

**Faith Formation in the Age of the Selfie**  
 Part II  
**Sloth, Fear...Hope**  
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**The Plan for these Webinars**

<p>Part I (Wednesday, Jan. 24)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stats and Data</li> <li>• The Communal Problem</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;">(30min) Q &amp; A (30min)</p>	<p>Part II (TODAY)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Spiritual Problem</li> <li>• What can we do?</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;">(30min) Q &amp; A (30min)</p>
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**The Idol of Happiness**

- Philip Rieff
  - Highest Good of Western culture
    - Personal wellbeing, self-fulfillment, happiness
    - Achieved most often through entertainment
  - Greatest Evil?
    - Preventing someone from achieving the highest good
    - BOREDOM
- Rieff's work – 1960s
  - He was a prophet of the coming culture we now inhabit



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## Boredom as a Problem



- Arthur Schopenhauer (German philosopher, early 1800s)
  - “Schopenhauer ranks boredom with ‘pain’ as one of the twin evils of life. (Pain for have-nots, boredom for haves — it’s a question of affluence.)”
    - Susan Sontag, nytimes.com 3.31.2012
- Boredom is relatively new, historically
  - Term first used in 1768
  - But as for us, boredom is not a new problem

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## Avoiding Boredom

- Boredom has become a **pathology**
  - In a medical framework, it’s a problem in need of a cure, a disease (dis-ease)
  - Devices **promise** you’ll never have to be bored (or feel alone)
  - So every time we feel boredom (or aloneness) creeping in, **we check**
    - Latest stats – 35-85 checks per day (based on age), @ 30 seconds/ea = at most 5 hrs per day
    - Con-current device use – we’re bored **with one** so we use more, up to 5 at a time
    - “We can rest while undergoing stimulation; receive without giving.” – David Foster Wallace
- Avoiding Boredom indicative of **triumph of therapeutic culture**
  - **Religion** used to achieve happiness and wellbeing
  - Devices serving the **same** purpose

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## Our **Spiritual Problem**: Metaphysical Boredom

“Maybe dullness is associated with psychic pain because something that’s dull or opaque fails to provide enough stimulation to distract people from some other, deeper type of pain that is always there, if only in an ambient low-level way, and which most of us spend nearly all our time and energy to distract ourselves from feeling, or at least from feeling directly or with our full attention .... surely something must lie behind not just Muzak in dull or tedious places anymore but now also actual TV in waiting rooms, supermarkets’ checkouts, airports’ gates, SUVs’ backseats. Walkmen, iPods, BlackBerries, cell phones that attach to your head. This terror of silence with nothing diverting to do. I can’t think anyone really believes that today’s so called “information society” is just about information. Everyone knows it’s about something else, way down.”

David Foster Wallace, *The Pale King*

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### Our Spiritual Problem: Metaphysical Boredom

Metaphysical Boredom:

Disgust with what *is* and the limits it presents.

Hating our *being*.

Ancient Christian term for this: *acedia*

Modern translation: **SLOTH or Idleness** (one of the 7 deadly sins)

DOES NOT mean laziness...

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### Our Spiritual Problem: Metaphysical Boredom

Definitions of **SLOTH** or **Idleness**

"[T]he metaphysical-theological concept of idleness means then, that man finally does not agree with his own existence; that behind all his energetic activity, he is not at one with himself." (Josef Pieper)

"We are made for God but sloth hates our *telos*; in fact, the slothful considers our purpose distasteful, even repellent, detesting the personhood God has given." (R.J. Snell)

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### Our Spiritual Problem: Metaphysical Boredom

Definitions of **SLOTH** or **Idleness**

"*Acedia*...is a profound withdrawal into the self." (Jean-Charles Nault)

"It is a mistake to think that sloth is laziness. The slothful might very well be busy doing things. Evagrius (of Pontus) claims, in fact, that the slothful are often in a frenzy of pointless action—now this, now that—in their disgust at the actual work given to them by God." (R.J. Snell)

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### Our **Spiritual Problem**: Metaphysical Boredom

- Are we disgusted with the reality of our being?
- Rejecting the gift of reality?
- Are we merely “amusing ourselves to death” (Neil Postman) or avoiding the thought of death’s impending arrival (existentialism)?
- The **ironic fallout** of entertainment to alleviate boredom:
  - Things start to mean less and less; we’re no longer entertained
  - Greater disenchantment leads to greater anxiety leads to greater depression leads to looking for a (new) solution. Ironically, our devices continue to promise a cure – “There’s an app for that.”

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### An **Additional Problem**: Our **Fears**

The Wardrobe (*Chr. of Narnia*)



The Tardis (*Dr. Who*)




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### An **Additional Problem**: Our **Fears**



The more we watch TV, Netflix, Youtube, the more we participate in social media networks, “we receive unconscious reinforcement of the deep thesis that the most significant quality of truly alive persons is watchableness, and that genuine human worth is not just identical with but *rooted in* the phenomenon of watching....**Watching and watchability become the measure of value and significance.**”

(David Foster Wallace)

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### An Additional Problem: Our Fears

Protecting Ourselves – Projecting an Idealized Identity

- Your Facebook Profile
- Your Instagram Feed
- Your Snaps



But...

"TVs and devices propose an unrealistic measure for real life (real life *should* be full of the kind of always bright, funny, supernaturally beautiful people and captivating, glamorous, can't-miss-it events that are (self-)engineered for digital reality (and to be shared))." David Foster Wallace

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### An Additional Problem: Our Fears

**Confession #89:  
I'm constantly  
afraid that I'm  
not good enough.**

What does all of this busy activity performing for others indicate about what we really fear?

Exacerbated by shame culture – this is killing all of us.

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Solutions: Toward Intimacy and Vulnerable Community  
Church as Paradigm

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