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THE SECULAR TRINITY, Part 4

Human beings are complex creatures, often motivated by conflicting aims and desires. We vacillate between modesty and pretentiousness, frugality and self-indulgence, ethicality and expediency, and many other such polar opposites. The spiritual pilgrim experiences this same inner conflict, at least in the earlier stages on the Path. An interior impulse is felt, and the decision is made to dedicate oneself to a certain way of living. Then that pilgrim is sooner or later tested by various distractions, thus revealing his resoluteness or lack thereof.

The spiritual impulse in younger souls, however genuine it may be, is easily overpowered by the loud clamor for worldly success. The prizes offered by the world generally fall into three categories: wealth, power, or fame. Although these can be powerful motivators for over-achievers, they are, from the standpoint of spirit, largely illusory. Wealth and power can be lost overnight; and unlike the fruits of a sanctified life, they cannot be taken across the threshold of death. There are those who, realizing the temporary nature of wealth and power, seek out fame and celebrity as a proxy for immortality. As the historian Tacitus once noted, the last worldly goal to be relinquished is the thirst for fame and glory.

Some may think it possible to achieve great renown and live a life of inner purity. Experience has shown this not to be possible or even practical. Fame may come to a spiritual person, but if it arrives it is incidental. It is as true today as it was in days of old: one simply cannot serve two masters. Plutarch, another historian, made this insightful observation: "The desire of glory has great power in washing the tinctures of philosophy out of the souls of men."

If one should manage to achieve popular acclaim and luminary status, there is a price to pay. First, one must feverishly work to keep it from slipping away. Then there is the loss of privacy and the fact that it becomes difficult to distinguish true friends from celebrity seekers. As Montaigne stated, "Fame and tranquility can never be bedfellows." The fleeting nature of fame is brilliantly encapsulated in this Roman maxim: *Sic transit gloria mundi*.

Yours may be a household name today, but it will likely draw blank stares from future generations. You may have a street named after you today, but names can be changed. That hard sought fame that you dedicated your life to achieving will, in the end, fade from view faster than the blue dye in a pair of cheap denim jeans.

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