

20<sup>th</sup> March 2021

## Indolence

**“What is it that constrains the individual to fear his neighbour,  
to think and act like a member of a herd, and to have no joy in himself? ...  
With the great majority it is indolence, inertia. ...  
[People] are even lazier than they are timid.”**

*Friedrich Nietzsche, Untimely Meditations*

Hilaire Belloc, poet, essayist and Liberal politician, wrote *More Beasts for Worse Children* in 1897. In it she includes this description of the Llama:

*The Llama is a woolly sort of fleecy hairy goat,  
With an indolent expression and an undulating throat  
Like an unsuccessful literary man.*

I don't know the character traits of Llamas well enough to judge Belloc's assessment of this unfortunate beast. But I do understand Nietzsche when he criticises the indolence of the majority of the human species.

Indolence, or “sloth”, is one of the “seven deadly sins”. Unsurprisingly, our inclination to laziness has been addressed in recent decades, and more so in this past year of lockdown. The “obesity crisis”; a lack of exercise for children because of an increased emphasis on “screen time”; enforced closures of gyms and outdoor sports facilities; the increased prevalence of “fitness videos” on TV to help us ... all indicate aspects of our tendency to be lazy and inactive.

In 1674, Thomas Ken published a *Manual of Prayers for the use of the Scholars of Winchester College*. His morning hymn opens with this:

*Awake, my soul, and with the sun Thy daily stage of duty run;  
Shake off dull sloth, and joyful rise to pay thy morning sacrifice.*

This was a challenge to the scholars of Winchester College in the 17<sup>th</sup> century *and* to every right-thinking Christian today. Sloth *is* a sin, to be shaken off with vigour. Indolence *may* be natural for Llamas – or even unsuccessful literary men – but it surely has no place in Christian service.

Let us be awakened to new possibilities right now and rise joyfully to do our Christian duty, in whatever active way is open to us.

### **A prayer for today**

*Waken me, loving God, to new possibilities of service today. Amen*

*An original reflection by © Tom Gordon*

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