Mark 10:43-45, *Douay-Rheims*.

¹³³ See opening lines of Romans, Philippians, Titus, and Jude.

¹³⁴ St. Benedict instructs the monks to pray eight hours total: seven day hours (Matins, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers, and Compline) and one night hour (Vigils) (See Benedict, *Rule of St. Benedict*, Ch.16). Each hour contained three or four psalms (Ch.13, 16). While St. Benedict sets up a structure for ordering the

servant,” when addressing God. In Psalm 118:25, for instance, he says, *Servus tuus sum ego*,¹³⁵ or “I am thy servant”,¹³⁶ and, in Psalm 85:2, “Give joy to the soul of thy servant, for to thee, O Lord, I have lifted up my soul.”¹³⁷ By praying the Psalms often, the Benedictines would have naturally understood themselves to be servants of God. In fact, the tradition of the Pope calling himself the “*servus servorum Dei*,” or the servant of the servants of God, began with Pope St. Gregory the Great,¹³⁸ who was a Benedictine.

Another major influence on the medieval understanding of *servus Domini* is the Virgin Mary. In the Annunciation scene, Mary gives her *fiat*, saying, “Behold, the handmaid of the Lord [*ancilla Domini*]; be it done to me according to thy word.”¹³⁹ Similarly, in her *Magnificat*, Mary praises God for looking upon the lowliness of His handmaid.¹⁴⁰ In his rule, St. Benedict instructs the monks to pray *canticum de Aevangelio* at the hour of Vespers.¹⁴¹ Because of the lack of articles in Latin, Benedict may be referring *a* canticle, any one of the canticles from the books of the Gospel. In this case, the *Magnificat* would have certainly been an option and would have been prayed frequently. St. Benedict could also mean the *Magnificat* as *the* Gospel canticle to be

psalms, he stresses that others might change this ordering, but in any case all 150 psalms must be prayed every week (Ch.16, ln.23-25).

¹³⁵ Psalm 118:25, *Biblia Sacra Vulgata: Editio Quinta*.

¹³⁶ Psalm 118:25, *Douay-Rheims*.

¹³⁷ *Laetifica animam servi tui quia ad te animam meam levo* (Psalm 85:4, *Biblia Sacra Vulgata: Editio Quinta*).

¹³⁸ Meehan, “*Servus servorum Dei*,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*.

¹³⁹ Luke 1:38, *Douay-Rheims*. See also *Biblia Sacra Vulgata: Editio Quinta*.

¹⁴⁰ See Luke 1:46-55.

¹⁴¹ Benedict, *The Rule of St. Benedict*, hereafter *Rule*, Ch.17, ln.8.

prayed at Vespers. This idea is substantiated by the fact that later, in the Northern Prose Middle English version of the *Rule*, the *Magnificat* is referring to as “þe cantikyl of þe gospel” (emphasis added).¹⁴² Additionally, the *Magnificat* has long been prayed daily at the hour of Vespers in Catholic tradition,¹⁴³ whether or not this tradition goes as far back as St. Benedict, born in the late fifth century.¹⁴⁴ The Benedictine would have been familiar with Mary’s *Magnificat* and would have sought to imitate the Mother of God in her humble, obedient service to the Lord, especially because of the emphasis on obedience in the *Rule*.

In the *Rule*, St. Benedict identifies the monk and the Abbot as a *servus*, reminiscent of *eved Adonai*. A significant example can be seen in the chapter concerning the election of an Abbott:

And especially he should adhere to the rule at hand in all things, in order that when he will have ministered well he might hear from the Lord what the good servant heard, who paid out the wheat to his fellow servants in its time: Amen, I say to you, he says, he set him above all the goods. [Matthew 24:47]¹⁴⁵

The good Abbott is likened to the “faithful and wise servant” in Matthew 24 “whom his lord hath appointed over his family, to give them meat in season”¹⁴⁶ and was found doing so upon the master’s return. Similarly, in the Prologue, St. Benedict exhorts all the

¹⁴² *The Northern Prose Version*, hereafter *Northern Prose Version*, in *Three Middle-English Versions of the Rule of St. Benet*, Ch.17, ln.22.

¹⁴³ Henry, “*Magnificat*,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*.

¹⁴⁴ Venarde, in the introduction to *The Rule of St. Benedict*, viii. Venarde also notes that “...the traditional date is 480.”

¹⁴⁵ *Et praecipue ut presentem regulam in omnibus conserbet, ut dum bene ministraverit audiat a Domino quod servus bonus qui erogavit triticum conservis suis in tempore suo; Amen, dico vobis, aid, super omnia bona constituit eum* [Matt. 24:47] (Benedict, *Rule*, Ch.64, v.20-22). Scripture reference is noted by Bruce L. Venarde.

¹⁴⁶ Matthew 25:45, *Douay-Rheims*.

monks: “Therefore indeed He must be obeyed at all times concerning His goods in us, in order that He not only should not like an angry father disinherit his sons...”¹⁴⁷ This injunction implies, inversely, that a faithful monk is a faithful son of God. St. Benedict goes on to write that the monk must be obedient “in order that He should not like a dreadful master hand over to eternal punishment His worthless servants who refused to follow Him to glory.”¹⁴⁸ St. Benedict is probably referring to the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:13-30. The monks should strive not only to not be a wicked servant, but also to be one of the “good and faithful” servants described in Matthew.¹⁴⁹ Every monk is identified as a *servus Dei*.

Through his emphasis on the necessity of offering good works to the Lord, and through the imagery of the monastery as *scola servitii*, St. Benedict conveys the whole life of the *servus Dei* to be one of obedient service. In the first paragraph of the *Rule*, St. Benedict gives the theme of obedience: “Willingly [or gladly] follow and efficaciously fulfill the admonition of a faithful father so that through the labor of obedience you might return to him from whom you had withdrawn through the sloth¹⁵⁰ of disobedience.”¹⁵¹ By his emphasis on obedience here and elsewhere, the reader receives connotations of a

¹⁴⁷ *Ita enim ei omni tempore de bonis suis in nobis parendum est, ut non solum iratus pater suos non aliquando filios exheredet* (Ibid., Prologue, ln.6).
ut nequissimos servos perpetuam tradat ad poenam qui eum sequi noluerint ad gloriam (Ibid., Prologue, v.6-7).

¹⁴⁹ “His lord said to him: Well done, good and faithful servant, because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (Matthew 25:21, *Douay-Rheims*).

¹⁵⁰ According to the *Dictionary of Ecclesiastical Latin* (Stelton), *desidia* can be translated “sloth,” as it is in the Northern Prose Middle English version: “þhe slewth of inobedience” (*Northern Prose Version*, in *Three Middle-English Versions of the Rule of St. Benet*, Prologue, v.6).

¹⁵¹ *...admonitionem pii patris libenter excipe et efficaciter comple ut ad eum per oboedientiae laborem redeas a quo per inoboentiae desidiam recesseras* (Benedict, *Rule*, Prologue, v.1b-2).

servus. Also, through the expression *labor oboedientiae*, or the “labor of obedience,” St. Benedict conveys the idea that the whole life of the monk is one of work for God.

Throughout the Prologue, St. Benedict stresses that Christians must do good works. He quotes Christ’s words in Matthew 7:24-25, “Every one therefore that heareth these my words, and doth them, shall be likened to a wise man that built his house upon a rock,”¹⁵² and comments on them: “Fulfilling these (words), the Lord expects that we ought to daily answer to his sacred admonitions with deeds.”¹⁵³ Moreover, a lover of God desires to do good works to follow the Lord, and by doing so he may reach eternal life. As St. Benedict writes:

What is sweeter to us, dearest brothers, than this voice of the Lord inviting us? Behold, the Lord in his tenderness shows to us the way of life. Therefore, our loins having been girded with faith and with the observance of good works, through the teaching of the Gospel let us proceed on His road, in order that we might merit to see him “who called us into his kingdom.” [1 Thess. 2:12] If we want to live in the *tabernaculum* [tabernacle, tent, dwelling place] of his kingdom, unless it is hastened thither with good works, it is not at all reached.¹⁵⁴

The life of the monk, then, is a one of obediently doing good works. The translator of the *Northern Prose Version*, in a modified prologue, expresses this idea succinctly in a prayer: “Lord, we pray that we may serve Thee, that in Thy tabernacle we may dwell.

¹⁵² *Douay-Rheims*. In the *Rule*: *Qui audit verba mea haec et facit ea, similabo eum viro sapient qui aedificavit domum suam super petram; venerunt flumina flaverunt venti, et inpigerunt in domum illam et non cecidit, quia fundata erat super petram* (Ibid., v.33-34).

¹⁵³ *Haec complens Dominus expectat nos cottidiae is suis sanctis monitis factis nos respondere debere* (Ibid., Prologue, v.35).

¹⁵⁴ *Quid dulcius nobis ab hac voce Domini invitantis nos, fraters carissimi? Ecce pietate sua demonstrat nobis Dominus viam vitae. Succinctis ergo fide vel observantia bonorum actuum lumbis nostris, per ducatum evangelii pergamus itinera eius, ut mereamur eum qui nos vocavit in regnum suum videre* [1 Thess. 2:12] . *In cuius regni tabernaculo si volumus habitare, nisi illuc bonis actibus curritur minime pervenitur* (*Rule*, Prologue, v.21). Scripture reference noted by Bruce L. Venarde.

Amen.”¹⁵⁵ Additionally, in one of the most memorable lines of the *Rule*, St. Benedict writes, “Therefore, a school of the Lord’s service must be established by us.”¹⁵⁶ In this “school,” the monk will learn to walk the way of the Gospel, the way of obedience. Here we glimpse the Benedictine unity of life: the monk is a *servus Dei*, his whole life one of obedient service.

With this understanding of unity of life, as well as by the use of the words *opus* and *labor*, an understanding of *avodah* emerges. Just as *avodah* is the word for both work and worship, so prayer, manual labor, and deeds of mercy are all described in a similar way, as *opus* or work. In Chapter 4, entitled *Quae Sunt Instrumenta Bonorum Operum*,¹⁵⁷ or “What are the Instruments of Good Works,” St. Benedict gives a list of all the instruments with which the monk does good works. These include the deeds of mercy: “to revive the poor, to clothe the naked, to visit the sick, to bury the dead. To assist those in tribulation, to console the sorrowful.”¹⁵⁸ First, the word for manual work or labor is *manuus opus*, as seen in Chapter 48.¹⁵⁹ Second, deeds of mercy are also termed *opus*.

In this list, among other deeds, St. Benedict also includes “to hear holy readings gladly, to incline frequently to prayer, to confess daily his past evils with tears and

¹⁵⁵ “Lauerd, we prai þe þat we may serve sua [you], in þi tabernakil þat we may wne. Amen.” (*Northern Prose Version*, Ch.2 of Prologue, v.2-4).

¹⁵⁶ *Consituenda est ergo nobis dominici scola servitii* (*Rule*, Prologue, v.45).

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, Ch.4, title.

¹⁵⁸ *Pauperes recreare, numdum vesitre, infirmum visitare, mortuum sepelire. In tribulation subvenire, dolentem consolari* (*Ibid.* Ch.4, v.14-19).

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, Ch.48, v.1.

sighing.”¹⁶⁰ So, as can be seen in this same passage, prayer too is a kind of *bonus opus*. Similarly, throughout the *Rule*, St. Benedict refers to the common prayer of the monks as the Divine Office (or rather the plural “Divini Officii” as St. Benedict terms them).¹⁶¹ Moreover, nine times St. Benedict calls the common prayer the *Opus Dei*, or the “Work of God.”¹⁶² This is translated in the *Northern Prose Version* as “godys servise”¹⁶³ or the “servise o god.”¹⁶⁴ The Divine Office, it should be noted, is the highest form of the monk’s service towards God, as seen in its very names as well as its centrality in Benedictine life. Just as “Divine Office” refers to a special kind of duty accomplished for God,¹⁶⁵ so “*opus Dei*” refers to a special kind of work or service which is of God. The idea of the priority of prayer is substantiated by the fact that the life of the monks was structured around the praying of the Divine Office, and *ergo nihil operi Dei praeponatur*,¹⁶⁶ or “Nothing, then, is to be put ahead of the work of God.”¹⁶⁷ Prayer is the highest form of service to God, and it is still understood as *opus* or work. Terming prayer an *opus* gives a distinctive quality to manual labor and deeds of mercy: the three are

¹⁶⁰ *Lectiones sanctas liventer audire, oration frequenter incumbere, mala sunt praeterita cum lacrimis vel gemitu cottidiae in orationi Deo confiteri* (Ibid., Ch.4, v.55-57).

¹⁶¹ For more about the Divine Office, see “Divine Office” by Fernand Cabrol in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. During St. Benedict’s time, monasteries were allowed some freedom concerning how the Divine Office was to be prayed. St. Benedict spends much of the *Rule* setting forth the form of the Divine Office.

¹⁶² See Chapter 22, for example. *...et ut parati sint monachi semper et, facto signo, absque mora surgentes, festinent invicem se praevenire ad opus Dei cum omni tamen gravitate et modestia* (Benedict, *Rule*, Ch.22, ln.4). Or another, the memorable exhortation, *Ergo nihil operi Dei praeponatur* (Ch.43, ln.3).

¹⁶³ See *Northern Prose Version*, Ch.22, v.25.

¹⁶⁴ See *Northern Prose Version*, Ch.43, v.2 and 7-8.

¹⁶⁵ Cabrol, “Divine Office,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*.

¹⁶⁶ A memorable exhortation (Ch.43, v.3).

¹⁶⁷ Here, translated by Vernarde, *The Rule of St. Benedict*, 147.

connected, all an offering of service to God, a *labor oboedientiae*.

It may be helpful to clarify here what is referred to by the Latin term *opus* or work both to distinguish it from some modern conceptions of work as well as deepen the connection the *avodah*. The work of *opus* is not referring to a Kantian-like fulfillment of duty, nor is it the equivalent of tooth-gritting work or toilsome labor, although accomplishing an *opus* may well involve a great deal of effort. As David Jeffrey explains, *opus* is not just work that one does, but is the shaping of one's life purpose.¹⁶⁸ It is a generic plural which can refer to the work of the Lord, the work of the Church, an entire dedication such as a musical *opus*, or a synthetic gathering. *Opus* can also be used in a liturgical context, as I have previously shown in *The Rule of St. Benedict*. It is impossible for the medieval listener to hear the word *opus* without thinking of both work and worship; in this way, it is very similar to the Hebrew term *avodah*.

Opus is also related to the term *leitourgia*, the root of the ecclesial term "liturgy." Scott Hahn explains, "When the first Christians cast about for a word to describe their worship, they chose *leitourgia*, a word that, like the Hebrew 'abodah, could indicate ritual worship but could also mean 'public work,' as in the labor of street sweepers..."¹⁶⁹ In *The Rule of St. Benedict*, *opus* is used in the same dual sense of "work" and "worship" as *leitourgia* originally was.

In the end, though, the *distinctio* between work and worship is an imperfect one. In his book, *Ordinary Work, Extraordinary Grace*, Scott Hahn quotes a large passage by British Protestant biblical scholar C.F. D. Moule because of how well he words this

¹⁶⁸ With special thanks to Dr. David Lyle Jeffrey for his explanation on *opus*.

¹⁶⁹ Hahn, *Ordinary Work, Extraordinary Grace*, 28.

matter; I will take the liberty of doing so here. In examining the use of the word *leitourgein* by Christians, one finds a “very salutary reminder” that

to worship, for a truly religious person, is the be all and end all of work; and that if worship and work are disintguished, that is only because of the frailty of human nature which cannot do more than one thing at a time. The necessary alternation between lifting up holy hands in prayer and swinging an axe in strong, dedicated hands for the glory of God is the human makeshift for that single, simultaneous, divine life in which work is worship and worship is the highest possible activity. And the single word ‘liturgy’ in the New Testament, like ‘*abodah* ...’, covers both.

While each activity is distinct, manual labor, deeds of mercy, and prayer are all described in a similar way: each is *opus*, or a *labor oboedientiae*. If the monk is a *servus Dei*, then every part of life can be an offering of loving service to God, in turn enkindling love.¹⁷⁰

d. *Avodah in Our Daily Work*

As in the *Rule of St. Benedict*, the author of *Our Daily Work* understands the Christian as a servant of the Lord and his life as one of service, drawing among other places from Matthew 20 and Philippians 2. The second sentence of the first part of the book is: “God has sent to man his time in order that he might serve him, and to gather with good works his grace to attain heaven.”¹⁷¹ The very first purpose the author gives for man is to serve God. Also in the first part, he writes, “Great shame it is to be idle in this time of grace, in which we are, as servants in the vineyard, hired to work—for if we labor as we ought a great reward awaits us.”¹⁷² Here, he is probably referring to Jesus’s parable

¹⁷⁰ The Caxton abstract emphasizes that the monks should welcome guests for God: “Al strangers or ghestes arn to be receyued for og and as god.”

¹⁷¹ “God has lent man þis tyme: to serue god in, & to gedere with gode werkes grace: til bi heuen with,” Rolle, “Works of Doubtful Authenticity: *Our Daily Work*,” Here I have used the translation by David Lyle Jeffrey in *English Spirituality in the Age of Wyclif*, 237.

¹⁷² “Grete schame is to be idel in þis tyme of grace: in þe whilk we are hired to wirke, & if we wirk as vs agh: grete mede vs abidis,” Ibid. Trans. Jeffrey, *English Spirituality in the Age of Wyclif*, 240.

of the workers in the vineyard in Matthew 20:1-18; all Christians are to work unceasingly for God. Although he does not quote Matthew 20:27-28, he probably associates it with the parable of the vineyard: “He that will be first among you, shall be your servant. Even as the Son of man is not come to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life as redemption for many.”¹⁷³ He quotes in Latin a similar passage from Philipians 2 in Latin, saying,

God gives us in Himself our highest model for a proper approach to work, for as the Apostle says: ‘He made Himself no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man he humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death on the cross.’¹⁷⁴

Like St. Benedict, the anonymous pastor conveys the life of the Christian to be one of obedient service. As Christ came to serve, so too must the Christian become a servant, offering all of his works to the Lord.

Similar to the *Rule of St. Benedict*, with this understanding of unity of life, as well as by the use of the word *werke*, an understanding of *avodah* emerges. The text opens with: “Three things are needful to everyone who wants to prosper spiritually—God’s grace leading and helping him. The first of these, simply, is to be engaged in honest work [*werke*], without wasting time.”¹⁷⁵ This *werke* includes both ordinary labor and prayer:

¹⁷³ Matthew 20:27-28, *Douay-Rheims*.

¹⁷⁴ “God gifs vs ensample to wirk: bi him-selfe, as þe apostle witnes þer he sais: Exinaniuit semetipsum: for[mam] ser[ui] ac[cipiens]; in similitudinem hominum factus / & habitu inuentus vt homo; humiliauit semetipsum factus obedi[ens] vsque ad m[ortem], m[ortem] autem cru[cis]...” Ibid. Trans. Jeffrey, 240.

¹⁷⁵ “T[h]ree thinges are nedeful til ilk man: til mikil his mede / þurgh goddis grace helpand: þat him sal lede. Þe first: þat man be in honest werke / with-oute losyng of his tyme,” *Our Daily Work*, 138. Trans. Jeffrey, 236.

Now is the time to work....Let us then do now as the Apostle says: ‘As we have opportunity, let us work good toward all men’ (Galatians 6:10). And as the Apostle counsels us he did himself, for it is said that from the first hour of the day until the fifth he worked with his hands to win his food; from the fifth to the tenth he preached to the people; from the tenth until evening he served the poor and pilgrims with such goods as he had; by nightfall he was at prayer, and thus he spent his time” (239)

Werke then serves a similar function as *avodah*, describing both work and worship.

As in the *Rule of St. Benedict*, prayer is the highest form of service or work offered to God. The anonymous pastor emphasizes the importance of prayer by spending a large portion of the text giving direction for daily prayer and devotions. Additionally, he shows that prayer is work especially consecrated to God, when prayed well, that is prepared in advanced¹⁷⁶ and offered with a “free wil & louand [loving] hert”¹⁷⁷:

For Holy Scripture says “God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7); God loves the one who gives Him everything, however small, with a glad heart. Certainly [*nameli*] this applies to endeavors that are consecrated to his praise and honor, and to the health of men’s souls; prayer, holy thoughts, and a clear-mindedness about God and his deeds are examples, if they are well intended and followed through to action. Prayer is a sacrifice that greatly pleases God, if it is offered in the manner it ought to be.¹⁷⁸

The pastor goes on to write that, “God asks prayer of us as a kind of debt due Him, as when he says, ‘God created the nations for His praise and His glory,’ (cf. Isaiah 43:7) and ‘The sacrifice of praise shall honor me.’ (Psalm 50:23).”¹⁷⁹ Here, the author of *Our Daily*

¹⁷⁶ *Our Daily Work*, 142.

¹⁷⁷ *Our Daily Work*, 141

¹⁷⁸ “For hali writ says: Hillarem datorem diligit deus, «God lufs þa / þat ought gifs him with a glad hert». & nameli þa werks þat fallis to goddis louynge / & hele to mannis saule, as praier & hali thoughtis / & clere mynde of god / & of gode dedis; thir & oþer slike / wil haue litil rest: if þai wele sal be. Praier is a sacrifice þat mikil paies god: if it be made o þe maner it agh to be...” Ibid. Trans. Jeffrey, 246. “*Nameli*,” according to the *Middle English Dictionary*, can also be translated “especially” or “particularly.”

¹⁷⁹ “for-þi god askis it of vs / as dette, þar he þus sais: Gentes creauit deus in laudem & gloriam suam. Et: sacrificium laudis ho[norificabit] me,” *Our Daily Work*, 141.

Work also touches on the priestly nature of offering prayers to God. The offering up prayer is done in the sense of both servant and priest, offering sacrifice, uniting it to the sacrifice of the Mass offered to the priest, which the Jewish temple worship foreshadowed.¹⁸⁰ Besides asking us to serve Him generally, God asks that we serve Him especially through prayer.

At the same time, the pastor emphasizes that all *werke* should be offered to God in loving service. This would include the work of earning one's bread, preaching, and serving the poor.¹⁸¹ Drawing again from St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:40, the pastor begins the conclusion of *Our Daily Work* with, "The third and last part of this book teaches us to so conduct ourselves—wherever we come in life and whatever we are given to do—that it be praise to God and an example of good to all that see us."¹⁸² Just as he opens his text by saying that the first part of sanctification is to engage in honest work, he ends by emphasizing that every kind of work, both ordinary work and worship, can be offered to the Lord in loving service.

e. Avodah in Walter Hilton

In Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection*, as in the previous texts, the follower of Christ is identified as a servant, his life is one of service. This is particularly the case when addressing the nun in Book I of *Scale of Perfection*. He writes that to have

¹⁸⁰ "Praier is a sacrifice þat mikil paies god...," *Our Daily Work*, 141.

¹⁸¹ Jeffrey, 239.

¹⁸² "Þe thrid parti & þe last of þis boke: techis a man to bere him sa / whare-so he comes, & what-so he dose: þat it be louyng to god & ensample of gode / til all þat him sees;" *Our Daily Work*, 155.

meeckness, one must begin by holding that one is “unworthi to serve God in conversacion with his servauntis.”¹⁸³ Although he is particularly identifying the community of nuns as servants of God, his words can be applied to all Christians. This can be gathered from the title of the chapter: “What a man schal use and refuse bi vertu of mekenes.”¹⁸⁴ While he has a particular cloistered nun in mind, his counsel can be applied more generally to all seeking humility. In the *Mixed Life*, Walter does not specifically call the layman a servant, but uses servant language and imagery in describing his life. Walter tells him that if he leaves his duties of serving others in order to pray, he is seeking to array Christ’s face but is leaving his arms and feet ragged and bare in His mystical body.¹⁸⁵ Though this image, Walter implicitly identifies the layman is a servant of God who should in charity serve in whatever way he is called. The whole Christian life is one of service: as he tells the nun, “He hath liyf in thee in as moche as thou hast a good wille for to serve Hym and please Hym...”¹⁸⁶ While here addressed to the nun, these words can surely be applied to all Christians.

Even perhaps more than St. Benedict and the anonymous pastor, Walter Hilton develops the idea of *avodah* by calling both bodily and spiritual activity offered to God as work, service, and worship. Like St. Benedict’s *opus* and the anonymous pastor’s *werke*, Walter Hilton uses the same terms for both prayer and all works of daily life, conveying

¹⁸³ Hilton, *Scale of Perfection*, ln. 361.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, ln. 355.

¹⁸⁵ Hilton, *Mixed Life*, 24-25.

¹⁸⁶ Hilton, *Scale of Perfection*, ln. 2594-2596.

the concept of *avodah*. The term “bodili werk”¹⁸⁷ (bodily works) or “bodili worchyngē” (bodily working) includes fasting, various mortifications, and “dedes of merci.”¹⁸⁸ Deeds of mercy include praying for others¹⁸⁹ as well as, after the example of Christ’s life, teaching, preaching, visiting and healing the sick, feeding the hungry, and comforting the sorrowful.¹⁹⁰ Bodily works are also referred to as works of the active life.¹⁹¹ Hilton tells us that all these works are pleasing to God when done by faith-filled charity.¹⁹² The term “goosteli werk”¹⁹³ (spiritual work) or “goosteli worchingē”¹⁹⁴ refers to the “contemplation of God and of spiritual things by prayers and meditations...”¹⁹⁵ Although prayer is the higher of the two, both bodily and spiritual service are termed *werk*, evoking the idea of *avodah*.

Like St. Benedict and the anonymous author of *Our Daily Work*, Walter Hilton identifies prayer as service to God higher than that of other works, but both bodily and spiritual works are a form of service to God. He tells the layman that he fulfills the “higher part of charity in contemplation of God and of spiritual things by prayers and

¹⁸⁷ Hilton, *Mixed Life*, 2.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁹⁵ “...þei fulfilleden þe hi3er partie of charite in contemplioun of God and of goosteli þynges by praieres and meditacions...,” Hilton, *Mixed Life*, 20.

meditations...”¹⁹⁶ He therefore says that those living the contemplative life leave the world in order to enter “the service of God”¹⁹⁷ not because God cannot be served in the active or mixed life, but because prayer is service especially consecrated to God. This is similar to how St. Benedict calls the Divine Office *Opus Dei*, translated the “service of God” in the Middle English. There are, though, other forms of service to the Lord. Hilton tells the layman, “[God] hath put you in that state [of life] to work and to serve other men.”¹⁹⁸ The layman’s life is one of service to fellow men, and through the theology of the mystical Body of Christ, his life is therefore one of service to God (I will explain this concept further in the next chapter). In a vivid passage, Hilton describes prayer as arraying Christ’s head and face, and deeds of mercy as caring for his ragged hands and feet, His Body, the Church.¹⁹⁹ Although prayer is the higher way of serving, both are essential. Bodily works and spiritual works are both forms of service both in the life of the layman and in the life of the nun.²⁰⁰

Walter Hilton further emphasizes these connections by calling both bodily and spiritual works *worchipe*, worship, and describing them as such. In the *Mixed Life*, he tells the layman, “What are all thy works worth, whether they are bodily or spiritual, unless they are done righteously and reasonably to the worship [*worschipe*] of God and at

¹⁹⁶ “...þei fulfilleden þe hi3er partie of charite in contemplioun of God and of goosteli þynges by praieres and meditacions...,” Hilton, *Mixed Life*, 20.

¹⁹⁷ Hilton, *Mixed Life*, 13.

¹⁹⁸ “...he hap put þee in þat staat for to traveile and serue opere men,” Hilton, *Mixed Life*, 28.

¹⁹⁹ Hilton, *Mixed Life*, 24-25.

²⁰⁰ See *Scale of Perfection*: “Over this, thee bihoveth loke forthere that sithen thou art so unable to serve oure Lord bi bodili werkis outward, hou mykil more thee bihoveth holde thee unable and unworthi to serve hym goosteli bi inward occupacion,” Hilton, *Scale of Perfection, Book I*, ln.366-368.

his bidding? Surely, nothing.”²⁰¹ Similar to how writers centuries after St. Benedict may have coined the phrase *ora et labora* with a pun in mind—both contain the word *ora*—, so may Walter have a pun in mind with the words working and worship. *Worschipe* looks akin to the verb *worship*, worketh; *worchynge* looks and sounds similar to *worschipyng*. The similarities of the two words may happily enhance Walter’s *avodah*-like understanding.

Besides calling both bodily and spiritual works *worschipe*, Hilton uses imagery of worship to describe them both. In Book I of *Scale of Perfection*, Hilton writes:

Then thus I say to you: whether you pray, or whatever you think, or any other deed that you do...bring it all within the faith and rules of Holy Church and caste it all in the mortar of meekness, and break it small with the pestle of the fear of God, and throw the powder of all these in the fire of desire, and offer it so to your Lord Jesus Christ. And truly I tell you, blessed shall that offering be in the sight of our Lord Jesus Christ, and sweet shall the smoke of that fire smell in the face of your Lord Jesus.²⁰²

Both bodily and spiritual works are like incense burned at Mass, which symbolizes prayers rising up to God. Everything that the nun does can be offered up as worship to God in connection to the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

Finally, the offering of the prayers and good works in the layman’s life is also described in language similar to that of the Mass. He writes, “...first go do thy works, and go then alone to thy prayers and meditations, and lift up thine heart to God...”²⁰³

²⁰¹ “What aren alle þyn werkes worþ, wheþir þei ben bodili or goosteli, but 3if þei ben doon ri3twiseli and resonabli to þe worschipe of god and at his biddynge? Sopli, ri3gt nou3t,” Hilton, *Mixed Life*, 24.

²⁰² “Thanne sei I to thee thus: praie thou, or thenke thou, or ony othir deede that thou doost... brynge hit al withynne the trowthe and rulis of Hooli Chirche and caste it al in the mortar of mekenesse and breke it smal with the pestel of drede of God, and throw the poudere of alle thise in the fier of desire, and offre it soo to thi Lord Jhesu Crist. And y telle thee forsothe, wel schal that offryng like in the sight of oure Lord Jhesu, and swete schal the smoke of that ilke fier smelle in the face of thi Lord Jhesu...” Hilton, *Scale of Perfection*, Book II, ln. 618-628.

²⁰³ “...first goo þanne alone to þi praier and to þi meditaaciouns, and life up þyn herte to God...,” Hilton,

This language recalls the part of the Mass where the priest says to the people, *Sursum corda*, or “Lift up your hearts,” and the people respond with *Habemus ad Dominum*, or “we lift them up to the Lord.”²⁰⁴ Whether or not the layman would pick up on the reference, Walter may have an image of the layman as offering up all his prayers to God in union with the prayers of the Mass. Walter continues by saying, “pray to him that in His goodness He will accept thy works that thou does to His pleasure.”²⁰⁵ These words are evocative of the part of the Mass where the priest addresses the congregation: *Orate fratres, ut meum ac vestrum sacrificium acceptabile fiat apud Deum Patrem omnipotentem*, or “Pray brethren, that my Sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God the Father Almighty.” The people respond here with, *Suscipiat Dominus sacrificium de manibus tuis ad laudem et gloriam nominis sui, ad utilitatem quoque nostram, totiusque Ecclesiae suae sanctae*, or “May the Lord receive the Sacrifice from your hands to the praise and glory of His Name, for our good, and that of all His holy Church.”²⁰⁶ Walter may understand the layman to be offering up all his works and worship in union with the prayers of the Church, offered in union with the Sacrifice of the Mass. As in both the *Rule* and *Our Daily Work*, work and worship are intimately connected.

Mixed Life, 36.

²⁰⁴ “Medieval Sourcebook: Mass of The Roman Rite Latin/English.”

²⁰⁵ “...and praie him of his goodnesse þat he wole accepte þi werkes þat vou doost to his plesauce,” Hilton, *Mixed Life*, 28.

²⁰⁶ “Medieval Sourcebook: Mass of The Roman Rite Latin/English.”

CHAPTER THREE

Manual Labor and Deeds of Mercy

a. Introduction

In the second chapter, I showed how the ordinary works of daily life are deeply connected to worship and service to God. In this chapter, I will discuss how manual labor and deeds of mercy are related to worship in a few specific ways. First, ordinary work helps one to better pray by banishing *acedia* and cultivating humility and charity. I will also show how manual labor and deeds of mercy have unique qualities in the context of a life of prayer. One's prayer can overflow into manual labor, an expression of the deep connection between work and worship. Deeds of mercy are a special way of serving the Lord in light of Christ's teachings in Matthew 25 (and elsewhere) and the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ found in St. Paul. I will treat each author separately. (Note-- The three points are not all equally relevant to every text).

b. St. Benedict

In *The Rule of St. Benedict*, manual labor aids one's prayer life. St. Benedict conveys it as a kind of beginning step in the spiritual life when he says that Sundays should generally be free for reading, but if a monk is so negligent and slothful (*negligens et desidiosus*) that he does not want nor is he able to meditate or to read, he should be given some kind of work to do so that he will not be idle.²⁰⁷ One reason for this might be

²⁰⁷ *Si quis vero ita negligens et desidiosus fuerit ut non vellit aut non possit meditare aut legere, iniungatur ei opus quod faciat ut non vacet* (*Rule of St. Benedict*, Ch. 48, v.23).

that manual labor will help enable the monk to better pray by breaking down *acedia*. One of the acute dangers of *otiositas* is that it can make a monk sluggish and restless in his prayers. By combating *acedia*, manual labor can help the monk to better pray. Manual labor may also prevent a monk from being idle and neglecting duties under the guise of praying, a danger which St. Benedict may have in mind when he instructs the monks to make their prayers briefly (see p.19). Walter Hilton will touch on this idea more explicitly, as I later show in this chapter.

Additionally, considering the relationship between body and soul can shed new light on the benefits of manual labor for prayer. Just as a modern spiritual director might recommend physical exercise to help overcome *acedia*, perhaps also the physical exertion of manual labor can help the monk to break out of a spirit of *acedia* and holistically help him to pray.

Second, manual labor and deeds of mercy are an aide to prayer by helping to cultivate virtues; growth in humility and charity will always help one to better pray. One might recall, for example, the importance of humility in prayer in the parable of the Pharisee and tax collector in Luke 18. In his *Rule*, St. Benedict emphasizes the importance of humility in prayer. “If when we wish to suggest something to powerful men, we do not presume unless with humility and reverence, how much more should we petition the Lord God of all with all humility and pure devotion.”²⁰⁸ Similarly, in Chapter 50, St. Benedict instructs that the monks should *cum tremore divino flectentes genua* should bend their knees with divine trembling. This echoes Psalm 2:11, *servite Domino*

²⁰⁸ *Si cum hominibus potentibus volumus aliqua suggerere, non praesumimus nisi cum humilitate et reverentia, quanto magis Domino Deo universorum cum omni humilitate et puritatis devotione supplicandum est, (Ibid. Ch.20, v.1)*

in timore et exultate ei in tremore, or “serve ye the Lord in fear and rejoice unto him with trembling.” As the monk is serving God by his prayers, his prayer should be accompanied by a holy trembling at the greatness of the task, and from the fear of the Lord. Similarly, the brothers should approach the orator *cum gravitate*,²⁰⁹ with gravity or seriousness at the importance of their task. The monks should approach God with all humility, reverence, and purity of devotion.²¹⁰ The Divine Office or Work of God is the highest form of service to God in Benedictine life, and should be treated with appropriate reverence. And, to give an example, William of Thierry shows how seeking contemplation is motivated by love for God:

By a certain natural sense derived from her First Cause the soul dreams—after a fashion--- of your face, in the image of which she was herself created....But when she strives to fix her attention on this face, not seeing it, sometimes she experiences that her effort has been anticipated by it. Often though it is only in the heavy sweat of her brow that she can eat her bread, laboring under the ancient curse.... So it is with the intention in contemplation or in prayer.²¹¹

In Benedictine tradition, not only is manual labor an aide to prayer, but prayer can overflow into manual labor. First, manual labor allows the monk to be thinking on God because of the silence in which it is done, as I discussed in the previous chapter. In “On Silence,” St. Benedict regulates that monks should be accustomed to keep silent, even from good things. This silence was not absolute; the monks would have been allowed to speak when necessary concerning their manual labor together, but they should refrain from jokes, story-telling, or conversation while working. Because it is done in silence,

²⁰⁹ Benedict, *Rule of St. Benedict*, 146.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 92. This passage is referring to both common and private prayer.

²¹¹ William of St. Thierry, *The Works of William of St. Thierry*, 72. Trans. Sister Penelope, CSMV.

manual labor can provide an opportunity for prayer. St. Benedict expects for this to occur, for in “On Humility” he instructs the monks to pray always; the monks

...should altogether shun forgetfulness and always remember everything God commanded so that he always turns over in his mind both how hell burns those who scorn God for their sins and the eternal life prepared for those who fear God.²¹²

While St. Benedict is focusing on how to build humility, in this chapter one sees that prayer is overflowing into manual labor. To continuously recall God’s commands, to be thinking of Him, to frequently recall the pains of hell and the joys of heaven is a kind of prayer, for it is an intentional lifting of the mind to God. The silence allows for this. Additionally, manual labor in particular often does not require a lot of thought, leaving the mind partly free to focus on God.

It is here that the *memoria* is essential. Through the memory, the monk is able to carry the prayer of the *Opus Dei* or his private prayer into his manual labor. St. Benedict tells the monk to remember, *memor*; this continuous prayer is possible because of a retentive, trained *memoria* which has been richly fed in the liturgy and *lectio divina*. The word *evolvat* recalls the “turning over” in the mind of meditation; as Carruthers explains, using traditional one medieval analogy for memory, “reading is to be digested, to be ruminated, like a cow chewing her cud.”²¹³

Even more vividly, *evolvere* can mean to unravel, recalling a scroll of Sacred Scripture. The monks can only “read” Scripture while doing their daily activities if it has been impressed into their memory. This is made possible through *meditatio*, which “consists in applying oneself with attention to this exercise in total memorization,”

²¹² Here trans. Venarde. *Rule of St. Benedict*, 46-47 (ln.10-11).

²¹³ Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 205.

exercising both “muscular memory of the words pronounced” as well as “an aural memory of the words heard.”²¹⁴ A trained and richly-fed *memoria*, then, is “a kind of eye dependent reading.”²¹⁵ In medieval imagery, a “trained memory is... linked metaphorically to a library.”²¹⁶ St. Jerome writes that “by careful reading and daily meditation his heart [i.e. by means of his memory] constructed a library for Christ.”²¹⁷ And Thomas of Celano later tells of his contemporary St. Thomas Aquinas,

His memory was extremely rich and retentive; whatever he had once read and grasped he never forgot; it was as if knowledge were ever increasing in his soul as page is added to page in the writing of a book.²¹⁸

St. Benedict instructs the monk to pray constantly; he should unroll and meditate on the Scriptures which he has stored in his *memoria* through the faithful practice of *lectio divina*.

St. Benedict views deeds of mercy as a special way of serving the Lord, fulfilling Christ’s commands in Matthew 25:31-46. In this Gospel passage, Christ welcomes those into Heaven who have done deeds of mercy, saying,

For I was hungry, and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink; I was a stranger, and you took me in: naked, and you covered me: sick, and you visited: I was in prison, and you came to me.²¹⁹

When these souls ask Christ when they ever saw him in these needy states, he responds,

²¹⁴ Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, 73.

²¹⁵ Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 31.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 41

²¹⁷ In *The Book of Memory* by Mary Carruthers, 29.

²¹⁸ In *The Book of Memory* by Mary Carruthers, 3.

²¹⁹ Matthew 25:35-36, *Douay-Rheims*

“Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to the least of my brethren, you did it to me.”²²⁰

Cassian reflects this understanding in the *Institutes* when he says that Egyptian monks “believe that by such an offering of the fruit of their hands [to the needy] they offer a reasonable and true sacrifice to the Lord.”²²¹ St. Benedict conveys an understanding of Mathew 25; in fact, he quotes this Gospel passage several times in the *Rule* and applies it to the everyday life of the monks. He begins Chapter 36, “Sick Brothers,” with:

Care should be taken for the sick before all and above all, so that they should be served as indeed Christ would be, because he said himself, “I was sick and you visited me” and “What you did for one of these little ones, you did for me.”²²²

By caring for the sick, St. Benedict understands the monks to be serving the Lord. He applies Matthew 25 to caring for children and the poor as well. The cellarer should “attend to the sick, young children, guests, and the poor with the utmost care, knowing without doubt that he will render an account for all of them on the day of judgement.”²²³

This is another reference to Matthew 25, which is an account of Judgment Day. The cellarer, who is in charge of the food supplies, serves the Lord in a special way by feeding the hungry who come to him.

St. Benedict sees the ministry of hospitality in light too of Matthew 25 and also John 13. He opens Chapter 53, “The Reception of Guests,” with a quote from Matthew 25: “All arriving guests should be welcomed as Christ, for he himself would say, ‘I was a

²²⁰ Matthew 25:40, *Douay-Rheims*

²²¹ Cassian, *Institutes* (Book X).

²²² The Latin text reads, *Infirmorum cura ante omnia et super omnia adhibenda est, ut sicut revera Christo ita eis serviatur, quia ipse dixit: infirmus fui et visitastis me et Quod fecistis uni de his minimis mihi fecistis* (*Rule of St. Benedict*, Ch. 36, v.1.)

²²³ *Infirmorum, infantum, hospitem, pauperumque cum omni sollicitudine curam gerat, sciens sine dubio quia pro his omnibus in diem iudicii rationem redditurus est* (*Ibid.*, Ch. 31, v.9).

stranger and you welcomed me.”²²⁴ To emphasize this idea that by serving guests they are serving Christ, St. Benedict instructs the monks to greet the guest “with bowed head or the whole body prostrate on the ground” because “Christ, who is also received, should be worshipped with them.”²²⁵ The poor and pilgrims should be received with greatest care “because in them especially Christ is welcomed (for awe of the rich itself secures honorable treatment).”²²⁶

Besides in Matthew 25, St. Benedict sees hospitality as a way of fulfilling Christ’s commands and following His example in the Last Supper. St. Benedict instructs that the abbot and all the monks should wash the feet of the guests. Although he does not cite a verse for the basis of this, he is clearly referring to St. John’s account of the Last Supper. John 13 recounts how Christ washes the feet of His disciples. After doing so, Christ says, “If then I being your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; you also ought to wash one another’s feet.”²²⁷ St. Benedict sees in offering hospitality to guests an opportunity to serve as Christ did. Additionally, in the same scene, Jesus tells the disciple these words too: “Amen, amen, I say to you, he that receiveth whomsoever I send, receiveth me; and he that receiveth me, receiveth him that sent me.”²²⁸ St. Benedict probably also has these

²²⁴ *Omnes supervenientes hospites tamquam Christus suscipiantur, quia ipse dicturus est: Hospis fui et suscepistis me* (Ibid., Ch.53, v.1).

²²⁵ Ibid, 173. *In ipsa autem salutatione omnis exhibeatur humilitas omnibus venientibus sibe discendentibus hospitibus; inclinatio capite vel prostrate omni corpore in terra, Christus in eis adoretur qui et suscipitur,* (Ibid., Ch. 33, v.6).

²²⁶ Here, translated by Bruce L. Vernerde, editor, *The Rule of St. Benedict*, 175. For reference, the Latin text reads: *in ipsa autem salutatione Omnis exhibeatur humilitas omnibus venientibus sibe discendentibus hospitibus; inclinatio capite vel prostrate omni corpore in terra, Christus in eis adoretur qui et suscipitur* (Ch.33, v.6).

²²⁷ John 13:14, *Douay-Rheims*

²²⁸ John 13:20, *Douay-Rheims*

words in mind in his understanding of welcoming guests as Christ, serving Him through the ministry of hospitality.

Deeds of mercy are given as much emphasis (if not sometimes more) in the Middle English rules as in the Latin text, evidence of their importance in Benedictine tradition. On serving the sick, the Northern Prose *Rule* and the Caxton Abstract give a little more emphasis. Chapter 36 in the Northern Prose reads: “Of the sick speaks St. Benet in this sentence, ‘And commands above all things that they be served as it were God himself. For he shall say on dooms-day: ‘I was sick, and you visited; that you did to any of mine, you did it to me.’”²²⁹ This passage differs slightly from the Latin text by emphasizing that Christ will judge us by these words in the future, as it does in Chapter 53: “for he shall say at the day of judgment: ‘*Hospes fuit &c.*—I was guest, and you received me.”²³⁰ It also differs slightly by emphasizing the priority of serving the sick with the words “above all things.” The Northern Verse also emphasizes serving the sick as Christ, turning Matthew 25 into verse form: “‘Sick I was,’ soothly says he, / ‘And kindly came you unto me. / For that you did to another in my name, / Unto myself you did the same.’”²³¹

Concerning hospitality, while the Latin text certainly gives clear instructions that the guests should be fed and given beds to sleep in, the Northern Verse and Caxton

²²⁹“Of þe seke spekis sain benet in þis sentence, And cumandis ouir al þing þat man sal ta yeme of þaim, þat tay be serued als it ware god him-selfe. For he sal say on domis-day: ‘I was seke, ye visit; þat ye did til an of myne, ye did it to me”(*Rule of St. Benet*, 26).

²³⁰“For he salle say at te day of dome: ‘*Hospes fuit &c.*—I was geste, and ye recauiud me”(Ibid., 35).

²³¹“‘Seke I wos,’ suthly sais he, / ‘And kindly com ze unto me. / for þat ze did oper in my name, / Vnto my-self ze did þe same”(Chapter 26, “On Sick Sisters”).

Abstract emphasize even more the physical care of guests. The Northern Verse again turns the Scripture (which is recorded as *hospes eram et colligistis* instead of *hospes eram et suscipistis*)²³² into a verse:

I was a stranger and you brought me in—I was a guest in my degree
And in your house you harbored me.
Than ought we guests and good pilgrims
To relieve all their limbs
And to refresh altogether right
As it s due by day and night.²³³

Here, physical care is emphasized, and the rule is clear that guests must be attended to at any time. The Caxton Abstract elaborates the Scripture of Matthew 25 also to emphasize physical care of guests: “I was a stranger and you took me in / and gave me food & drink and lodging”²³⁴ This version also emphasizes that the monks should welcome guests both *as God and for Him*: “All strangers or guests are to be received as God and for God.”²³⁵ Interestingly, he refers here not to Matthew 25 but to the *imago Dei*; it is possible to welcome guests as God because “every person is to be honored for the image of God.”²³⁶ Additionally, this writer explains that one serves Christ not only in hospitality, but “other dedes of mercy”²³⁷ as well. The tradition of deeds of mercy in Benedictine life is clearly

²³²In contrast, both the Abindon manuscript and the MS 914 of the Abbey of St Gall use the word *suscepistis* (*Rule of St. Benet*)

²³³“I was a gest and you took me in-- / I was a gest in my degree, / And in 3our hous 3e herberdme./ þan aw us gastes & gud pilgrims / For to releue in al þere lims / and for to refresch in al rgiht, / als it es det be day & night...” (*Rule of St. Benet*, 102).

²³⁴“I was a stranger & ye toke me in / and gaued me mete & drink and lodgyng,” *Rule of St. Benet*, 133. *Mete* here refers not strictly to flesh meat but to food, sustenance, a meal, etc. in general (See *Middle English Dictionary*).

²³⁵“Al strangers or ghestes arn to be receyued for god and as god” (*Rule of St. Benet*, 133).

²³⁶“Every persone is to be honourid for the ymage of god”(*Ibid.*)

²³⁷*Ibid.*

passed down to the Middle English rules; this could be seen as evidence of their importance in Benedictine tradition.

St. Benedict understands prayer to overflow into deeds of mercy, too, thanks to the *memoria*. Since St. Benedict instructs the monks to pray constantly, deeds of mercy should not be seen as an exception to this. On the contrary, because of the *memoria*, one's prayer can carry over to one's deeds of mercy. Pope St. Gregory the Great writes that, "We ought to be transform what we read within our very selves, so that when our mind is stirred by what it hears, our life may concur by practicing what has been heard."²³⁸ The sign of a retentive memory, in medieval understanding, is that what has been learned can be applied in various situations.²³⁹ And indeed, one's *lectio* must bear fruit in daily action. Thus, Scripture which is retained in the *memoria* by *lectio divina* can be applied to everyday encounters with others, including deeds of mercy. St. Benedict demonstrates this by connecting Matthew 25 to receiving guests and feeding the hungry. St. Benedict has prayed this passage of the Gospel and it is a part of his *memoria*. His memory allows him to apply it to various situations, including those particular situations of his monastery. This is an extension of his prayer life. St. Benedict reveals a concrete example of how the monks sought to pray during their manual labor when he says that after the community has washed the feet of the guests, they should say Psalm 47/48:10.²⁴⁰ It is reasonable to assume that prayer was a part of other deeds of mercy as well.

²³⁸ Ibid., 205.

²³⁹ Dr. Mary Carruthers notes that moderns concur with medievals on this view of learning. See p. 1 of *The Book of Memory*.

²⁴⁰ See Ch. 53, ln. 14.

Deeds of mercy can, in turn, can enrich one's prayer. St. Benedict's memories of doing deeds of mercy would enrich the next time that he prays Matthew 25. His *memoria* could combine his life experience with his reading of the Scriptures. He would better be able to imagine and meditate on Matthew 25, having had experience of feeding the hungry and caring for the sick. Manual labor can have a similar benefit; for example, working in the fields can help one to meditate on parables concerning sowing and harvesting. Or, going back to the previous example concerning the washing of the feet, doing this deed of mercy would enable the monk to better be able to meditate on the Last Supper.

b. Our Daily Work

Like St. Benedict, the pastor of *Our Daily Work* understands humility and charity as essential for prayer. He stresses the need to pray with "a (gret) awe and due consideration: for we speak with almighty God when we are but unworthy wretches."²⁴¹ Christians must pray with a "free wil & louand [loving] hert."²⁴² We should pray out of love to God our Father. Since they cultivate humility, manual labor and deeds of mercy can aid one's prayer life.

The author of *Our Daily Work*, like St. Benedict, expects one to normally pray while doing ordinary work. He treats this as a natural expectation. He writes that the

²⁴¹ "Pis aght to stere vs to prai with a (gret) drede & avisement: for we speke with al-mighti god / when we (er bot) vnworthi wreches" (Rolle, *English prose works of Richard Rolle : a selection*, 142).

²⁴² "of þat we him (pray, if we lu)f him as oure fader, & kynd to him be" (Ibid.).

Christian should be outwardly composed as well as devout within, praying to the Lord.²⁴³ He gives some practical advice for doing so. He notes that if he is working at a pace where he cannot pause to pray, he should slow down. Other times, he may be unable to pray, such as from “weariness of your body” or from needing to speak to people. When this happens, the “devotion of your prayer cools.” He does not provide any advice for addressing this challenge, other than perhaps his previous warnings against involving in worldly business unnecessarily. He explains that an ideal time for praying is when walking quietly while doing ordinary business, as such bodily labor does not require much mental attention. Then, the reader can recall everything God has done for him. When traveling, one can also tell good stories or something from the Scriptures to traveling companions, and sometime pray the “Seven Psalms,” the seven penitential psalms of 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143.²⁴⁴

²⁴³ “And as þou ordayns þine vtter beryng in outeyng: als loke þou be with-in / deuote, & nameli in praying / & louyng of þi lorde. If þou mai nocht in outeyng rest whil þou makis þi praiers: ga þe softer. Mani thinges lettis þe trauailand to prai: werynes of lymes, men þat he metis þat with him spekis; þe .v. wittis þen fletis oute of warde / & þen kelis þe deuocion of þe praiand. When þou has said þi praiers walkand þat þou art halden to sai: lift vp þi hert to god & prai him in þi thought in a celi mynde; think on þe godes god has þe done / & sal do if þou him truli serue; think on his biddyngs: & do þaim in dede after þi might; for so god biddis þare he þus sais: Erunt verba hec que precipio tibi / in corde tuo, & enarrabis ea filiis, & meditaberis ea / sedens in domo tua, & ambulans in itinere, dormiens & consurgens. Or in trauailing: tell faire talis to þi felawes, or sum-what of hali write, þat mai soft zoure wai & glad zow in god. And sai sum-tyme þe .vii. psalmes for þe quik & þe dead, þat god gif grace to þe quike: & rest to þe dead”(Ibid., 155).

²⁴⁴ Trans. Jeffrey, *English Spirituality in the Age of Wyclif*, 263. See also *Maidstone’s Seven Penitential Psalms: Introduction* by George Shuffelton. “In the eighth century (and possibly earlier) monks also began reciting the fifteen “gradual” psalms (Vulgate numbers 119–133) and the seven penitential psalms (Vulgate numbers 6, 31, 37, 50, 101, 129, and 142) in private devotion. These groups of psalms later circulated in primers, handbooks of devotion for the laity that were also used for the instruction of children in the basics of Latin (see Edmund Bishop, *Prymer or Lay Folks Prayer Book*, pp. ix–xxii). The majority of primers were in Latin.... But the English laity demonstrated a desire to read the psalms in their native tongue, as evidenced by the number of complete Middle English psalters, particularly in the translation by Richard Rolle (see James Morey, *Book and Verse*, pp. 172–94). The seven penitential psalms, perhaps a more manageable unit for many lay readers, also survives in a number of translations and in many manuscripts. The popularity of these seven psalms owes something to their powerful emphasis on confession and contrition, a fitting topic for private devotional reading.

The pastor of *Our Daily Work* treats praying while doing ordinary work as a normal occurrence, yet a habit that needs cultivation. This is why he gives some practical advice on the subject. The pastor refers to Deuteronomy 6:7 (Vulgate) on this subject, quoting the verse in Latin.²⁴⁵ Seeking to pray always in this way—especially while travelling-- is a way of fulfilling the Lord's command, referring to God's decrees: "And thou shalt tell them to thy children, and thou shalt meditate upon them sitting in thy house, and walking on thy journey, sleeping and rising."²⁴⁶

The writer of *Our Daily Work* discusses deeds of mercy much less than St. Benedict and Walter Hilton. He writes, quoting Galatians 6:10, "Let us do now as the Apostle [Paul] says: 'As we have opportunity, let us work good toward all men.'"²⁴⁷ Deeds of mercy are part of the everyday Christian life. He goes on to write:

And as the Apostle counsels us he did for himself, for it is said that from the first hour of the day until the fifth he worked with his hands to win his food; from the fifth to the tenth he preached to the people; from the tenth until evening he served the poor and pilgrims with such goods as he had; by nightfall he was at prayer, and thus he spent his time.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁵ Rolle, *English prose works of Richard Rolle : a selection*, 156.

²⁴⁶ *Douay-Rheims*

²⁴⁷ Trans. Jeffrey, *English Spirituality in the Age of Wyclif*, 238. "Do we þen as þe apostle sais: Dum tempus habemus, operemur bonum ad omnes"(Rolle, *English prose works of Richard Rolle : a selection*, 139).

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 239. Dr. Jeffrey notes that, "This expansion of the life of St. Paul (and the work habits suggested by Acts 18:3 and 2 Thessalonians 3:7-10) owes to traditional histories and biographies. References to "the Apostle" in this period are inevitably to Paul; it should be noted, however, that he was at this time still thought to have authored the Epistle to the Hebrews." The Middle English text for the quoted passage is: "And as þe apostle redis vs: he did him-selfe: for fra þe first houre of þe daie: vn-to þe fift: he trauaild with his handes / til wyn his fode; & fra þe fift to þe tende: he prechid to þe folke; fra þe x. til euen: he seruid þe pouer & pilgrimes with swilk gode as he had; bi night: was he praiand; & þus spend he his tyme"(Rolle, *English prose works of Richard Rolle : a selection*, 139)

Through St. Paul, the author of *Our Daily Work* gives preaching, serving the poor and pilgrims, and supplying their needs as examples of deeds of mercy. Serving the poor could be one of the deeds of mercy he envisions as part of the daily work of his readers. This passage, however, are the only explicit mention of deeds of mercy throughout the whole text. This could be because he does not focus on deeds of mercy because he knows that most of his readers need to spend their time doing manual labor and other necessary business to support themselves. Unlike St. Benedict and Walter Hilton, the Yorkshire pastor also does not discuss any special theology concerning deeds of mercy except as a way of following St. Paul's example. The could simply be beyond the natural scope of the treatise.

c. Walter Hilton

Walter Hilton is more explicit than the other two authors in explaining how ordinary work can help one to worship better. Throughout his letters to the layman as well as in *Scale of Perfection*, Hilton is very attentive to steps of growing in the spiritual life. He explains that ordinary work is a beginning step in progress in the spiritual life; similar to St. Benedict in chapter 48, Walter writes that “bodily working goes before, and spiritual comes after.”²⁴⁹ (Walter uses the term “bodily work” to refer to work “done by the body”²⁵⁰ or “all manner of good works that the soul does by the senses and members

²⁴⁹ “Bodili wirchyngge goop bifore, and goosteli comeþ aftir”(Hilton, *Mixed Life*, 2).

²⁵⁰ “Goosteli werk comeþ not first, but first comeþ bodili werk þ is done by the bodi, and sipen comeþ goosteli werk aftir”(Hilton, *Mixed Life*, 3).

of the body unto itself,”²⁵¹ including fasting, penance, restraining one’s bodily desires, enduring bodily suffering, and deeds of mercy.²⁵²) Walter explains that when one begins to live a life of service to God, he must first undertake bodily works that his body might be “supple and ready, and not much contrary to the spirit in spiritual working [prayer, meditation, etc]. For...bodily working was made for spiritual working and not spiritual for bodily.”²⁵³ Walter explains that it is “siker and profitable,”²⁵⁴ sound and helpful, for whomever desires to do spiritual work to first be well-practiced in bodily works. The layman desires to develop a life of prayer, and so this section is addressed to him in a special way.

More explicitly than the other authors, Walter explains that these deeds are ways of working out the moral virtues which make possible a life of prayer and purifying his soul. Before he is able to do spiritual work, the Christian must largely break down pride, vainglory, envy, wrath, covetousness, gluttony *accidie*, or lechery.²⁵⁵ Without such virtues, a life of prayer is not possible. He tells the layman that the deeds of mercy which make up a large part of the daily life of the layman are an occasion for growing in virtues.

²⁵¹ “Bi þis bodili worchyng þat I speke of mai þou undirstonde al maner of good werkes þat þi soule doop bi þe wittes and þe memgres of þi bodi unto þi silf, as i[n] fasyng, wakyng, and in refryng of þi fleschli lustis bi oþir penaunce doynge, or to þyn euen-Cristen bi fulfilling of þe dedes of merci bodili or goosteli, or unto God bi suffryng of all maner [bodili] myscheues for þe loue of riztwisenesse. (Hilton, *Mixed Life*, 4).

²⁵² Hilton, *Mixed Life*, 4.

²⁵³ Also it longeþ to alle zongeþe bigynnyng men whiche comen newe oute of wordli synnes to þe service of God, for to make hem able to goosteli wirkyng, and for to breke doun þe unboxumnesse of þe obdy bi reson and bi such bodili werchyng, þat it myzt be souple and redi, and not moche contrarious to ze spirit [in] goosteli wirching”(Hilton, *Mixed Life*, 2).

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

This is not a fast process. As in *The Scale of Perfection*, Walter is sensitive to the fact that growth in the spiritual life often comes slowly and that the layman cannot expect to “suddenly start out of this dark night of this felshly corruption into that ghostly light, for we may not suffer it nor bear it for sickness in ourselves, no more than we may with our bodily eyes when they are sore [or inflamed] behold the light of the sun.”²⁵⁶ He gently explains that “we must abide and work by process of time.”²⁵⁷ Eventually, when one has been well accomplished in bodily works, his soul “somewhat cleansed from great outward sins,” he can then by God’s grace undertake spiritual works.²⁵⁸

Like St. Benedict and the author of *Our Daily Work*, Walter understands how *accidie* is a huge hindrance in a life of prayer. I have already shown how Walter connects the ordinary works of daily life with *acedia* through their connection with charity. He also goes further, noting that sloth or *ydelnessse* often can “come under color of contemplation.”²⁵⁹ The inactivity of *acedia* can outwardly look the same as quiet prayer—and perhaps even feel like it for someone inexperienced in prayer. To prevent

²⁵⁶ “...we mai not sodeynli stirte oute of þis myrk [nizt] of þis fleschli corrupcion in to þat goostli lizt, for we mai not suffre it ne beere it for sikenesse of oure silf, n[o] more þanne we mai wiþ oure bodili izen whanne þei aren sore bihoolde þe [l]izt of þe sonne”(Hilton, *Mixed Life*, 4).

²⁵⁷ “And þefore we mosten abide and worche bi proces of tyme...”(Ibid).

²⁵⁸ “And þanne, whanne þou hast be wel trauailed and wel assaied in alle siche bodili werkes, þan mai þou bi grace ordayne þee to goostli worchyng”(Ibid., 6). And, “oure soule be sumwhat clensed from grete outeward synnes and abled to goosteli werk”(Ibid., 4).

²⁵⁹ “And so schalt þou putte awai bi grace of oure lord slepe, ydelnesse, and veyn reste [of þisilf] þat comeþ undir colour of *contemplacion*, and letteþ þe sumtyme fro meedfulle and spedeful occupacion in outeward bisnesse, and þou schalt be ai wel occupied, eiper bodili or goosteli”(Ibid., 29).

this self-deception, Walter describes that the layman should engage sometimes in “outward business.”²⁶⁰

Walter Hilton does not touch much on praying while doing ordinary work since he is sensitive to the layman’s situation. In the *Epistle on the Mixed Life*, this might be because the layman’s ordinary work is not the quiet manual labor which is so central in *The Rule of St. Benedict* and *Our Daily Work*. Most of the daily work of the layman directee is made of up deeds of mercy and other duties which take up his full mental attention. Like the author of *Our Daily Work* when he says that needing to speak to people can prevent the Christian from praying, Walter separates deeds of contemplative life in which one prays and thinks on the Lord from deeds of mercy towards fellow Christians.²⁶¹ Walter understands that the sort of work which the layman engages in does not readily allow him to have his thoughts on the Lord. Additionally, as an author concerned with spiritual progress, Walter may be keenly aware that praying throughout the day is something one must grow into. It is much more practical to help one beginning a life of prayer to establish set times and habits of prayer than to tell him to try to pray constantly. Such advice might only prove frustrating; perhaps this is also why Walter does not touch on it. Over time, prayer will begin to overflow in the ordinary works of the layman’s life.

Walter is aware that not being able to think about God constantly is painful for the layman. He wishes to leave his current state and become a contemplative. Walter says to

²⁶⁰See above.

²⁶¹Hilton, *Mixed Life*, 49.

him, “I know well the desire of you heart, that you greatly yearn to serve our Lord wholly in spiritual occupation, without the hindrance or troubling of worldly business, that you might come by grace to more knowledge and spiritual feeling of God and of spiritual things.”²⁶² The layman desires to be always praying and to have the Lord in his mind and heart. If the layman was a farmer, or some occupation which involved quiet manual labor, he might be able to lift up his mind to God while he was working. His current station, however, does not allow much for this, which might make the layman’s current state particularly frustrating to him.

In persuading the layman to stay in his station, Walter first emphasizes that his love must be correctly ordered. Charity “lies both in love of God and in fellow Christian”; if he does not fulfill the obligations to those he is bound to, he does not fulfill charity.²⁶³ He then both convinces him to remain where he is and encourages by showing how deeds of mercy are a special way of serving the Lord in His Mystical Body. Walter explains the concept of the Mystical Body of Christ to the layman:

You shall understand that our Lord Jesus Christ, as man, is head of the spiritual body which is Holy Church. The members (limbs) of his body are all Christian men. Some are arms, and some feet, and some are other members after various workings that they use in living here.

Walter is drawing from the letters of St. Paul, especially 1 Corinthians 12, which reads

“For as the body is one, and hath many members; and all the members of the body,

²⁶²“Y knowe weel the desire of þyn herte, þat þou zernest gretli to serue oure lord bi spiritual occupatioun al holli, wiþoute lettynge or trobolyng[e] o[f] wordeli bisynesse, þat þou myztest come bi grace to more knowyng[e] and goosteli feelyng[e] of God and of goostli þynges”(Hilton, *Mixed Life*, 7).

²⁶³“For charite, as þou knowest weel, lieþ boþe in loue of God and of þin euen-Cristene....For he þat, for þe loue of God in contemplacioun, leueþ þe loue of his euen-Cristene, and dooþ not to hem as he ougth whanne he is bounden þerto, he fulfilliþ not charite”(Ibid., 16).

whereas they are many, yet are one body, so also is Christ”²⁶⁴ and goes on to explain that each Christian has a unique place in the body based on the gifts he has received, likening different people to eyes, hands, feet, etc. This theme is found elsewhere in St. Paul, such as Colossians-- “And he is the head of the body, the church...”²⁶⁵ --, Romans 12:24, Ephesians 1:22-23. Paul himself is probably building on the teachings of Christ I have quoted previously, such as in Matthew 25 and John 13. Doubtless he is also pondering Christ’s words to him recounted in Acts 9 where Christ speaks to him (then Saul), “I am Jesus whom thou persecutest”²⁶⁶; in persecuting Christians, Saul was persecuting Christ. Being all connected, “if one members suffer any thing, all the members suffer with it; or if one member glory, all the members rejoice with it.”²⁶⁷ Christ the Head still continues to suffer through His Mystical Body the Church.

Walter explains to the layman that if he abandons his obligations to his fellow Christians in order to be wholly devoted to prayer and meditation which he is not fully bound to, he would be neglecting Christ’s body. He is arraying Christ’s head and face with jewelry and precious stones but leaving Christ’s “body, his arms and his feet, ragged and torn,” or crowning his head but leaving his body “naked and bare as it were a beggar.”²⁶⁸ He would be kissing Christ his devout prayers but treading on His feet,

²⁶⁴1 Cor. 12:13, *Douay-Rheims*

²⁶⁵Col. 1:18, *Douay-Rheims*

²⁶⁶ Acts 9:5, *Douay-Rheims*

²⁶⁷1 Cor. 12:26

²⁶⁸“...zif þou leue þat þynge þat þou art bounden to bi wai of charite, of riȝt, and of resoun, and wolt hooli zeue þe to anoþer þynge wilfulli, as it were to more plesaunce of God, whiche þou art not fulli bounden to, þou doost no[t] worshiþe discreteli to him. þou art bisi to worschiþe his heed and his face, and araie

defouling them by negligence.²⁶⁹ These feet are his children, servants, tenants, and all those in his care. Walter encourages him in saying that by doing deeds of mercy, however less pleasing they may be for him than prayer, he is “waschyng of his feet.”²⁷⁰ The more lowly service he does out of love for Christ and his fellow Christians, the more he will please the Lord.²⁷¹ Christ indeed wills him to serve in this special way by placing him in his current state of life.²⁷² He may not be able to have his thoughts on the Lord much while doing deeds of mercy, but this is a sacrifice he can offer to God with a loving heart. Deeds of mercy have a unique character in relation to service to God; one serves Christ in a special way through His Mystical Body.

Instead of discussing prayer during ordinary work, Walter emphasizes how ordinary work increases charity and one’s desire for God, thus aiding in a life of prayer. One of Walter’s favorite images of charity is the fire of love in the soul. This fire, as I explain in the final chapter, must be continually nourished with sticks so that it does not

him. þou art bisi to worschipe his heed and his face, ad arie it faire and curioseli, but þou leuest his bodi, his armes, ad his feete, ragged and rente, and takest noo keep þereof, and þere þou worschipest hym no3ht, for it is velanye and no worschipe / a man to be curioseli arraied upon his heed wiþ perre and precious stoones, and al his bodi be naked and baare as it were a beggere. Rizt so goosteli, it is no worschipe to God to croune his heed and leue his bodi baare”(Ibid., 25). Ogilvie-Thompson notes that *perre* is jewelry and *membres* here refer to limbs.

²⁶⁹“þou makest þee for to kisse his mouþ bi deuocion and goosteli praier, but þou tredest upon his feet and defoulest hem in as moche as þou wolt not tende to hem, for negligence of þi silf, whiche þou haste take þe cure of. þus þenkþ me”(Hilton, *Mixed Life*, 26).

²⁷⁰Ibid., 27.

²⁷¹“For þe more lowe seruice þat þou [do]st to þi lord for loue of him, or to ony of hise membris what nede and rigztwisenesse askep it, wiþ a glad meke herte, þe more plesist þou hem...”(Ibid.)

²⁷²“For it semep to me, sipen he hap put þee in þat staat for to traueile and seru opere men, þat it is his wil þat þou schuldest fulfille it on þi myzt”(Ibid., 28).

go out; Walter entreats the layman, “I pray you, nourish this fire.”²⁷³ Walter explains that the little “sticks” to enkindle this fire are of diverse matter from different kinds of trees,²⁷⁴ and include “good works of the active life”²⁷⁵ and “good deeds done outwardly to his fellow Christian.”²⁷⁶ Walter instructs the layman to fulfill his responsibilities and then alone in prayer humbly offer his works to God; “lift up your heart to God, and pray that in His goodness he will accept your works that you do to his pleasure.”²⁷⁷ Ordinary work can be offered to the Lord in worship. Walter also encourages the layman by saying that sometimes the more troubled he has been in active works, the more burning his desire for God will be, and by God’s grace he will have a clearer understanding of spiritual things whenever he goes to his prayers and meditations. Because they enkindle the fire of love, the layman’s devotion is increased by the ordinary works of daily life. Walter says that his ordinary will not hinder his devotion, but rather increase it.²⁷⁸

²⁷³ “þis fier is loue and desire to God in a soule, whiche loue [nede] þ for to be norischid and keptid bi leiynge to of stikkes þat it goo not oute. Þise stikkes aren of diuers matir; sum are of oo tree and summe of anopir” (Ibid., 39). “I praie þee, norische þis fier” (Ibid., 40).

²⁷⁴ See above.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 36.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 38.

²⁷⁷ “þat is, first goo do þi werkes, and goo þanne aloone to þi praier and to þi meditaciouns, and lift up þyn herte to God, and praie him of his goodnesse þat he wole accepte þi werkes þat þou doost to his pleasaunce” (Ibid., 36).

²⁷⁸ “And þanne for þis mekenesse schal alle þi good deedis torne in to a flawme of fire as stikkes leid upon a coole, and [so] schal þi gode deedes outward not hyndre þi deuocion, but raper make it more” (Ibid., 37).

CHAPTER FOUR

Ordinary Work: Sanctifying the Soul

a. Introduction

The *opus* of manual labor and deeds of mercy are not worthwhile because of their tangible results alone. While they are certainly done in part to fulfill a certain basic need, they are first an opportunity to serve the Lord, as I have shown in the previous chapters. Ordinary work is also good for the health of the soul. Manual labor and deeds of mercy are preventative and remedies for *acedia* as well as opportunities for growing in charity, humility, and other virtues. First, I will delve into John Cassian's understanding of *acedia* and trace Cassian's influence in *The Rule of St. Benedict, Our Daily Work*, and the writings of Walter Hilton. Second, I will show how each author understands manual labor and deeds of mercy to be remedies for *acedia*. Finally, I will also show how each author understands manual labor and/or deeds of mercy to cultivate virtues of charity and humility.

b. Acedia: The Vice

i. Cassian

John Cassian, who was a strong influence on St. Benedict, describes *acedia* as “weariness or distress of heart” such as described by psalmist David in the verse, “my

soul slept from weariness.”²⁷⁹ *Acedia*, also spelled *accidie*, causes the soul to sleep “as regards all contemplation of the virtues and insight of the spiritual senses.”²⁸⁰ He categorizes it as one of the “eight principal faults,” vices, or diseases, along with gluttony, fornication, covetousness or avarice, anger, dejection, vain-glory, and pride.²⁸¹ He describes them a part of the “fire of vices” which are secretly present in everyone and must be “drag[ged] into light” and extinguished by the “water of virtue.”²⁸² Sometimes called the “noon-day devil,” it tends to especially attack in the dryness of the middle of the day, tempting the monk to give up his work. It is not just a feeling of weariness but lies primarily in the will. *Acedia* is the “sixth combat” the monk must face, a “strong battering ram”²⁸³ against the soul, and the soul must *choose* not to “sink into slumber.”²⁸⁴ While it is described in various terms, *acedia* can summarily be understood in Cassian’s perspective as a fault, disease, or vice of weariness or listlessness of spirit.

The vice of *acedia* is a capital vice which leads to other sins. If the monk is overcome by it, it can lead to two different outcomes:

And whenever it begins in any degree to overcome any one, it either makes him stay in his cell idle and lazy, without making any spiritual progress, or it drives him out from thence and makes him restless and a wanderer, and indolent in the matter of all kinds of work.²⁸⁵

²⁷⁹ Cassian, John *Institutes*, X. Cassian is referring to *destillavit anima mea prae stultia*, Psalm 118:28 (Vulgate), “my soul hath slumbered through heaviness.”

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Cassian, *Institutes* V, II

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Trans. Gibson. Cassian, *Institutes (Book X)*.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

Giving in to *acedia* may cause the monk to be idle in his cell, overcome by a spiritual torpor, or it may cause him to be restless and leave his cell to distract him from his unwillingness to work. Either way, the monk is refusing the work he has been given to do. Cassian goes on to describe this as a progression, explaining that *acedia* leads to idleness, which then leads to restlessness and sins of meddling such as gossip.²⁸⁶ He also judges the sins of meddling to “spring solely from the malady of leisure”²⁸⁷ or idleness. It appears to be that while *acedia* is a deadly vice that the monk must conquer in the soul, the occasion of sin is for the man to choose willfully to give up the work he is called to do, whether this takes the form of inactive laziness (lazing about, one might say) or seeking some distracted occupation other than the work he needs to do. The first reaction might sometimes lead to the second. It is progressive; the more the monk sins by this idleness, a refusal to work, the more he is steeped in the spirit of *acedia*.

Cassian also translates the term *acedia* as *otiositas*. For example, in Book X, “The Spirit of Accidie,” Cassian gives an exegesis on 2 Thessalonians 3 to show the symptoms of *acedia* or *otiositas*. In Chapter VIII, titled “That he is sure to be restless who will not be content with the work of his own hands,” he comments on 3:7: “*Because we were not restless among you*. Since he [St. Paul] wishes to prove through the exercise of works that he was not restless among them, he amply observes that those who refuse to be working prove always restless by the vice of *otiositas*.”²⁸⁸ He later says that the “so great ulcers” of idleness and *curiose agentes*, curious doing or “curiously meddling” as C.S.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Latin text: *Quia non inquieti fuimus inter vos. Cum se vult inquietum inter eos non fuisse per operis exercitium conprobare, eos qui operari nolunt abunde notat otiositatis vitio inquietos semper existere.* (Cassian, *Iohannis Cassiani opera: De institutis coenobiorum*, 181)/

Gibbons translates it,²⁸⁹²⁹⁰ “emerge from the root of *otiositas*.”²⁹¹ Again, *otiositas* is another term that he uses for the traditional vice of *acedia*.

ii. *The Rule of St. Benedict*

In *The Rule of St. Benedict*, St. Benedict conveys an understanding of Cassian’s *acedia*, using the term *otiositas*. He uses the term once in the *Rule* in a prominent place, opening²⁹² Chapter 48 with the terse phrase, *otiositas inimica est animae*, or “*otiositas* is the enemy of the soul.”²⁹³ He does not discuss *otiositas* in-depth, which is appropriate concerning the practical nature of *The Rule*. While *otiositas* can be translated to mean simply “idleness,” as many translators of the *Rule of St. Benedict* have done, it is often a Latin translation of the Greek term *acedia*, as I showed previously in Cassian. Due to the influence of Cassian on Benedict, it is reasonable to assume that *otiositas* is the term Benedict uses to refer to vice of *acedia*. This is probably the case here.²⁹⁴ The connection to *acedia* is substantiated by the content of Chapter 48. St. Benedict warns against the brother who *vacet otio aut fabulis*,²⁹⁵ which can be translated “is idle/unoccupied with

²⁸⁹ Trans. Gibson. Cassian, *Institutes (Book X)*.

²⁹⁰ *Velut quidam remunculus oritur: sed curiose agentes.* (Cassian, *Iohannis Cassiani opera: De institutis coenobiorum*, 185).

²⁹¹ *Causas tantorum ulcerum, quae de radice otiositas emergent...* (Cassian, *Iohannis Cassiani Opera: De Institutis Coenobiorum*, 185).

²⁹² Here, *otiositas* can be translated as “idleness,” a meaningless, vain, or lazy inactivity. In other places *otio* alone can be translated in the positive sense of a holy leisure. While the two may sometimes outwardly appear the same, they are very different.

²⁹³ Benedict, *Rule of St. Benedict*, Ch.48, v.1.

²⁹⁴ Reno, *Fighting the Noonday Devil*, 3. Even if St. Benedict is referring to the state of being idle, he would have seen this as closely causing or closely stemming from *acedia*.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

idleness or stories.” In other words, there are two ways of wasting time: by doing nothing or by unimportant chatter. This points to a richer understanding of *otiositas* than simply inactivity. Additionally, the connection here between sins of idle inactivity and sins of restless activity is similar to Cassian’s treatment of *acedia*. *Otiositas* can be understood to be an equivalent term to *acedia* in *The Rule*.

iii. Our Daily Work

In Middle-English literature, *idelnes* or idleness is often the term used for *acedia*, as is the case in *Our Daily Work*. Chaucer gives us a context of medieval English vocabulary at the beginning of the Prologue of the “Second Nun’s Tale” by writing, “That servant and that nurse unto the vices / Which men do call in English Idleness, Portress at Pleasure’s gate, by all advices / We should avoid...”²⁹⁶ Like Chaucer, the author of *Our Daily Work* uses the term “idleness.” He translates the Latin word *otiositas* as “idleness”[*idelnes*] quoting from Ecclesiastes 33:29 in Latin: “Against *idelnes*, says Solomon, ‘*Otiositas* has taught much evil.’”²⁹⁷

The author of *Our Daily Work* uses the term *idelnes* much as the Latin term *otiositas* is used. On one hand, it can refer to the state of being idle, the occasion of sin, something like lazy inactivity; often the pastor uses *idelnes* to refer to a state of idleness, not the deadly vice itself. For example, before quoting Ecclesiastes, he writes that “there are three ways in which one loses his time: the first is in idleness; the second is in work that no real good can come of; the third is in good words which are not ordained as they

²⁹⁶ Chaucer, “Prologue of the Second Nun’s Tale,” *Canterbury Tales*,

²⁹⁷ “Agayn idelnes: sais Salomon: *Multam maliciam docuit ociositas.*” (Rolle, *English prose works of Richard Rolle : a selection*, 139.)

should be.”²⁹⁸ Or, in quoting the teacher Barlaham, “...Since I was born it has been all of 60 years; but those years that I spent in idleness and sin before I took me to this New Life, I hold as years of death.”²⁹⁹

On the other hand, *idelnes* appears to also refer to the rich concept of *acedia*. Other times, the pastor’s description of *idelnes* resembles *acedia* or *otiositas*, such as: “*Idelnes* is nurse to all the vices, making one reckless about not doing what he is beholden to do.”³⁰⁰ He goes on to describe how Satan, “when he finds anyone idle, puts into that person’s heart foul thoughts of fleshly filth and other follies that may bring him to sin; after that he prompts that person actually to perform his fantasies until he entirely contradicts the Apostles’s bidding...”³⁰¹ He says that “idleness opens the door to [Satan]” and quotes Seneca: “he lives not to his own benefit who lives for his stomach and the ease of his flesh at every opportunity.”³⁰² The description of *idelnes* as opening the way for other sins resembles *acedia* or *otiositas*. It especially resembles the principal vice of *acedia* this description: “*Idelnes* smitis a man as ware in paralsi, & makis his lymes drie /

²⁹⁸ trans. Jeffrey, *English Spirituality in the Age of Wyclif*, 239.. “In .III. maners / man tynes his tyme: In idelnes, or in werks þat na gode comes of, or in gode werks bot noght ordeynd as þai suld be. Agayn idelnes: sais Salomon: *Multam maliciam docuit ociositas*” (Rolle, *English prose works of Richard Rolle : a selection*, 139)

²⁹⁹ trans. Jeffrey, *English Spirituality in the Age of Wyclif*, 241. “Sen I was borne: hase bien lx. 3eres; bot þas 3eres þat i spendid in idelnes & syn / or i toke me to þis life: I hald as 3eres of dede.” (Rolle, *English prose works of Richard Rolle : a selection*, 139)

³⁰⁰ Anonymous, “Our Daily Work,” 240. Trans. Jeffrey

³⁰¹ “And when þe fend fyndis man idel: he puttis in his hert / foule thoughtis of fleshli filth, or oper folys þat mai bring him to syn; after he eggis him til do þaim in dede,” *Rule of St. Benet*, 139.

³⁰² Trans. Jeffrey. “...so idelnes drawis him in þerto. And Seneke sais: ‘he lifs noght to him-selfe: þat lifs to his wambe & to eise of his flesh in al þat he mai” (Rolle, *English prose works of Richard Rolle : a selection*, 138)

þat he mai nocht wirke.”³⁰³ This description of a progressive disease is much like Cassian’s *acedia*.

The pastor first focuses on the sins of being idle, of inactivity: “Grete schame is to be idel in þis tyme of grace”³⁰⁴ At the same time, it is in the context of *idelnes* and its progressive nature that the pastor begins his next section: “What losing of time it is to travail about things that no profit comes of!”³⁰⁵ The author goes on to describe how one can waste time not only by inactivity but also in vain works and giving oneself too busily to the things of the world,³⁰⁶ similar to the restless activity of Cassian’s *acedia*. In the next section, he describes “three types of impediments to spiritual living. . . :useless, vain chattering, raking about in other folks’ business, and excessive care about worldly things.”³⁰⁷ After initially describing idleness he goes on to describe unnecessary business, vain works and vanities, sins related to community life, and disordered loves of the things of the world. All of these are connected to *idelnes*. As he says at the beginning of the work: “From the beginning, we see that one ought to guard against squandering his short time, or spending it mistakenly, or in idleness letting it pass away.”³⁰⁸

³⁰³ *English Spirituality in the Age of Wyclif*, 239. Trans. Jeffrey. *Our Daily Work*, MS Arundel 507. Or, as translated from the Thornton Manuscript, “Idleness smites a man as if he were in paralysis, and makes his limbs atrophy until he cannot work.”

³⁰⁴ Trans. Jeffrey.

³⁰⁵ Ibid. “What losyng of tyme it is: to traual aboute thinges þat na profit comes of!” (Rolle, *English prose works of Richard Rolle : a selection*, 139)

³⁰⁶ Ibid. “Wonder it ware þat man þat gifs him to bisynes of þe werld / mare þen nedis: had na lettyng in praier, in rest of hert, in sothefastnes of worde, in perfeccione of gode werks, in luf to god & all cristen men”(140).

³⁰⁷ Trans. Jeffrey 242. Ibid. “Thre maners of occupacions are, as sere langling & mikil, Raykyng aboute, Mikil traailing aboute werldli thinges”(140).

³⁰⁸ Ibid. “At the fyrste, sall euer-ylke gud cristene mane vmbylke hyme & euer be warre þat he tye noghte the schorte tyme, or wrange dispende it, or in ydilnes late it ouer passe.”

Like *otiositas*, the term of *idelnes* can be problematic, for it difficult to discuss the distinction between the vice or habit in the soul and the occasion of sin, of lazy inactivity. Although it is a less precise term than *acedia*, in this text *idelnes* appears to refer to the same vice.

iv. *Walter Hilton*, *Epistles on the Mixed Life and Scale of Perfection*

Walter Hilton also demonstrates an understanding of Cassian's *acedia*. Hilton uses the term *accidie* four times when writing to the enclosed nun in Book One of the *Scale of Perfection*, naming it as one of the principal or deadly vices to combat. In the *Scale*, Walter describes the "image of sin" from which one seeking perfection must work to purify himself, giving remedies for deadly vices. The first time *accidie* appears, Walter says that the image of sin is clothed in "pride, envie, ire, accidie, glotonye, and lecherie."³⁰⁹ *Accidie* is obviously referring to the traditional vice of *acedia* here. He does not define *accidie*, assuming that the nun has a basic understanding of the term. Walter goes on to treat each vice, including *accidie*, in more detail in Book I. In doing so, he demonstrates a similar understanding of *acedia* as Cassian. He writes that instead of *accidie*, the Christian should increase "fervour of devocioun."³¹⁰ In opposing fervor of devotion with *accidie*, he reveals the understanding of *accidie* as a kind of listlessness or apathy of soul. He also says that *accidie* is "slowe"³¹¹ to do good works and gives the image of *accidie* as slow feet on a man, connecting it to both weariness of spirit and lazy

³⁰⁹ Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection, Book I*, ln. 1497-8.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, ln. 2480.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, ln. 2449-2450.

inactivity.³¹² *Accidie* can be understood as the traditional vice of *acedia*, in the vein of Cassian's writings.

In the *Scale of Perfection*, Walter begins by solely naming *accidie* as the principal vice, and then adds more recognizable term. In the title of chapter 39, he writes: "Hou love sleeth coveitise, leccherie, glotonye, and accidie, and the fleschli savour and delite in alle the fyve bodili wittes in the perfite love of Jhesu...." Yet, in the actual content of the chapter, he lists "accidie and flishli ydelness" together. This could be viewed as either synonyms of the vice to combat, or two very similar vices. Unlike the pastor of *Our Daily Work*, Hilton may find the term "idleness" to be too problematic to use as a translation of *accidie*, especially in a text which emphasizes the distinction between the image of sin and actual sin. Hilton is aware, however, that readers of the *Scale* may lack the knowledge of what *acedia* is. To compensate, he uses *accidie* and idleness together here. Although his language is neither precise nor consistent, his lay readers should at least get a sense of what he is talking about. In his pastoral texts, Hilton sometimes use less precise language in order that his intended audience might understand his message, as well as perhaps to compensate for problematic English terminology.

In *Book II* of the *Scale*, possibly written in part with a lay audience in mind, Walter uses a different method. He writes that love slays "*accidie* and fleischly ydelnesse, making the soule lifli and spedi to the service of Jhesu."³¹³ Here, idleness refers to the state of being idle; by describing *accidie* in this way, Walter gives a primary

³¹² Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection, Book I*, ln. 2448-2452. "The feet of this ymage aren accidie, and therefore the wise man seith to the slowe for to stire him to goode werkis thus: *Discurre, festina, suscita amicum tuum* (Proverbs 6:3). That is to seie, renne quykli aboute to good werkes, and haste thee swithe, for the tyme passeth; and reise up thi freend, whiche is Jhesu, bi devoute praier and meditacioun."

³¹³ *Ibid.*, ln. 2815-2816.

symptom of *accidie* for readers unfamiliar with the term to recognize.

In his first letter to a layman, Walter uses imprecise terminology, inconsistently using the terms “idleness,” “bodily ease,” sloth, and *accidie* to convey the rich sense of *acedia*. In *Treatise on the Mixed Life*, fleshly rest and idleness are described as two different symptoms of a coldness of heart: “ofte it [the fire of love] wexeth coold, and turneth to flesschli reste, and sumtyme to idleness.”³¹⁴ Here, he may be trying to describe *acedia* to a reader who probably has not had the benefit of reading Cassian or another text on this vice in Latin. He also may be sensitive to the limited education of the layman about the vices. When he refers to the vice again in *Treatise on the Mixed Life*, he uses a different method: “Breke doune as moche as thou mai fleshly likyngs, eiþer in accidie or in bodiili eese, or glotonie, or leccherie.”³¹⁵ Here, it appears that he is using “bodili eese” as another term or translation for *accidie*. Yet, the word *or* and the comma placement makes it slightly ambiguous. Walter seems not to be comfortable with simply translating of *accidie* as bodily ease, yet wants to communicate to the layman something of what he means by the term.

In his second letter to the layman Hilton uses a different method, saying that sloth, idleness, and vain rest can disguise themselves as contemplation.³¹⁶ “Idleness” I have already discussed. “Vain rest” seems to mean a similar thing as “bodily ease,” except showing more of a distinction between the inactivity of *acedia* and good leisure through

³¹⁴ Hilton, *Mixed Life*, 36.

³¹⁵ Hilton, *Mixed Life*, 5.

³¹⁶ “And so schalt þou putte awai bi grace of oure lord sleþe, ydelnesse, and veyn reste [of þisilf] þat comeþ undir colour of *contemplacion*, and letteþ þe sumtyme fro meedfulle and spedeful occupacion in outward bisnesse, and þou schalt be ai wel occupied, eiþer bodili or goosteli” (Ibid., 29).

the term “vain.” This time, he drops the term *accidie* completely in favor of the term “sloth.” R.R. Reno notes that “In English, this vice [*acedia*] shows up in the standard lists of the seven deadly sins under the heading of sloth. But citing synonyms and translations only signals the crudest definitions.”³¹⁷ In general, the term “sloth” in Middle English literature fails to capture the rich meaning of *acedia*, which Reno notes “is a complex spiritual state that defies simple definition.”³¹⁸ Some Middle English texts use the term “sloth” with a narrow understanding of simply lazy inactivity or idleness, while others, such as *Our Daily Work* and the writings of Walter Hilton capture much of the richness of Cassian’s *acedia*.

Although he uses imprecise terms or translations for *accidie* when addressing a lay audience, here Hilton conveys the same richness of *accidie* as he does for the enclosed nun. In *Treatise on the Mixed Life*, for example, he writes, “Breke doune as moche as thou mai fleshly likyngs, eiþer in accidie or in bodiili eese, or glotonie, or leccherie.”³¹⁹ This language of “breaking down” the vices recalls the language of Cassian. Additionally, in his *Treatise on the Mixed Life*, he explains to the layman that our love and desire for God, the fire of love, “ofte it wexeth coold, and turneth to flesschli reste, and sumtyme to idleness.”³²⁰ This coldness which leads to fleshly rest and idleness resembles the heaviness of Cassian’s *acedia*. Similarly, in *The Scale of Perfection* he

³¹⁷ Reno, *Fighting the Noonday Devil*, 3

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Hilton, *Mixed Life*, 6

³²⁰ Hilton *Mixed Life*, 36.

places liveliness of soul and speediness to good works in opposition to *accidie*.³²¹ Like in Book I, *accidie* can then be understood as a listlessness of soul connected to lazy inactivity. Additionally, he understands the effect of *acedia* or idleness to be “hevynesse and peynful bitternesse”³²² in the soul when work is necessary; this is even more closely resembles Cassian.

Although Hilton describes *accidie* as a kind of bitterness, as in the previous texts, this vice lies primarily in the will. Hilton emphasizes the role of affections in vices and virtues. For example, he says: “...the conforming of a soul to God...may not be had but he first be reformed by the fulness of virtues turned into affection.”³²³ The primary place of virtues is in the will. As the person is perfected, his affections too will be perfected. He goes on to explain:

There is many a man who has virtues, as humility, patience, and charity to his fellow-Christian, and such others, only in his reason and will and has no spiritual delight nor love in him. For many times he feels grouchiness, heaviness, and bitterness to practice them, and nevertheless he does them by strength and stirring of reason for fear of God. The man has virtues in reason and in wille, but not the love of them in affection.³²⁴

Feelings of grouchiness, then, is not the sin of *accidie*. The Christian can choose to do good works even if he feels sluggish. In a passage on pride, Hilton explains that the

³²¹ “And yit dooth love more, for it sleeth accidie and fleischli ydelnesse, and maketh the soule lifli and spedi to the service of Jhesu...” Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection, Book II*, 2815-16.

³²² Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection, Book II*, 2820.

³²³ “This is the confoormynge of a soule to God, which may not be had but he be first reformyd bi fulheed of vertues turnyd into affeccion,” Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection, Book I*, ln. 314-315

³²⁴ “There is many man that hath vertues, as lowenesse, pacience, charité to his even Cristene, and siche othere, onli in his resoun and wille and hath no goostli delite ne love in hem. For ofte tyme he felith grucchinge, hevynesse, and bittirnesse for to doo hem, and neverthelees yit he doth hem bi strengthe and stiryng of resoun for drede of God. This man hath vertues in resoun and in wille, but not the love of hem in affeccion,” *Ibid.*, 317-321

Christian can (and should) choose humility in his will, can will not to be prideful. Still, the Christian who is still on his way to perfection may feeling “stirrings of pride.” Hilton explains that feeling them against one’s will is not a sin, or at most may be a venial sin, as it is difficult to know when one may be in a small way allowing oneself to experience such feelings. These feelings may come from the weakness one has from wounds of past sins or as temptations from Satan. Whatever the case, Hilton is clear that simply feeling the stirrings as they spring out, be it the stirrings of pride or the stirrings of any other vice, is not a sin when against one’s will.³²⁵ By opening it up to any other vice, he is including *accidie*. Experiencing against one’s will stirrings of *accidie*, such as feeling heavy, sluggish, or bitter, is not the sin of *accidie*. The sin occurs when the person chooses to act upon these feelings.

This idea is implicitly present in St. Benedict, Cassian, and the author of *Our Daily Work* as well. In prescribing manual labor as a preventative and remedy for *accidie*, they emphasize simply doing the work one is given to do—*stabilitas*. They recognize that one is capable of choosing to work even amidst feelings prompted by the spirit of *acedia*.

Manual Labor and Deeds of Mercy: Remedies for Acedia, Cultivating Virtue

Cassian

Cassian recounts the story of Abbot Paul who regularly collected palms he had

³²⁵ “But now seist thou, that thou mai not flee siche styrynges of pride. For ofte sithes thou felist hem agens thi wil, and therefore thou holdest hem no synne, or if thei be synne, thei are not but venial synne. As unto this I seie thus, that the felynge of these styrynges of pride or of any othir sich springen out, oither of the corrupcion of this foule ymage or bi incastyng of the enemye, it is no synne, in as moche as thou felist hem,” *Ibid.*, ln. 1594-1595.

grown and then every year burnt them all because he had no where to give or sell them to. This tells us that manual labor is good in itself, even apart from earning one's bread or supporting a community. In this story, Cassian writes making and burning the palms enabled the monk to gain "victory over accidie...driving it away."³²⁶ One manual labor's its benefits is that it is a remedy for *acedia*. In his commentary on Thessalonians, Cassian describes the maladies of disorderly conduct, restlessness, and curious meddling which are the results of *acedia* or *otiositas*. The *remedia* is contained in verse 3:12, "Moreover, in the Lord Jesus, we declare and entreat to those who are of this way, that they toiling with silence should eat their own bread."³²⁷ Cassian comments:

The causes of such ulcers, which spring from the root of *otiositas*, he cured by one salutary precept of work, as a skilled doctor, knowing that such other bad conditions sprouting from the same mound will immediately be extinguished with the origin of the sickness having been removed.³²⁸

Cassian also comments that St. Paul gives the charge *si quis non vult operari, nec manducet* or "he who does not want to be working, neither should he eat" (3:10) in order that men might be forced to set aside their *amore otii*, love of ease or idleness, and do work.³²⁹ Manual labor is the cure for all the symptoms of *acedia*.

Inversely, manual labor can be used to prevent occasions of sins of idleness in the first place. St. Paul writes that he and his companions wearied themselves with bodily

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ *his autem qui huiusmodi sunt denuntiamus et obsecramus in domino Iesu, ut cum silentio operantes penem suum manducet*, Ibid.

³²⁸ *causas tantorum ulcerum, quae de radice otiositatis emergent, uno operationis salutari praecepto curavit ut peritissimus mendicorum, ceteras quoque valitudines malas eodem cespice pullulantes sciens protinus extinguendas origine morbi principalis exempta*, Ibid., 185-186.

³²⁹ *Iohannis Cassiani Opera: De Institutis Coenobiorum*, 184-185.

labors to earn their food in order to set a good example(3:8).³³⁰ By setting the example of work, St. Paul will hopefully prevent the troubles from *acedia* from ever springing up in the first place. Cassian shows this in Chapter XXII, where he writes that “And so taught by these examples the Fathers in Egypt never allow monks, and especially the younger ones, to be idle[*otiosos*]....”³³¹ The Egyptian abbots, in order to prevent idleness and provide a remedy for *acedia*, regulate times of manual labor.

Additionally, the way to have victory over *acedia* is to simply persist in doing the manual labor, or any kind of labor, that one has been given to do.³³² John Cassian expresses this idea in the *Institutes* in recounting an exchange between him and Abbot Moses. Cassian relates to him that he was attacked by accidie the previous day and was only released from its grip by going to Abbot Paul. Abbot Moses responds, “You have not freed yourself from it, but rather have given yourself up to it as its slave and subject.... rather learn to triumph over it by endurance and conflict.” Cassian concludes, “Whence it is proved by experience that a fit of accidie should not be evaded by running away from it, but overcome by resisting it.”³³³ By persisting in the manual labor one has been assigned to do, the monk can triumph over *acedia*.

³³⁰ Ibid., 183-184.

³³¹ Here translated by Rev. Gibson. Latin Text: *His itaque exemplis per Aegyptum patres erudite nullo modo otiosos esse monachos ac praecipue innes sinuut...* (Cassian, *Iohannis Cassiani Opera: De Institutis Coenobiorum*, 192).

³³² This is similar to the monk Evagrius of Pontus, a monk who lived from 345-355 A.D. who influenced John Cassian and St. Benedict, wrote that, “The time of temptation is not the time to leave one’s cell, devising plausible pretexts. Rather, stand there firmly and be patient.”(see *Fighting the Noonday Devil*, 13). While here Evagrius is praising the benefits of *stabilitas*, stability, the greatest weapon against *acedia*, this applies too to manual labor.

³³³ Trans. Gibson. Cassian, *Institutes (Book X)*.

The monk on his journey toward holiness seeks not just to rid himself of vices but to become virtuous, to become holy (perhaps it may be said that combating vices and building virtues are done simultaneously and build on one another). The purpose of manual labor is not just to banish and prevent *acedia* but to build virtues. Cassian expresses this idea in his story about Abbot Paul. Not only does Abbot Paul drive away *accidie* by doing manual labor with the palms, but he performs manual labor “simply for the sake of purifying his heart, and strengthening his thoughts.”³³⁴ Through manual labor, the monk gains purity of heart and a kind of focus of mind that is the opposite of *acedia*’s restlessness. Manual labor is essential in order to become holy; as Cassian writes, “without manual labor a monk cannot... rise to the heights of perfection.”³³⁵

The Rule of St. Benedict

Perhaps the most obvious reason for manual labor’s importance in *The Rule of St. Benedict* is that it is necessary for the community to support itself; living by one’s own labor is a central to monastic life. The early Benedictine monastery was “an independent family, self-contained, autonomous, managing its own affairs.”³³⁶ Each community would have sought to support itself financially, following the example of St. Paul and other Church fathers and apostles who labored for their own bread. St. Benedict makes this clear when he says that *veri monachi sunt si labore manuum suarum vivunt sicut et patres*

³³⁴ Trans. Gibson. Cassian, *Institutes (Book X)*.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*

³³⁶ Alston, “The Benedictine Order.”

nostris et apostolis,³³⁷ or “they are true monks if they live by the labor of their own hands just as our fathers and the apostles.” The monk should do whatever various kind of manual labor is needed or useful for the community to support itself. Manual labor has the benefit of physically sustaining the community, making the monastic life possible.

Manual labor also provides the physical goods necessary for deeds of mercy. Cassian explains that the monks in Egypt not only do manual labor to support themselves, but also to “refresh pilgrims and brethren who come to visit them, “to...collect an enormous store of provisions and food, and distribute it in the parts of Libya which suffer from famine and barrenness,” and to give food to those “also in the cities, to those who are pining away in the squalor of prison.”³³⁸ The benefit of manual labor is not only to sustain the monastery, but also to offer hospitality and give food to the needy. St. Benedict expresses this idea in his *Rule* by assigning two brothers each year to a kitchen for guests, and explaining that all monks must help in the guest kitchen in order to provide food for the guests.³³⁹ Through the manual work of artisans, the monks can offer various goods to the people at a lower price than usual as another kind of deed of mercy.³⁴⁰ A benefit of manual labor is that it makes deeds of mercy possible.

In the Benedictine tradition, there are several intrinsic reasons for doing manual labor. The first is that it can be an offering to the Lord, as I discussed in the previous chapter. Second, as in Cassian, it is a remedy for *acedia*. St. Benedict begins Chapter 48 with: *Otiositas inimica est animae, et ideo certis temporibus occupari debent fratres in*

³³⁷ *Rule of St. Benedict*, Ch.48, ln.8-9.

³³⁸ Trans. Gibson. Cassian, *Institutes (Book X)*.

³³⁹ *Rule of St. Benedict*, Ch.58, v.17-18.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 65.

*labore manuum, certis iterum horis in lectione divina*³⁴¹ or “*otiositas* is the enemy of the soul, and therefore at certain times the brothers ought to be occupied in manual labor, and again certain hours in *lectio divina*.” St. Benedict’s primary reason for regulating manual labor is not that it is needed for physical nourishment, but that it is good for the monks; it is a remedy for *acedia*, a weapon against the enemy of the soul. In this way, he is following closely in Cassian’s footsteps.

The understanding of the benefits of manual labor as a prevention, cure for, and weapon against *acedia* is also reflected in the Middle English rules for nuns. One can also see the influence of St. Paul in the English Benedictine tradition as well as in St. Benedict’s Latin *Rule* on the understanding of the relationship between manual labor and *acedia*. Since St. Benedict was heavily influenced by Cassian, it is likely that he was familiar with Cassian’s commentary on 2 Thessalonians 3. He may have arrived at the phrase “Idleness is the enemy of the soul” by interpreting St. Paul with Cassian.³⁴² One can also see St. Paul’s influence on the writer of the Caxton Middle English edition as well. Like the Latin *Rule*, “Idilnesse is the enmye of þhe soul” are the first words of Chapter 48 in the Caxton Abstract. The Northern Prose of the *Rule* contains: “For ydilnes, os sais sant paul, es grete enemy unto þhe saul. / And þefore es ordand þat þi / sum gude warkes sal wirk always, / and sum certane times of þe 3er / to wirk with hand...”³⁴³ Interestingly, while actually quoting St. Benedict, the Caxton author attributes the idea that “idleness is the enemy of the soul” to St. Paul. She is probably referring to

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 54.

³⁴² *Rule of St. Benet*

³⁴³ *Rule of St. Benet*, 99.

the same Pauline writings of St. Paul that Cassian draws from, whether or not she has read the *Institutes*.

The second intrinsic reason for doing manual labor is that it helps to cultivate virtues. The first virtue which manual labor cultivates is humility through the labor itself. In the chapter “De opera cotidiano manuum,” St. Benedict instructs the monks to “non contristentur” or “not be saddened” when they need to do labor in the fields on account of the poverty of the monks.³⁴⁴ I can think of two main reasons why a monk might be sad at the prospect of harvesting: first, it is difficult work, and second, it is lowly work. John Paul II writes in “*Laborem Exercens*”:

The ancient world introduced its own typical differentiation of people into classes according to the type of work done. Work which demanded from the worker the exercise of physical strength, the work of muscles and hands, was considered unworthy of free men and was therefore given to slaves.³⁴⁵

Manual labor was often disdained by free men in the times of early Christianity, and this attitude persisted in Benedict’s day.³⁴⁶ St. Benedict was working to correct this attitude, showing that manual labor has an inherent dignity and is meant for man, not visa versa. Thus the first reason he gives for manual labor’s importance is not that it is physically necessary, but that it combats *otiositas*. Manual labor is good for man. Additionally, by regulating manual labor, Benedict teaches the monks that they are not above the labor which servants were accustomed to do. Manual labor cultivates humility.

Furthermore, Because it can be done in silence, manual labor allows the monk to

³⁴⁴ Ibid., 54.

³⁴⁵ John Paul II, “*Laborem Exercens*.”

³⁴⁶ Ford, “St. Benedict of Nursia,” In *the Catholic Encyclopedia*

grow in virtues of humility, temperance, and even prudence. In “On Silence,” St. Benedict regulates that monks should be accustomed to keep silent, quoting Psalm 38[39]: “I said: I will take heed to my ways: that I sin not with my tongue. I have set guard to my mouth, when the sinner stood against me. I was dumb, and was humbled, and kept silence from good things...”³⁴⁷ Monks should refrain from jokes, story-telling, or conversation while working; even perfect monks must have permission to converse about good things.³⁴⁸ This silence builds the virtues of humility, temperance, and prudence.

Concerning humility, St. Benedict writes that “It is fitting for the teacher to speak and to teach; it is appropriate for the disciple to be silent and to listen.”³⁴⁹ Since activities such as harvesting would have often needed to be done in groups of two or more, the silence amidst the company of others in manual labor would have been particularly humbling. Additionally, the silence was not absolute, and so the monks would have been allowed to speak when necessary concerning their manual labor together. Manual labor would have been a prime time for practicing self-control and being silent since would sometimes or often need to work together on various tasks. When alone monks do not have much opportunity to build the virtues of self-control in speech, for it is easy to be silent when there is no one nearby with whom to speak. Manual labor usually does not require much speech, and it would be easy for monks to tell stories, make conversation, tell jokes, or grumble and complain during times of working together. It takes prudence and temperance to refrain from speaking good things which may appear necessary to

³⁴⁷ Psalm 38:2-3a, *Douay-Rheims*

³⁴⁸ *The Rule of St. Benedict*, 42-43. Here he quotes Proverbs 10:19 and afterwards Proverbs 18:21.

³⁴⁹ *loqui et docere magistrum condecet; tacere et audire discipulo convenit* (*Rule of St. Benedict*, Ch.6, ln.6).

work but which really are not. Manual labor thus has the benefit of being a training ground for virtue because of the silence in which it is done.

Deeds of mercy are also an opportunity to practice humility. Because of his understanding of Matthew 25, St. Benedict sees deeds of mercy, especially hospitality, as a way of serving Christ in the least of these. I will explore this idea further in the next chapter. Because guests are to be welcomed as Christ, and by extension all they minister to as Christ, deeds of mercy should be particularly humbling. In fact, humility is required to do them. Because of the greatness of the task, St. Benedict specifies that it is only a brother who possesses the fear of God who may serve the guests.³⁵⁰ St. Benedict seeks to foster this humility through deeds of mercy, instructing the monks to greet and bid goodbye to a guest with humility, “with bowed head or the whole body prostrate on the ground” because “Christ, who is also received, should be worshipped with them.”³⁵¹ Following His example in the Last Supper, St. Benedict also instructs that the abbot and all the monks should humbly wash the feet of the guests.

Although he does not discuss it explicitly, St. Benedict expresses the idea that every good work serves to increase the virtue of charity in the heart of the monk. This would include manual labor and deeds of mercy. At the end of the Prologue, St. Benedict describes the *dominici scola servitii*, the “school of the Lord’s service” and encourages the brothers not to shrink from the road ahead. Instead, he exhorts, “truly by progress in the monastic way of life and in faith, with hearts expanded by the unutterable sweetness

³⁵⁰ *Idem et cellam hospitem habeat adsignatam fater cuius animam timor Dei possidet* (Ibid., 174).

³⁵¹ Ibid, 173. *In Ipsa autem salutatione omnis exhibeatur humilitas omnibus venientibus sive discendentibus hospitibus; inclinatio capite vel prostrate omni corpore in terra, Christus in eis adoretur qui et suscipitur*, 172.

of love, the way of God's commands is hastened..."³⁵² Progress in monastic life is connected to an increase of charity. As the monk presses forward in good deeds, his heart will be growing in love. Although St. Benedict does not discuss this idea in depth, one can see the idea of good works enkindling charity in the *Rule of St. Benedict*.

Our Daily Work

For the anonymous pastor, all ordinary work is an opportunity to gain graces to reach Heaven: "God has sent to man his time in order that he might serve Him, and to gather with good works his grace to attain to heaven."³⁵³ It is important for the health of the soul on earth. He opens his text with: "Three things are needful to everyone who wants to prosper spiritually—God's grace leading and helping him. The first of these, simply, is to be engaged in honest work, without wasting time."³⁵⁴ Honest work, ordinary work, is intrinsically good for the soul.

While he has shown that ordinary work is good for the health of the soul in general, the anonymous pastor focuses on manual labor as a preventative for *idelnes*. He quotes Ecclesiastes 33:29, saying: "Against *idelnes*, says Solomon, '*Otiositas* has taught much evil.'³⁵⁵ He probably has in mind too the previous verse which reads, "Torture and fetters are for a malicious slave: send him to work, that he be not idle."³⁵⁶ In this portion

³⁵² *Processu vero conversationis et fidei, dilatato corde inaenarrabili dilectionis dulcedine curritur via mandatorum Dei* (Benedict, *Rule*, Prologue, ln.49).

³⁵³ Trans. Jeffrey, *English Spirituality in the Age of Wyclif*, 258.

³⁵⁴ Trans. Jeffrey, *English Spirituality in the Age of Wyclif*, 258.

³⁵⁵ Rolle, *English prose works of Richard Rolle : a selection*, 139. "Agayn idelnes: sais Salomon: *Multam maliciam docuit ociositas.*"

³⁵⁶ Ecclesiastes 33:20, *Douay-Rheims*.

of Ecclesiastes, the slave's work is seen as a preventative for idleness. This has probably influenced the pastor's understanding of the benefits of manual labor. Later, he quotes Job 5: *Homo ad laborem natus est* or "Man was born to labor"³⁵⁷ and God's command to work after the first sin in Genesis 3:19. He then says, "Therefore shall you work stalwartly and not faintly, for He bids you work, with the sweat on your face... that in all your lifetime you should lose no time in idleness. Idleness smites a man, as if he were in paralysis..."³⁵⁸ Besides drawing from Scripture to show that ordinary work is part of man's purpose in life, he also describes it as a way of preventing idleness. Manual labor, emphasized by the sweat, is of special importance. The author also briefly discusses deeds of mercy such as serving the poor in the text as well.³⁵⁹

While the author focuses on ordinary work as a preventative for *idelnes*, the understanding of it as a remedy for *idelnes* and all the vices it leads to is implied by the context. *Our Daily Work* is a pastoral text and gives counsel concerning foundations of the Christian life, such as "God has sent to man his time in order that he might serve Him, and to gather with good works his grace to attain to heaven"³⁶⁰ (This is similar in tone to the *Baltimore Catechism*). He begins the whole text succinctly stating the three things needful for man, and gives instructions for forming a life of prayer. This is a text appropriate as instruction for those disciples well on their way to maturity, to those new

³⁵⁷ Se Job 5:17 (Jeffrey, 239).

³⁵⁸ "Pou sal trauail stalwordli & noght fayntli, for he biddis þe trauail / «with swete of þi face, ay til þou torne to þe erth, þat is, al þi life-tyme, / þat þou lose na tyme in idelnes. Idelnes smitis a man as he ware in paralsi..." Rolle, *English prose works of Richard Rolle : a selection*, 139.

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 139.

³⁶⁰ Trans. Jeffrey, 237. "God has lent man þis tyme: to serue god in, & to gedere with gode werkes grace: til bi heuen with"(Rolle, *English prose works of Richard Rolle : a selection*, 137)

to living the Christian life, and for those who are turning back to God. This text helps those who read it to correct their ways. Many who read it will have experienced first-hand the devastations of idleness. His admonitions to work, then, cannot be limited to only a preventative. The pastor must also understand that by beginning to work, one can begin to recover from the paralysis of idleness and the illness of all other vices.

Our Daily Work also contains an understanding of *werke* as an opportunity for growth in virtue. The first are humility and obedience, again in the context of Ecclesiastes 33. Verses 25-30 read:

Fodder, and a wand, and a burden are for an ass: bread, and correction, and work for a slave. He worketh under correction, and seeketh to rest: let his hands be idle, and he seeketh liberty. The yoke and the thong bend a stiff neck, and continual labours bow a slave. Torture and fetters are for a malicious slave: send him to work, that he be not idle: For idleness hath taught much evil. Set him to work: for so it is fit for him. And if he be not obedient, bring him down with fetters, but be not excessive towards any one: and do no grievous thing without judgment.³⁶¹

In this passage, manual labor is a way of gaining humility and obedience. Elsewhere, he describes one's ordinary work as a battlefield for overcoming pride and building humility. Indeed, he says that when "necessity draws us into the world, where the enticements to sin are so many, we should go with great caution, as into a battle to fight against our foes."³⁶² Here will be many occasions to practice the virtues, beginning with temptations to misrepresent the truth and to try to impress other people. In response, the Christian can practice humility by the clothes he wears and the postures, movements, and outward bearing of his body—all reflected a state of inner humility.

Ordinary work is also an opportunity to practice self-control and prudence. The

³⁶¹ *Douay-Rheims*.

³⁶² Trans. Jeffrey, *English Spirituality in the Age of Wyclif*, 262

Christian, when going into the world, must have prudence, choosing clothes which are neither “too hideous or overly fancy.”³⁶³ The pastor admonishes to keep ones arms and legs in their proper place, and says not to “cast your eyes over everything like a child. Don’t play with your hands, or bounce about on your feet.”³⁶⁴ This requires the virtue of self-control. Ordinary work is the occasion for growing in virtue.

Although he does emphasize how ordinary work enkindles charity as Walter Hilton will do, the anonymous pastor does show that ordinary work is an opportunity for practicing charity. The pastor writes that “One may ask God for grace, and securely trust to receive it, who rouses himself up to good endeavors and so garnishes them with heartfelt love and devotion that they may bcome a savory offering to his beloved Lord.”

³⁶⁵ Ordinary work is an opportunity to grow in love for God.

v. *Walter Hilton*

Walter Hilton understands ordinary work done full of love of God to be a principal remedy for *acedia*. He lists the deadly vices and their opposite virtues, beginning with pride: “Slay, then, and break down pride and set up meekness.”³⁶⁶ He next describes covetousness, followed by *accidie*: “in stide of accidie, fervour of devocioun with a glaad redynesse to alle good deedes.”³⁶⁷ Here there is a hint of the

³⁶³ Ibid.

³⁶⁴ Ibid., 263.

³⁶⁵ Trans. Jeffrey, *English Spirituality in the Age of Wyclif*, 258.

³⁶⁶ “Slee thanne and breke doun pride and sette up mekenesse...” Book 1, Chapter 86, ln. 2480-2481

³⁶⁷ Ibid., ln.

stabilitas of the desert fathers. The remedy for *acedia* is a readiness to all the good deeds that the nun is called to do in her state, including ordinary work. But even more than just continuing the daily labor, one must do it with a glad heart, full of love of God.

Yet this advice contains a puzzlement. How is one to do one's ordinary work with gladness and fervor when she is suffering from *accidie*? If spiritual listlessness is the problem, the advice to have devotion while doing good deeds can be frustrating. The first key lies in Walter's unique emphasis that charity is not only the opposite virtue of *acedia* to cultivate, but is itself the principal remedy for it:

And yet does love do more than slay lechery and gluttony, for it slays *accidie* and *fleischli ydelnesse*, and makes the soule lively and speedy to the service of Jesus, so far ahead that it yearns constantly to be occupied in goodness, namely the interior beholding of Him, by the virtue of which sight the soul has savor and spiritual delight in praying and thinking, and in all other manner working that needs to be done, after the state and degree that he lives requires (whether he be religious or secular), without heaviness or painful bitterness.³⁶⁸

In growing in charity, we will be healed from our vices, including *accidie* and its effects. We will be able to do our work with glad readiness, which will further help the soul in overcoming *acedia*.

The second key lies in the connection between ordinary works and charity. One of Hilton's favorite images of charity is the fire of love in the soul. Hilton describes God as a consuming fire, quoting Hebrews 12:29, and God sends into the soul "a little spark of this blessed fire, that is Himself."³⁶⁹ He describes this fire as desire for God and good will to please God, or simply as "love and charity"—qualified later as a "beginning and

³⁶⁸ Ibid., ln. 2480-2481

³⁶⁹ "Now þanne, siþen oure lord hap sent in to þyn herte a litil sparcle of þis blissid fier, þat is him silf as hooli write seiþ: *Deus noster ignis consumens est*; oure lord God is a fier wastynge..." (Ibid., 39).

tasting of love” which is not yet perfect and complete. This fire easily grows cold. In *Epistle on the Mixed Life*, fleshly rest and idleness are described as two different symptoms of the cooling of the fire of love: “ofte it wexeth coold, and turneth to flesschli reste, and sumtyme to idleness.”³⁷⁰ He explains in the next line that therefore it is good for him to put sticks on this fire; these “sticks” to enkindle the fire of love are “good works of the active life.”³⁷¹ He instructs the layman to fulfill his responsibilities and do good works, and then afterwards go alone to pray and meditate, and “lift up your heart to God, and pray that in His goodness he will accept your works that you do to his pleasure.”³⁷² He is to offer them humbly, realizing that they are nothing on their own, but can offered to God because of His mercy.³⁷³ By this humility “shall all your good deeds turn into a flame of fire as sticks laid upon a coal...”³⁷⁴ Like in *The Rule*, all the one’s ordinary work can increase the charity in one’s heart when offered to God.

Here Hilton is laying out a step which is not explicitly contained in the other authors I am examining. All authors prescribe ordinary work as a remedy for *acedia*, but it is unclear how manual labor or deeds of mercy can overcome *acedia*. St. Benedict contains the idea that all ordinary work can increase charity. It is also common for medieval writers to place charity as the opposing virtue to *acedia*. Hilton connects these

³⁷⁰ Hilton, *Mixed Life*, 36.

³⁷¹ “Forþi it is good þat þou putte þerto stikkes, þat aren good werkes of actif liyf...”(Ibid., 36).

³⁷² “þat is, first goo do þi werkes, and goo þanne aloone to þi praiers and to þi meditaciouns, and lift up þyn herte to God, and praie him of his goodnesse þat he wole accepte þi werkes þat þou doost to his pleasaunce”(Ibid., 36).

³⁷³ “Holde [hem] as noȝht in þin owen sight, but oonli at þe merci of hym”(Ibid., 36).

³⁷⁴ “And þanne for þis mekenesse schal alle þi good deedis torne in to a flawme of fire as stikkes leid upon a coole...”(Ibid., 37).

ideas. It is charity which slays a multitude of vices, including *accidie*. Ordinary work can increase the charity in one's heart, sanctifying the soul.

CONCLUSION

The *Rule of St. Benedict*, *Our Daily Work*, and the writings of Walter Hilton convey a distinction-in-unity in the activities of daily life, leading to the understanding that all work is deeply connected to worship. Work and worship are not simply equated; prayer is distinct from manual labor and deeds of mercy, and a hierarchy of importance is maintained. At the same time, there contains wherein an essential unity of life which is akin to the Jewish concept of *avodah*. Prayer, manual labor, and deeds of mercy are all termed work, be it *opus* or *werke*, and described as such. At the same time, since these authors understand the Christian to be a *servus Dei*, everything—including the ordinary works of daily life-- can be an offering of loving service. Offered to the Lord, it is worship.

Ordinary work is a way of serving the Lord, and through it man is sanctified. Manual labor and/or deeds of mercy are given by all three authors as remedies for Cassian's understanding of *acedia*, called *otiositas* by St. Benedict, *idelines* by the anonymous pastor of *Our Daily Work*, and *accidie* and various other terms by Walter Hilton. Manual labor and deeds of mercy are also excellent ways of cultivating virtues such as humility, obedience, temperance, prudence, and charity. Walter Hilton especially focuses on ordinary works enkindling charity; in fact, it is through increasing charity that they banish *acedia*.

In showing how ordinary work relates to worship and service in some specific, concrete ways, I first discussed how breaking down *acedia* and cultivating virtue through manual labor and deeds of mercy aids in one's prayer life. Manual labor and deeds of

mercy can help one be better prepared for prayer. Next, I discussed some unique qualities of manual labor and deeds of mercy in relation to worship and service to God. For St. Benedict and the anonymous pastor, ordinary work—especially manual labor—can be an opportunity for prayer. St. Benedict and Walter Hilton show that deeds of mercy are a special way of serving the Lord in light of Matthew 25 and other teachings of Christ in the Gospels and theology of the Mystical Body of Christ found especially in St. Paul. Sensitive to his audience, Walter Hilton focuses on deeds of mercy, not delving into the idea of prayer overflowing into manual labor. Instead, he especially emphasizes how ordinary works, especially deeds of mercy, increase one's devotion by enkindling charity. In *The Rule of St. Benedict, Our Daily Work*, and the writings of Walter Hilton, the ordinary works of daily life are intimately connected with worship. As Scott Hahn summarizes, "We work so that we might worship more perfectly. We worship while we work."³⁷⁵

³⁷⁵ Hahn, *Ordinary Work, Extraordinary Grace*, 28.

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