



Humility and Spirituality: New Directions in Interdisciplinary Research

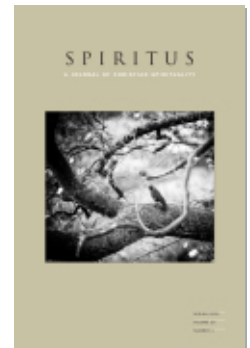
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Humility and Spirituality: New Directions in Interdisciplinary Research

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INTRODUCTION

Even a cursory reading of classical texts in the study of Christian spirituality reveals numerous mentions of humility, its value for the spiritual life, and ways in which it might be cultivated. In some traditions, such as the desert fathers and mothers, it is one of the crowning virtues of the ascetic life. One of the sayings of Abba Antony reads, “I saw the snares that the enemy spreads out over the world and I said groaning, ‘What can get through from such snares?’ Then I heard a voice saying to me, ‘Humility.’”¹ Elsewhere, a saying attributed to Amma Theodora notes, “that *neither asceticism, nor vigils nor any kind of suffering are able to save, only true humility can do that.*”² And Abba John places humility as the highest of the virtues: “Humility and the fear of God are above all virtues.”³ Humility is central to the desert ascetic tradition and, indeed, quite integral to Christian spiritual traditions more broadly.⁴ As Wendy Wright and Joseph Power note: “Humility as the primary human disposition that allows for the entry of God in the soul is central to the thought of Augustine, Benedict, Bernard, Teresa, and innumerable other Christian spiritual writers.”⁵

Yet what is known about humility in contemporary understanding and practice? How might such ancient Christian spiritual traditions be bridged with current research on the topic of humility, which is increasingly the subject of empirical psychological study? This article first illustrates the significance of the topic of humility within Christian spirituality through brief discussions of humility in the writing of several significant authors, including Cassian, Benedict, Julian of Norwich, and Teresa of Avila. These key figures in the history of Christian spirituality, selected from among many possible writers who expound upon the virtue of humility, enable us to explore some features of classical discussions of humility. The discussion also provides an overview of some of the recent psychological research on humility that forms the backdrop to a contemporary empirical research project on humility, spirituality, and religious leadership being conducted jointly by a team of clinical psychologists



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and theologians. This project includes a mixed-methods design and employs both a battery of quantitative measures of humility and a series of qualitative items that provide contextual information and phenomenological description of some of the unique understandings of humility across religious traditions. Also examined are challenges to humility identified by religious leaders, and spiritual and religious practices leaders use to cultivate or maintain humility.⁶

This growing body of research on humility is studied in order to assess contributions to knowledge about humility as a feature of Christian spirituality and implications for practices such as spiritual formation, spiritual direction, and therapeutic intervention. The research also provides a way to reflect broadly upon the current state of the interdisciplinary character of spirituality studies. Despite the fact that the emergence of spirituality studies as an academic discipline has gone hand in hand with assertions of the highly interdisciplinary nature of the field, there remains a kind of “siloing” of approaches to the study of spirituality. Theological and historical-contextual scholarship continues to dominate groups such as the Society for the Study of Christian Spirituality, while social scientific research on spirituality features more prominently in conferences of organizations such as the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, which feature multiple sessions on spirituality, or the American Psychological Association, which, includes a division in psychology, religion, and spirituality and publishes a related journal.⁷ Kristy Nabhan-Warren has described resistance to qualitative and quantitative methods among some spirituality scholars: “. . . a qualitative ethnographic approach to the study of Christian spirituality – not to mention a mixed method of qualitative and quantitative research – is viewed with a bit of suspicion.”⁸ So too Norwegian practical theologian Tone Stangeland Kaufman has called for greater use of ethnographic methods in the study of Christian spirituality.⁹ This article aims in part to further explore possibilities of qualitative and quantitative research in spirituality, not in isolation from historical and theological approaches, but rather as a complementary and also fully interdisciplinary research approach in spirituality. The potential contributions, and limitations, of more empirical psychological approaches are explored in conversation with historical-theological methodologies in the study of humility and spirituality. This research does not seek to advance one methodological approach over another, but rather to propose more robust interdisciplinary research in spirituality that brings empirical, theological, and historical approaches into fruitful dialogue.¹⁰

I. HUMILITY IN SELECTED CHRISTIAN SPIRITUAL CLASSICS

John Cassian

One voice that emerges from the early monastic tradition is John Cassian (c. 360 – 435 CE). His monumental two volumes *The Institutes* and *The Confer-*

ences (both dated roughly around 420 CE) provide a window into conceptions of humility in the desert ascetic tradition. In many ways, his depiction of this tradition has some parallels with what today might be considered participant observation or ethnographic research.¹¹

Cassian describes humility as the “teacher of all virtues” and as a divine gift: “Humility, then, is the teacher of all the virtues; it is the most-firm foundation of the heavenly edifice; it is the Savior’s own magnificent gift.”¹² According to Cassian, the spiritual life concerns the pursuit of perfection through “purification from vices” and finding “security in virtue.”¹³ In the ascetic tradition to which he is giving voice, the vices are to be overcome through the practice of the corresponding virtue. The virtues in this framework can at times be seen as the cure of the sickness of vice, which for Cassian means sin.¹⁴ Cassian views pride as a particularly insidious vice. In his listing, it is last in order, but first in appearance.¹⁵ Humility, for Cassian, is the cure for this vice.

The virtues for Cassian are not so much understood conceptually, but experienced, encountered; they are signified through their embodiment in the lives of particular persons. They are learned by seeing them and then practicing them.¹⁶ In order to give some indication of what humility looks like in practice, Cassian names a certain ten signs¹⁷ of humility. These signs which follow are also important in understanding his thought about humility: 1) “If a person has put to death in himself all his desires;” 2) “if he conceals from his elder not only none of his deeds but also none of his thought;” 3) “if he commits nothing to his own discretion;” 4) “if in every respect he maintains a gracious obedience and steadfast patience;” 5) “if he neither brings injury on anyone else nor is saddened or sorrowful if anyone else inflicts it on him;” 6) “if he does nothing and presumes nothing that neither the general rule nor the example of our forebears encourages;” 7) “if he is satisfied with utter simplicity and, as being an unfit laborer, considers himself unworthy of everything that is offered him;” 8) “if he does not declare with his lips alone that he is inferior to everyone else but believes it in the depths of his heart;” 9) “if he holds his tongue and is not loudmouthed;” and 10) “if he is not ready and quick to laugh.”¹⁸ Some of these signs—submission to an elder, obedience to the rule, satisfaction with a particular type of simplicity—certainly reflect Cassian’s monastic paradigm; however, they provide a good starting point for a discussion of humility. They reveal the deep connection between context and virtue, while providing some indicators that transcend context.¹⁹

Cassian’s writings are permeated with references to humility and its role in the ascetical life; how one engages this wealth of insight depends on what one is seeking in it.²⁰ Going forward, in order to draw parallels with the psychological research to be discussed later in this article, the scope in the writings of Cassian is narrowed to the intersection of humility and leadership. Pride, in

Cassian's appraisal, is the foremost stumbling block to good leadership. The practice of humility, cultivated in the early stages of one's monastic vocation, is essential to the rooting out of pride, which for Cassian is the root of all vice. Thus, it is central for a monk in general, and for one in a position of leadership it is absolutely necessary. In his monograph, *Contextualizing Cassian: Aristocrats, Asceticism, and Reformation in Fifth-Century Gaul*, Richard J. Goodrich spends considerable time addressing the role of humility in the preparation for monastic leadership. Goodrich writes that according to Cassian, "The principal problem of Gallic monasticism was the untrained abbot who had the temerity to establish his own monastery without first having served as a disciple under an experienced master. This action, the epitome of pride, undermined one of the chief goals of the ascetic life, the cultivation of humility."²¹

For Cassian, there appears to be a deep concern that one might enter into a position of authority for the wrong reason. For example, Cassian shares a long exhortation by a certain monk Moses, who, speaking of the temptation of the devil, warns, "And, indeed, [the devil] inveigles us into desiring the holy clerical office under the pretext of edifying many and for the love of spiritual gain, thus tearing us away from the humility and severity of our present chosen orientation."²² The desire to serve in a position of leadership does not appear to be inherently sinful, but without humility one can seek such roles out of a prideful desire for a position of honor. This is worsened, when a monk, not having practiced the virtue of humility and being filled with excessive pride, begins to "[rely] on his own judgement in every respect rather than on that of the elders"²³ Prideful reliance on one's own judgement assumes that one requires nothing from others. This stands in stark contrast to the tradition of virtue that is central to the monastic tradition. One practices the virtues by seeing them performed by others, and then imitating them. One looks to an elder in the manner of an apprentice learning from a master craftsman. If a monk does not practice humility, with eyes towards an accomplished elder, pride can leave him unprepared, that is to say unpracticed, in virtue. The monk could then become eager "to build a monastery, and he strives to gather together those whom he can teach and instruct--a bad disciple becoming an even worse master!"²⁴ If the monastic life is a communal cultivation of the virtues, how can one presume to be a leader if one has not acquired them? One would not follow a novice craftsman to become a master, for one would never learn the intricacies of the craft.

In the absence of humility one will be unable to practice another definitive virtue, that is discernment/discretion, of particular value to those in positions of leadership.²⁵ Cassian notes, "Then Moses said: 'True discretion is not obtained except by true humility. The first proof of this humility will be if not only everything that is to be done but also everything that is thought

of is offered to the inspection of the elders, so that, not trusting in one's own judgment, one may submit in every respect to their understanding and may know how to judge what is good and bad according to what they have handed down."²⁶ This also corresponds to a significant point that emerges in some of the psychological literature on humility—humility leaves one open to the counsel of others. It is through this openness that one begins to better understand and embody the monastic way of life. In turn, one is able to gain insight into the nature of this life through the discernment of those who have come before them. This then gives one the practical wisdom that leads to discretion. Without this discretion, one will have little to offer others when in a leadership position.

As indicated, Cassian's understanding of humility fits into his larger understanding of the virtues in the spiritual life. Central to his understanding is the notion that the virtues are a free gift from God. It is God who "destroys" the vice of pride, humility's opposite according to Cassian.²⁷ One cannot by one's own strength overcome the vices.²⁸ This does not mean that one cannot do things to make oneself more open to the grace of God. Cassian speaks of certain practices that can contribute to such an openness to grace. The practice of confession or penitence invites God to heal human beings from their vices.²⁹ Humility can arise out of an openness to learn. Thus, Cassian also writes, "listen to those teachers and guides . . . learning by act and experience."³⁰ The practice of learning through apprenticeship is another means by which one can open oneself to the grace of God manifested in the virtues. For example, "[Aiming] at a lasting humility," one ought to "[fix one's] gaze on those whom they knew to be really free from sin and already in the enjoyment of eternal bliss in the kingdom of heaven, and so by this consideration they avoided the downfall of pride."³¹

For Cassian, the life of a monk itself is the soil in which the virtues sprout forth. Thus, practices like vigil, prayer, and fasting which are common to the monastic life, also open the monk up to God's grace in virtues. Again, one does not earn grace through these practices; however, it seems clear that Cassian sees these as essential to the spiritual life and the acquisition of virtue. Cassian understands that "perfection" cannot come without certain "human efforts," yet such practices do nothing apart from God.³² One can infer then that Cassian does not see particular practices as significant in themselves, but in their capacity to open one up to the grace of God. Certainly, Cassian would see the *telos* of monastic life and the Christian life more generally as the Kingdom.³³ He does not give any indication that the particular practices performed in a monastic context are not also appropriate in other contexts as well. One might even conclude that for Cassian, the cultivation of the virtues generally, and humility in particular, have more to do with adhering to the normative practices

of one's context faithfully, than the performance of certain practices across all contexts. Ultimately, when reading Cassian one must remember that he is writing for a particular audience for a particular purpose. The insights he provides could be useful for those outside the monastic context about and from which he is writing. Given that he is advocating for a particular expression of monastic life, with its own practices, structures, and even conceptions of virtue, one must engage with caution when attempting to translate him into new contexts.

Benedict of Nursia

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The Rule of St. Benedict of Nursia (480–547 CE) offers another window into the importance of humility as a spiritual virtue in the early Christian monastic tradition. Benedict is a vital figure in the history of western monasticism, whose spirituality synthesized elements of Eastern Christian doctrine such as from Cassian with Western sources. Chapter 7 of *The Rule* shows how Benedict adopts central features of Cassian's analysis of humility, first by admonishing against pride:

Brothers, divine Scripture calls to us saying: Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled, and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted (Luke 14:11; 18:14). In saying this, therefore, it shows us that every exaltation is a kind of pride, which the Prophet indicates he has shunned, saying: Lord, my heart is not exalted; my eyes are not lifted up and I have not walked in the ways of the great nor gone after marvels beyond me (Ps 130[131]:1). And why? If I had not a humble spirit, but were exalted instead, then you would treat me like a weaned child on its mother's lap (Ps 130[131]: 2).³⁴

Benedict also builds on Cassian's ten "signs" of humility previously discussed using the image of twelve "steps" to represent the practices that form a monk in the virtue. Benedict adds the "fear of God" as the first step of humility, which says that monks ought to have the "fear of God always before [their] eyes."³⁵ Terrence Kardong, a contemporary Benedictine commentator, equates the biblical expression of "fear of God" with what he refers to as monastic mindfulness, or a powerful and re-orienting awareness of God.³⁶ Benedict then follows Cassian closely on the subsequent steps related to obedience, the importance of indifference when it comes to any privileged position in the monastery, and vigilance of speech. Finally, both also portray the love of God as the *telos* of humility, citing 1 John 4:18 as the charity which "casts out fear."³⁷ Altogether, Chapter 7 of *The Rule* shows how humility comprises a number of different early Christian monastic norms, ideals, and practices that are aimed at a fundamental transformation of a person in the love of God.

Humility in Benedict's *Rule* can be understood through a Christological lens. Humility enacts a transformation of the person. Specifically, Benedict

envision the person to become an image of Christ. For example, on the second step of humility a monk “loves not [their] own will nor takes pleasure in the satisfaction of [their] desires.” Benedict adds that they ought rather to “imitate by his actions that saying of the Lord: *I have come not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me* (John 6:38).”³⁸ Benedict’s Christological focus is also in the third step, which instructs that a monk “submits to [their] superior in all obedience for the love of God, imitating the Lord of whom the Apostle says: *He became obedient even to death* (Phil. 2:8).”³⁹ This emphasis on an imitative asceticism after Christ is not only key to Benedict’s definition of humility, it is also a central feature of *The Rule*’s spirituality. At the end of his Prologue, Benedict concludes that “we shall through patience share in the sufferings of Christ that we may deserve also to share in his kingdom.”⁴⁰ The original word for “share” here, *participemur*, connotes participation or partaking in Christ that well characterizes the ethos of Benedictine spirituality.

Given the centrality of humility in the spirituality of *The Rule*, it is somewhat surprising that there is no explicit mention of humility in Benedict’s instruction for the leaders of the monastery. The virtue of humility is implicit especially in instructions for the Abbot of the monastery, who Benedict says should teach the virtues by example to the rest of the community. Specifically it states that the Abbot “must point out to them all that is good and holy more by example than by words, proposing the commandments of the Lord to receptive disciples with words, but demonstrating God’s instructions to the stubborn and the dull by a living example.”⁴¹ Furthermore, with Christ being the source and exemplar for Benedict’s teaching on humility, it is significant that Benedict describes the Abbot as being a representative of Christ in the monastery, holding “the place of Christ” in the community.⁴² It follows for Benedict that “the abbot must never teach or decree or command anything that would deviate from the Lord’s instructions.”⁴³ As spiritual leader of the community, the Abbot is to both embody and teach the virtues of asceticism. For this role, the specific place of humility should figure at the center of their leadership.

Julian of Norwich and Teresa of Avila

The examples of Cassian and Benedict could be greatly expanded as humility features prominently in numerous works within the Christian tradition. For the English medieval mystic and anchoress Julian of Norwich (1342-c.1423), humility is rooted in the love of God, who unfathomably sustains all that is. When given a vision of “something as small as a hazelnut” lying in the palm of her hand, Julian reflects: “I was amazed that it could last, for I thought that because of its littleness it would suddenly have fallen into nothing. And I was answered in my understanding: It lasts and always will, because God loves it; and thus everything has being through the love of God.”⁴⁴ For Julian, humility

is deeply Christological, relational, and embodied. Julian perceives God's own humility in the incarnation, as theologian Frederick Bauerschmidt notes: "The incarnation of God in human flesh is for Julian a sign of divine humility, God's willingness to come to us, so that we might be enclosed in God."⁴⁵ Julian is convinced that God constantly meets human beings in our embodied vulnerability, in our "humblest of needs."⁴⁶ She depicts Christ as a humble, "courteous Lord" who puts others' needs before his own.⁴⁷ For human beings, humility entails a right sense of oneself in relationship to this humble, loving Creator and is a natural fruit of contemplation and relationship with God: "For of all things, contemplating and loving the Creator makes the soul to seem less in its own sight, and fills it with reverent fear and true meekness, and with much love for its fellow Christians."⁴⁸

For Teresa of Avila (1515–1582), too, humility is a virtue rooted in relationship to God; indeed, "the closer one comes to God the more progress there must be in this virtue; and if there is no progress in humility, everything is going to be ruined."⁴⁹ Elsewhere, Teresa refers to humility as a "sign of holiness."⁵⁰ At the same time, Teresa cautions about false humility that leads one to abandon prayer (as she did) or discount the gifts that God has bestowed upon one: "Let him pay no attention to the kinds of humility, which I will discuss later, in which it seems to some that it is humility not to acknowledge that God is giving them gifts. Let us understand most clearly the real fact: God gives them to us without any merit on our part. And let us thank His Majesty for them, because, if we do not acknowledge we are receiving them, we will not awaken ourselves to love."⁵¹

In these few examples one is able to glimpse the value ascribed to humility in such traditions of Christian spirituality; humility has been portrayed as an essential virtue in Christian living. With these authors in mind, this reflection will now consider how humility is being described in contemporary psychological research.

II. RECENT STUDIES OF HUMILITY IN PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Given the significance of humility in such classic Christian spiritual teachings, one might expect it to be a subject of voluminous research and reflection. Yet, few studies of humility have been published in spirituality journals in recent years. How might Christian spiritual traditions contribute to contemporary understandings of humility? How might current psychological research inform understandings of the role of humility in the spiritual life? Is a mutually critical dialogue possible between Christian spiritual classics and this contemporary field of empirical research?

There is in fact a growing discourse on humility in psychology with hundreds of empirical studies in recent years that can inform diverse approaches



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to the study of spirituality. The following offers a thematic exploration of how humility is understood and defined in psychology. First, humility is considered broadly within the field of psychology. Next, to situate the research project within the current discussion, studies that specifically investigate the psychology of humility in relationship to spirituality are examined.

Recent interest in the study of humility can be traced to the rise of positive psychology. Positive psychology focuses on the study and promotion of human flourishing and virtues that contribute to individual and collective well-being. Positive psychologist June Price Tangney, an important early psychological voice on humility, notes that the study of humility had previously been limited both by its associations with value-systems including religions, which ran counter to a desire for objectivity within the field, combined with a lack of coherence around how to define and measure it.⁵² However, post-positivistic philosophies of science and a growing appreciation for human diversity (including spiritual and religious) have contributed to a much greater openness to the empirical study of virtue and spirituality as mainstream topics within psychological research.

A major part of psychological research involves investigating individual differences in personality traits and other experiences seeking to understand, for example, why some individuals may show consistent patterns of humble behaviors (trait humility) while others may show humility in certain situations (state humility) and not others. Tangney represents this individual differences tradition of psychological research and highlights some key definitional themes of the virtue that continue to be important in humility research today. The themes include: the ability to accurately assess oneself, including achievements as well as mistakes and limitations; an openness to new ideas and learning; a relatively low self-focus in relationships; and, perspective-taking including the recognition of oneself within a broader network of relationships (such as with other persons as well as in society).⁵³ Clearly, there are several points of potential resonance between Tangney's definitional themes and aspects of humility described by the classic spiritual writers cited above, including Cassian's emphasis on learning from those more experienced in the virtues and Teresa of Avila's awareness that true humility entails recognition of one's gifts. Of course, what is not captured in Tangney's humanistic definition of humility is the conviction expressed by many Christian spiritual authors, namely, that humility is a divine gift. Tangney is also one of the major contemporary researchers of shame, which she contrasts with humility in ways that seem to differ from Cassian's positive description of a sense of personal inferiority, or with the "kenotic" understandings of humility found in other Christian spiritual authors. For example, in his enormously popular *Introduction to the Devout Life*, Francis de Sales (1567–1622) outlines features of both outward

and inward humility and urges the cultivation of this “little virtue.”⁵⁴ According to Salesian scholar Wendy Wright, interior humility is both a “lively consciousness of the gifts given to one by God coupled with a sense that one has not merited any of these . . . True humility should lead the devout person to a knowledge of his or her own lowliness—what de Sales called abjection . . . Here, in the cherishing of one’s own partial and fragile humanity, one meets God . . . it is precisely in this kenotic attitude, one’s utter emptiness of self, that one enters into a profound participation with the crucified Lord.”⁵⁵ It is unclear whether empirical research can measure adequately the nuances of how theological frameworks inform conceptions of humility, such as those reflected in Wright’s interpretation of Salesian thought, although current research is testing correlations between certain theological beliefs and views of humility.

The complex spiritual, cultural, and gender dynamics related to shame and humility also are worthy of further interdisciplinary study. For example, in her autobiography, Teresa writes that she is but a “woman and wretched as well,” and marvels that God makes a beautiful garden in “so filthy and malodorous a dunghheap.”⁵⁶ Julian of Norwich uses similar self-deprecating language, as when she counsels readers to “disregard the wretched worm, the sinful creature” (herself) to whom the visions were shown and contemplate instead God, who gave the visions.⁵⁷ While such global, shameful self-images go against the grain of modern psychological theories of mental health, this case also underscores the need for a multi-dimensional reading of self-assessment in spiritual literature and practice. For example, Grace Jantzen observes a softening of Julian’s self-deprecating language in comparing the earlier Short Text with the Long Text, reflecting a higher “self-confidence” in Julian’s more mature theological writing.⁵⁸ Even in the Short Text, one cannot miss the juxtaposition of harsh self-description and assertions of the authority of her experience of God: “for I am a woman, ignorant, weak, and frail. But I know very well that what I am saying I have received by the revelation of him who is the sovereign teacher.”⁵⁹ As in other spiritual classics, such as Augustine’s *Confessions*, the author’s self-deprecation functions to magnify God and to direct readers to the sheer grace of revelation. For Teresa, humility is a “sign of holiness”⁶⁰ and, while her excessive self-deprecation is jarring to the modern reader, it also serves a protective purpose in her sixteenth-century context, which was highly suspicious of women’s mystical experience. Teresa’s self-deprecation co-exists with her strong assertions of the authority of her mystical experience against those, including her “learned confessors,” who would deny it.⁶¹ Psychological researchers of humility may benefit from this type of historical, contextual, and dialectical awareness of certain paradoxes of humility, such as facilitating spiritual authority and ascent, among women and other non-dominant groups. So too, psychological research may prompt critical readings of conceptions of

humility that induce or reinforce shame. Contemporary psychological research in Western cultural contexts shows overwhelmingly negative patterns of association between shame and relational virtues, although questions have been raised about whether this is different in Eastern cultural contexts.⁶²

As the scholarly discussion expanded beyond Tangney and other early psychological research on humility, the field has continued to debate the definition of humility. In a 2010 review of the state of humility research, Don Davis et al. notes several emphases that tend to surface in psychological definitions of humility: accurate view of the self and an orientation or stance (such as empathy, respect) to being in relationship with others,⁶³ what later were described as the “intrapersonal” and “interpersonal” dimensions of defining humility.⁶⁴ Current scholarship tends to view humility inherently as a multifaceted construct that integrates the intrapersonal and interpersonal. For example, psychologist Jennifer Cole Wright and others, assert that the core of humility should best be described as “a particular psychological positioning of oneself – namely, one that is both epistemically and ethically aligned.”⁶⁵ Wright’s epistemic alignment of an “understanding and experience of oneself as one, in fact, is,”⁶⁶ combined with ethical alignment as “the understanding and experience of oneself as only one among a host of other morally relevant beings”⁶⁷ correspond to the intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions of a psychological definition of humility.

This integration of intrapersonal and interpersonal maturity in the conceptualization of humility is also found in recent work based on a relational spirituality model emphasizing differentiation of self (DoS).⁶⁸ DoS refers to the ability to balance (a) emotion regulation (intrapersonal dimension) with (b) flexible relational capacities for both connection or autonomy, community and solitude (interpersonal dimension). Those who are high in DoS are not typically threatened by interpersonal differences and combine a grounded sense of identity with an openness to feedback from others and a willingness to suffer in the interest of growth. DoS has been described as an important trait of mature religious leaders given the frequency of high levels of stress, risks of isolation, and pressures to conform or please others through grandiose over functioning.⁶⁹ Several empirical studies with seminary students in Christian contexts in the United States have found positive associations between DoS and humility, and a wider body of literature demonstrates empirical connections between DoS and numerous indicators of healthy spiritual formation (including spiritual well-being, spiritual maturity, meditative prayer, forgiveness, hope, gratitude, social justice commitment, and intercultural competence).

A recent study with religious leaders (three years or more experience; Christian, Jewish, and Islamic traditions) found DoS “mediated” relationships between two different measures of humility and measures of mental health and well-being. Mediator effects in social science research are when a third

or “middle” factor accounts for the relationship between two other variables. This suggests DoS capacities for emotion regulation and relational maturity may be embedded within a relational spirituality of humility. Importantly, the statistical effects in this study held up even after controlling for impression management among participants, which suggests the findings were not reducible to participants over-reporting their own virtue or maturity. DoS was particularly associated with the humility dimension of low concern for status in this study, which could be interesting to compare to the spiritual and relational teachings aforementioned on humility from Cassian and Benedict, as well as Jewish and Early Christian scriptural texts on the virtue of humility.⁷⁰ Humble religious leaders can differentiate themselves from unhealthy influences of surrounding social systems and temptations to exploit social privileges while still being able to connect with others and receive mentoring. That is, they do not need to totally cut themselves off from society or relationships, rather they wisely differentiate the kinds of relational or social influences that shape their behaviors. There is a need to better understand the spiritual and psychological dynamics and practices that undergird these status-oriented dimensions of humility in leaders.

Research on the virtues in general, and humility in particular, has been described as an underdeveloped area within the psychology of religion, although empirical studies are rapidly accumulating in this area.⁷¹ Current research seeks to address this gap in scholarship, which clearly has implications for spirituality studies. The Templeton project on relational spirituality and humility works from the relational spirituality model initially developed by psychologist Steven Sandage and theologian F. LeRon Shults and more recently elaborated by various collaborators.⁷² This model defines spirituality broadly and relationally as “ways of relating to the Sacred”⁷³ and extends relational development theories into ways of thinking about how human development is correlated in bi-directional influence with relationship dynamics with the sacred. This opens conceptual space for considering a wide variety of relational dynamics with God or the sacred which can range from salutary to pathological depending upon sociocultural contexts. Humility has been posited as a key virtue within the relational spirituality model due to the emphasis on spiritual orientations that (a) cultivate healthy and mature relationships and (b) mature forms of “alterity” or socially just and mature ways of relating across human differences.

Although humility was mentioned as an aspect of positive psychological functioning by some of the seminal thinkers of Western psychology, including Sigmund Freud,⁷⁴ Carl Rogers,⁷⁵ and Abraham Maslow,⁷⁶ it was largely overlooked as a trait conducive to mental health and well-being until recently. In fact, the lack of theorized connections between humility and psychological health probably contributed to the limited empirical study of humility for

most of the last century. However, humility has now been empirically associated with several indicators of well-being and social benevolence beyond the studies mentioned above, including self-reported physical health,⁷⁷ resilience to trauma,⁷⁸ quality social relationships,⁷⁹ generosity,⁸⁰ helpfulness and agreeableness,⁸¹ patience,⁸² empathy,⁸³ avoidance of social duplicity,⁸⁴ and graciousness in receiving from others.⁸⁵ Negative correlations between humility and psychiatric symptoms could be of particular interest to clinicians and also suggest humility can be consistent with mental health.⁸⁶ Yet almost all the research on humility to date has been with non-clinical samples. In one of the first clinical studies in this area, humility “moderated” the effect of religious salience on several measures of mental health and well-being in a sample of adult outpatient psychotherapy clients at a clinic in the northeastern U.S.⁸⁷ Moderator effects are when a third variable alters the relationship between two other variables, and in this case a moderate to high level of humility was necessary to show positive relationships between religiosity and mental health and well-being for this group of clients. Put differently, the religious commitment of clients was not associated with psychosocial or relational health when humility was low, which might mean they suffered from symptoms of pride warned about in the classic spiritual writers above. This is only an initial clinical study that could not determine the causality of these effects; however, it does invite further consideration of (a) pride (or narcissism) in the context of strong spiritual and religious commitments⁸⁸ and (b) the role of humility in buffering narcissistic temptations and promoting effective psychosocial functioning among those who have struggled in the domains of mental health. While the language of “psychosocial functioning” is quite different from the language employed in Christian spiritual authors, there are interesting parallels to be mined about the importance of humility for healthy, embodied life in community, as well as the ways in which mental health struggles can compromise humility and other relational virtues.

There is also a growing body of psychological literature specifically related to humility and spirituality. Humility has been positively correlated with measures such as experienced closeness to God,⁸⁹ a finding that appears consistent with Teresa of Avila’s insight that “the closer one comes to God the more progress there must be in this virtue . . . ”⁹⁰ So too, humility has been positively correlated with the Object Relations Theory-based measure of spiritual maturity,⁹¹ spiritual support,⁹² and religious commitment.⁹³ In addition, humility has been negatively associated with several variables that indicate forms of spiritual struggles, including anger at God and religious fear and guilt.⁹⁴ Spiritual instability (SI) has also been negatively correlated with humility. SI is a measure of spirituality based on traits of Borderline Personality Disorder and typically indicates significant emotional dysregulation, shame, and fear of

abandonment or persecution from God.⁹⁵ This finding could be particularly interesting to relate to spirituality studies since, as noted, some classic spiritual writers (and contemporary Christian leaders) associate humility with themes of self-negation that could be challenging to differentiate from items within this measure of spiritual instability. Again, these considerations will involve careful attention to definitions of humility and spiritual maturity within differing contexts and traditions.

Many spiritual traditions emphasize the virtue of humility in sharp contrast to the sin of pride, as seen, for example in Cassian's treatment of the virtues. Another example is Bernard of Clairvaux's (1090–1153) classic, *The Steps of Humility and Pride*, which describes the steps downward of pride as mirroring the steps upward towards humility.⁹⁶ However, there is psychological research that could add complexity to these associations. For example, a study of Christian graduate students identified three statistically-distinct "spiritual barriers" to the development of humility: (a) narcissistic traits of spiritual grandiosity (seeing one's relationship with God as superior to that of others), (b) a hunger for idealization (an unusually strong need to idealize others combined with a difficulty tolerating disappointments), and (c) insecure attachment to God (being either excessively avoidant or anxiously preoccupied towards God).⁹⁷ These findings point to different problematic aspects of human development and spiritual formation that might be implicated in difficulties cultivating humility; pride is not the only impediment to humility.

Contemporary research on narcissism generally supports the idea of two major dimensions: (a) *grandiose narcissism* (characterized by superiority and arrogance, low empathy, interpersonal aggressiveness, and an aversion to vulnerability) and (b) *vulnerable narcissism* (characterized by tendencies to idealize others, vulnerability to fluctuating self-esteem and frequent shame, interpersonal neediness, and resentment when expectations of support go unmet).⁹⁸ The study of relational spirituality and humility among religious leaders mentioned above also found (a) both forms of narcissism were negatively associated with humility, (b) the relationship between a multi-dimensional measure of humility (accurate self-awareness, appreciation for strengths of others, and teachability) was positively associated with well-being and negatively associated with mental health problems (beyond narcissism), and that this effect was mediated by the security of the participants' attachment with God, and (c) intellectual humility about the fallibility of one's religious beliefs tended to be associated with risks for insecure attachment to God and to lower well-being among religious leaders when more general, characterological humility was low. Thus, finding (c) suggests the spiritual and psychological challenges for leaders who struggle to integrate cognitive and emotional/relational aspects of humility, and this could have relevance for seminaries and other religious

education settings where beliefs are critically examined as part of leadership training.

The attachment to God literature related to findings (b) and (c) represents one of the leading theories in the psychology of religion and spirituality and focuses on individual differences in internal working models of relationships based on interpersonal templates within the limbic brain which can influence interpretations of relational experiences, including experiences with God and the sacred. Attachment theory suggests humans have a need for relational figures who provide (a) safe havens of emotional security and affect regulation during distress and (b) secure bases of support during exploration or questing toward new experiences or understandings. Cassian's notions of humility in relation to "security in virtue," a willingness to rely on others, and an openness to learn could each be brought into fruitful conversation with attachment to God research on humility. The same is true of emphases on awareness of God's love and the immanence of God's loving care in Benedict and Julian, respectively. Psychological research on attachment to God could add clarity on well-validated taxonomies of attachment styles that could illuminate different relational strengths and struggles. Classic spirituality literature offers a description of the spiritual practices (both individual and communal) that can transform attachment to God dynamics.

III. IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE TRAJECTORIES IN SPIRITUALITY STUDIES

Practices of Spiritual Formation and Direction

The results of this interdisciplinary (historical, theological and psychological) exploration of humility suggest some promising areas for application in spiritual formation, as well as spiritual direction, and spiritual care. One import from the study of humility could be towards approaches to spiritual formation that are organized around or function through a relational understanding of the human person. The relational quality of humility is in fact one of the most salient characteristics shared between both the historical-theological and psychological perspectives on humility that were reviewed. This is apparent for instance in Benedict's twelve steps of humility, with each step or practice linked to a person's relationships within the monastic community, and even more to his or her relationship with God. A simple reduction of Benedict's teaching on humility could be that right relationship with others is a necessary dimension of right relationship with God. While the exact practices entailed by the virtue would naturally be different than Benedict's arrangement meant for a monastic setting in the sixth century, such a view of the spirituality of humility could mesh well with theistic approaches to spiritual formation that value the development of humility with respect to God as well as to other people. The



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psychological sources consulted above also stress the theme of relationality in their treatment of humility, especially in the interpersonal aspects of humility that were named. One example includes the definition of humility offered by Wright and colleagues entailing an ethical alignment towards being in relationship with others. These relational perspectives from psychology can contribute further possibilities for interpreting, practicing, and growing in humility within the context of spiritual formation.

A second import for spiritual formation from our interdisciplinary exploration of humility concerns the identification and focus on the impediments to humility. Both the psychological as well as the theological-historical sources discussed above show a common practice of turning to resources in their respective discourses to describe barriers to the development of the virtue. For Cassian, as seen in his ten steps of humility, the barriers to the development of humility are presented quite predictably in the context of ascetical life and in the language of elaboration on vice: that a person “puts no trust in his own opinion,” that he or she “hurts nobody else,” that one “does nothing and ventures on nothing to which he is not urged by the Common Rule or by the example of our elders . . . ”⁹⁹ In the modern psychology of spirituality literature, impediments to humility were investigated by Sandage and colleagues in their 2015 study, which analyzed different “spiritual barriers” to the flourishing of humility. This study linked these barriers primarily to developmental problems and concerns proper to the study of psychology, for instance a lack of secure attachment relationship, or unmet narcissistic self-object needs during childhood. From these examples, it is apparent how interdisciplinary inquiry into a virtue like humility can yield diverse ways of understanding factors that may inhibit spiritual flourishing, while also producing insight regarding how to either avoid or overcome these obstacles in the spiritual life.

A third set of implications pertains to relationships of spiritual direction or spiritual guidance. Here, humility can be an informative and potentially valuable virtue for both those serving as “directors” (those who offer direction or guidance) as well as “directees” (those who are receiving it). For spiritual directors, the discussion of humility is referred, particularly in regards to the psychological theory of differentiation of self (DoS). The view of humility that emerges from this theoretical framework highlights how the virtue includes the sense of an ability to engage across interpersonal differences, while still maintaining a grounded sense of identity within oneself. This interpersonal, relational capacity suggested by the psychology of humility literature is one factor that would naturally prove valuable for persons serving as spiritual directors, and even more if they serve in professional practices that do interfaith or secular forms of spiritual direction where diversity of clients may tend to be greater than in a denominational setting. A director’s humility would imply not

only their ability to stay grounded and not feel threatened by interpersonal differences in clients, but also a relational capacity to acknowledge more fully a directee's distinctive personality, history, cultural background, and experience.

Regarding the humility of directees, the review of Cassian's treatment of humility suggests a potentially relevant meaning of humility as well in the sense of a willingness or ability to consult with others regarding one's inner life and particular dilemmas or challenges one may be experiencing. While Cassian recommends the virtue of humility as part of a rather extreme form of reliance upon a spiritual elder that is characteristic of Christian monastic traditions, the generalized value of the conception of humility is understood as an openness to receive the counsel of others, which may also indicate that a person has the capacity to acknowledge their own limitations and maintain a teachable attitude.

The psychological findings underscore the need for continued research on intercultural and interreligious competency and the practice of spiritual direction. Spiritual direction literature increasingly is addressing issues of culture, context, and spiritual care, including, for example, studies of African American traditions of spiritual guidance, spiritual direction in diverse contexts, and, more recently, a study of spiritual direction in South Africa.¹⁰⁰ Psychologist Carolyn Gratton underscores the importance of critical cultural analysis in spiritual formation and direction.¹⁰¹ Susan Raczky's edited volume *Common Journey, Different Paths: Spiritual Direction in Cross-Cultural Perspective* includes rich theological reflections on cross-cultural spiritual guidance and valuable practitioner perspectives that could be put in fruitful dialogue with psychological research on humility and intercultural competence.¹⁰² Several resources have been published on interreligious spiritual direction such as edited collections by Norvene Vest's *Tending the Holy: Spiritual Direction Across Traditions* and John Mabry's *Spiritual Guidance Across Religions*.¹⁰³ Yet neither these resources, nor publications to date of Spiritual Directors International (SDI), include substantial attention to psychological dimensions of intercultural or interreligious spiritual care. This is an area ripe for interdisciplinary dialogue.

Finally, psychological research may complement contemporary scholarship in spirituality that either contests the primacy given to humility, particularly given systematic oppression that undermines the development of healthy self-image, or reframes true humility as a liberative virtue that resists oppressive and demeaning systems. For example, considering the effects of apartheid, which "served to ensure that non-white South Africans were made to feel like lesser beings," Correia, Matsaneng, and Paulin-Campbell emphasize the rebuilding of positive self-identity as a central aim of spiritual direction in the South African context: "Our ability to develop a trusting relationship with God, and indeed to hold a positive image of God, is profoundly influenced by

our own sense of self. The healing of the damage done to people's sense of self by a system that continuously viewed them as objects, rather than persons, remains a core part of the work of spiritual direction in this context."¹⁰⁴ Feminist and womanist authors have subverted the idea that humility is necessarily a virtue and pride the chief sin. For example, Valerie Saiving persuasively argues this point, and these shifts are also reflected in some literature in spiritual direction.¹⁰⁵ Margaret Guenther writes in her well-known book *Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction*: "Far from being pride, women's distinctive sin is self-contempt,"¹⁰⁶ which is often centered on the body. The popular contemporary author Joan Chittister blasts self-denigration as a kind of "false humility." In fact, she interprets Benedictine conceptions of humility (which she calls the "lost virtue") as an antidote to patriarchy: "Men need the first degree of humility to curb the delusions of grandeur inherent for them in the system; women need it to realize that the presence of God is as strong in them as it is in any man. Real humility, based on the will of God for creation, leads women to reject oppression, not to accept it."¹⁰⁷ Such movements to retrieve and reinterpret the meaning of humility correspond well to contemporary psychological definitions of humility as accurate self-assessment and even suggest a theoretical linkage between humility and resistance to social oppression.

Methodological Considerations

As this study aims to demonstrate, certainly there is potential for rich interdisciplinary research in spirituality studies. While interdisciplinarity has been named as a hallmark of the field, and whereas psychology also has been identified as a key complementary discipline for spirituality studies, in practice there is more exchange among humanities-based disciplines (history, theology, literary studies) and less robust engagement between such disciplines and empirical social sciences.¹⁰⁸ There is a call for more methodological reflections on the relative contributions and potential interconnections of (a) historical and theological disciplines (such as humanities-based) and (b) empirical social science disciplines to the study of spirituality.

Janet Ruffing states that "psychology may well become the authoritative discipline in the study of spirituality . . ." ¹⁰⁹ However, more work is needed to grapple adequately with implications for research. Ruffing identifies the sorts of questions to be addressed in truly interdisciplinary exchange: "How do these findings [from empirical research] require changing assumptions about spirituality based in theological and historical disciplines? How might researchers in Christian spirituality contribute to the development of measures that are congruent with Christian experience and practice?" ¹¹⁰

To consider such issues with regard to the topical focus of humility, it is plausible to imagine further work that would be quite fruitful. For example, it

could be possible to empirically test theories of humility informed by historical-theological sources measuring the empirical efficacy of certain traditional spiritual practices for cultivating humility with different groups or moderated by certain individual difference factors (such as the fact that the same practice may not work equally well for everyone). Empirical investigation of different dimensions of humility also could allow us to estimate the relative impact on certain outcomes. Humility might be tracked over time in longitudinal studies to see factors that contribute to growth or decline, again informed by historical-theological studies. Qualitative studies might also yield thick descriptions of challenges or practices related to humility that reveal parallels with and differentiation from historical accounts.

At the same time, bringing psychological literature into conversation with texts of classic spirituality raises fresh questions. How do understandings of the virtues proposed by the authors of Christian spiritual classics relate to contemporary research on spiritual and psychological well-being? Certainly there are some differences in emphasis, as classic Christian spiritual authors typically bring a theo-centric perspective on humility, which is understood most centrally as a virtue in relationship to the divine, while psychological research emphasizes interpersonal aspects of humility. Could classical spiritual wisdom inform the definitions and measures of humility utilized in psychological research? And, in mutually critical dialogue, the question can be presented in light of contemporary psychological understanding, as to whether some classical conceptions of humility could yield potentially negative consequences for some people with specific personality disorders and psychological issues.

Some spirituality scholars may question whether a validated social scientific instrument can truly measure the essence of the concept of humility. For traditions such as Eastern Orthodoxy that understand virtue as both a gift of God and the “embodiment of divine-human communion”—*theosis*—the prospect of empirical measurement may appear especially complex or even dubious.¹¹¹ Still, conceivably, if one were to model the relational spirituality embedded in much of the ascetical tradition, then it would be possible to incorporate certain measures as tools for evaluating the performing practices in their varied forms towards express aims and purposes. This could be valuable even in traditions that view virtue as the embodiment of a divine mode of being.¹¹²

Research that takes up these kinds of projects and questions requires collaboration across disciplines. Interdisciplinary work in theology and psychology, though, typically has been conducted by individual scholars whose competence tends to be stronger in one discipline rather than a team of two or more scholars collaborating across their disciplinary expertise, and the individualistic single-scholar approach often come with certain limitations.¹¹³ Similarly, the unfortunate siloing of approaches to the study of Christian spirituality will

need to be moderated so as to promote more fully interdisciplinary conversation. Academic guild structures can be impediments to research that brings social scientific, historical, and theological research in spirituality into conversation. More intentional partnerships among professional organizations that include scholars of spirituality would foster interdisciplinary work. Doctoral training in spirituality studies also needs to familiarize students with a range of approaches, and some training in qualitative and quantitative methodology would prepare students for collaborative interdisciplinary work. A further point to consider are the aspects of intellectual humility that may be necessary to advance interdisciplinary work in spirituality studies. The experience of this interdisciplinary team of scholars working across disciplinary “cultures” on this project has reaffirmed the need to slow down the process at times, ask good questions with an open curiosity, to listen carefully, to be honest about points of confusion or disagreement, and to work patiently at explaining and understanding cross-disciplinary terms, methods, and perspectives that may initially seem foreign or unintelligible. In reality no one method or approach to the study of spirituality can exhaust nor encapsulate the entirety of the discipline of spirituality studies, the traditions, or the phenomena they bear.

NOTES

1. Benedicta Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1984), 2.
2. Ward, *Sayings*, 84.
3. Ward, *Sayings*, 90.
4. For further discussion of humility in Christian traditions of spirituality and theology, see Wolfeich, Keefe-Perry, Sandage, and Paine, “Humility: Empirical Psychological Research in Dialogue with Practical Theology - Part 1,” *International Journal of Practical Theology* 20, no. 1 (June 2016): 143–155, and Wolfeich, Keefe-Perry, Sandage, and Paine, “Humility: Empirical Psychological Research in Dialogue with Practical Theology - Part 2,” *International Journal of Practical Theology* 20, no. 2 (November 2016): 1–19.
5. Wendy M. Wright and Joseph F. Power, “Introduction,” in *Francis de Sales, Jane de Chantal: Letters of Spiritual Direction*, trans. Péronne-Marie Thibert, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 65, n. 8.
6. This project was supported by a grant from the John Templeton Foundation on Developing Humility in Leadership (#60622).
7. The SSSR conference includes multiple sessions on spirituality. See <http://www.sssreligion.org>, accessed April 17, 2018.
8. K. Nabhan-Warren, “Reflections on the Method of Ethnography for the Study of Christian Spirituality,” *Spiritus* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 55–59.
9. T.S. Kaufman, “A Plea for Ethnographic Methods and a Spirituality of Everyday Life in the Study of Christian Spirituality: A Norwegian Case of Clergy Spirituality,” *Spiritus* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 94–102.
10. For a discussion of egalitarian relational dynamics between social scientists and theologians working on interdisciplinary collaboration, see Steven J. Sandage and Jeannine K. Brown, *Relational Integration of Psychology and Christian Theology: Theory, Research, and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

11. In preparations for this article, the authors discussed the value of a study on Cassian as a proto-ethnographer and his works as a form of proto-qualitative research. In brief, Cassian's *Institutes* and *Conferences* are the fruit of extensive conversations—and perhaps participant observation of sorts—in communities and with hermits. These conversations are in some cases included—though not without some editorial effort by Cassian—or help shape much of Cassian's thought on Christian asceticism broadly, and monasticism in particular. It goes beyond the scope of this article to address this suggestion further, but it might be the subject of some fruitful future analysis.
12. John Cassian, *The Institutes*, trans. Boniface Ramsey (New York: The Newman Press, 2000), 4.39.
13. Cassian, *Institutes*, 4.39.
14. In some readings of the desert ascetic and patristic corpus more generally, the cure of the soul of the passions/vices is the aim of the spiritual life. Certain strands of Orthodox Christian spirituality, those that adhere to the so-called patristic psychology, “science of spiritual medicine,” or Orthodox therapeutic method, have produced a number of volumes on this topic. See for example, Hierotheos Vlachos, *Orthodox Psychotherapy: The Science of the Fathers*, trans. Esther Williams (Levadia: Birth of the Theotokos Monastery, 2000). See also the works of John Romanides and Jean-Claude Larchet.
15. See also Cassian, *Institutes*, 12.1.
16. One will note the influence of the Stoic and Aristotelian virtue ethics in this schema.
17. These will be significant in the discussion below concerning Benedict. Additionally, they will point to the challenge of definitions that emerges in the final section of this article.
18. Cassian, *Institutes*, 4.39. It should be noted, that although Cassian sees these signs as indicators of humility in a monastic context, ultimately, they reveal a degree of conformity to the likeness of Christ as do all virtues. For more on humility as an indication of Christ-likeness see, Jacques Beaudry, *L'humilité selon Jean Cassien* (Montreal: Les Clercs de Saint-Viateur, 1967).
19. Concerning the balance between monastic and general Christian implications of humility in Cassian's thought, see Augustine Casiday, *Tradition and Theology in St. John Cassian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 111: “Even though Cassian began his teaching with the need for humility and obedience in the monastery, he quickly moved beyond the particularities of monastic life to expose the reasons why humility and obedience are necessary in general application.”
20. The majority of contemporary secondary sources that engage Cassian's thought on humility discuss it in relation to his broader ascetical interests, particularly his interests in offering practical advice to monastic communities. In other treatments, his concerns regarding certain theological disputes, the Pelagian controversies for example, shape the discussion of humility and other virtues. See Casiday, *Tradition and Theology in St. John Cassian*.
21. Richard J. Goodrich, *Contextualizing Cassian: Aristocrats, Asceticism and Reformation in Fifth-Century Gaul*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 16. Goodrich devotes a whole chapter to this issue drawing on significant passages from Cassian's writings to contrast Gallic monasticism and the more robust Egyptian monasticism. He frequently argues for Cassian's lauding of humility as an essential virtue in monastic life and by extension monastic leadership. We encourage readers to consult Goodrich's book for a more in-depth analysis of the topic. Here we only present a few passages that correspond to some of the findings of the humility project as one argument for the value of such research in the study of Christian spirituality.
22. John Cassian, *The Conferences*, trans. Boniface Ramsey, vol. 57, *Ancient Christian Writers* (New York; Mahwah, NJ: Newman Press, 1997), 1.5.
23. Cassian, *Institutes*, 12.29. Sofia Millican notes that Cassian, in his use of the image of the elder-disciple relationship is not only “a structural tool for assuring uniformity and

- continuity,” it is also a “transmission of a life” passed on from the former to the latter. Inheriting a life from the elder is an essential aspect of monastic life for Cassian, as the elder seeks to “encourage” the younger monk in an effort to “[confront] the death-dealing forces opposing the young monk’s perseverance and growth” (in Sofia Millican, “Spiritual Encouragement in the Conferences of John Cassian (Part I),” *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 49, no. 2 (2014): 146.
24. Cassian, *Conferences*, 12.30. Goodrich also makes note of these passages; see Goodrich, *Contextualizing Cassian*, 53.
 25. In some of the literature of the desert tradition, the acquisition of discernment is one of the central purposes of monastic/ascetic struggle. This is certainly true of Cassian’s thought.
 26. Cassian, *Conferences* 2.10. Here, we also see a correlation to the Aristotelean conceptualization of virtue.
 27. See Cassian, *Institutes*, 12.8: “God, the Creator and Healer of all, knowing that pride is the cause and fountain head of evils, has been careful to heal opposites with opposites, that those things which were ruined by pride might be restored by humility.”
 28. Cassian, *Institutes*, 12.10.
 29. Cassian, *Institutes*, 12.11.
 30. Cassian, *Institutes*, 12.15.
 31. Cassian, *Institutes*, 12.15.
 32. Cassian, *Institutes*, 12.14.
 33. Cassian, *Conferences*, 1.2.
 34. Rule of St. Benedict (RB) 7.1–4. All references herein to the *Rule of St. Benedict* are from the following translation: St. Benedict and Timothy Fry, *RB 1980: The Rule of St. Benedict in Latin and English with Notes* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1981).
 35. RB 7.10; see also Ps. 36:2. For an informative survey of modern Benedictine literature on humility, see Ephrem Hollerman, “Humility in the Rule of Benedict: A Theological and Historical Analysis of Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Interpretations,” *The American Benedictine Review* 51, no. 3 (2000): 254–282.
 36. Terrence Kardong, *Benedict’s Rule: A Translation and Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 140.
 37. RB 7.67; see also Cassian, *Institutes*, 4.39.
 38. RB 7.32.
 39. RB 7.34.
 40. RB Prol. 50.
 41. RB 2.12.
 42. RB 2.2.
 43. RB 2.4.
 44. Julian of Norwich, *Julian of Norwich: Showings*, trans. Edmund Colledge and James Walsh, *Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), LT 5, 183.
 45. Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, *Julian of Norwich and the Mystical Body Politic of Christ* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 54.
 46. Julian writes in LT 6, “A man walks upright, and the food in his body is shut in as if in a well-made purse. When the time of his necessity comes, the purse is opened and then shut again, in the most seemly fashion. And it is God who does this, as it is shown when he says that he comes down to our humblest of needs.” Note that Bernard McGinn describes LT 6 as unprecedented in the history of Christian mysticism; see McGinn, *The Varieties of Vernacular Mysticism 1350–1550*, vol. 5 of *The Presence of God Series* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2012), 450.
 47. See Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality and Theology: Christian Living and the Doctrine of God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 120–121: “‘Courtesy’ was an important attribute in the society of Julian’s day. It involved polite behavior in which one deferred to

another — in other words, put the convenience or desires of another person before one's own."

48. Julian of Norwich, *Showings*, LT 6, 187..
49. Teresa, *The Book of Her Life*, in *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington, DC: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1976), 86–87 (ch. 12).
50. Teresa, *Life*, 155 (ch. 23).
51. Teresa, *Life*, 75 (ch. 10). Regarding giving up prayer, she writes (in *Life*, 67 (ch. 8): "May the devil not tempt him, the way he did me, to give up prayer out of humility. May that person believe that God's words cannot fail. For if we are truly repentant and resolve not to offend God, He will return to the former friendship and bestow the favors He previously did, and sometimes more if the repentance merits it."
52. June Price Tangney, "Humility," in *Handbook of Positive Psychology*, eds. C. Snyder and Shane Lopez (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 411.
53. Tangney, "Humility," 413.
54. Saint Francis de Sales, *Invitation to the Devout Life*, trans. John K. Ryan (New York: Image Books, 1989), III, 4–7.
55. Wendy M. Wright and Joseph F. Power, "Introduction," 66.
56. Teresa of Avila, *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, vol. 1, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1976), 109–110.
57. Julian of Norwich, *Julian of Norwich: Showings*, trans. Edmund Colledge and James Walsh, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), ST 6, 133.
58. Grace Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1987), xii.
59. Julian of Norwich, *Julian of Norwich: Showings*, trans. Edmund Colledge and James Walsh, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), ST 6, 135.
60. Teresa, *Collected Works*, 155.
61. Teresa asserts that though she is an unlearned and "wretched woman," she must tell what "the Lord taught her through experience" (*Collected Works*, 109).
62. Paine, Moon, Hauge, Sandage, "Humility – Part 1."
63. Don E. Davis, Everett L. Worthington, and Joshua N. Hook, "Humility: Review of Measurement Strategies and Conceptualization as Personality Judgment," *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 5, no. 4 (2010): 243.
64. Don E. Davis, Joshua N. Hook, Ryan McAnnally-Linz, Elise Choe, and Vanessa Placeares, "Humility, Religion, and Spirituality: A Review of the Literature," *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 9, no. 3 (2017): 243.
65. Jennifer Cole Wright, Thomas Nadelhoffer, Tyler Perini, Amy Langville, Matthew Echols, and Kelly Venezia, "The Psychological Significance of Humility," *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 12(1) (2016): 4.
66. Wright et al., "The Psychological Significance of Humility," 4.
67. Wright et al., "The Psychological Significance of Humility," 5.
68. Everett L. Worthington Jr. and Steven J. Sandage, *Forgiveness and Spirituality in Psychotherapy: A Relational Approach* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2016); Peter J. Jankowski, Steven J. Sandage, Chance A. Bell, Elizabeth G. Ruffing, and Chris Adams, "Humility, Relational Spirituality, and Well-Being among Religious Leaders: A Moderated Mediation Model," *Journal of Religion and Health* 237, no. 237 (2018).
69. Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: Guilford Press, 1985); D. C. Olsen and N. G. Devor, *Saying No to Say Yes: Everyday Boundaries and Pastoral Excellence* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).

70. Klaus Wengst, *Humility: Solidarity of the Humiliated: The Transformation of an Attitude and Its Social Relevance in Graeco-Roman, Old Testament-Jewish, and Early Christian Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988).
71. See Davis et al., "Humility, Religion, and Spirituality;" Wolfteich et al., "Humility - Part I."
72. See James Tomlinson, Elizabeth S. Glenn, David R. Paine, and Steven J. Sandage, "What Is the 'Relational' in Relational Spirituality? A Review of Definitions and Research Directions," *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health* 18, no. 1 (2016): 55–75; Worthington & Sandage, *Forgiveness and Spirituality*.
73. F. LeRon Shults and Steven J. Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality: Integrating Theology and Psychology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 161.
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