



The Twelve Step Review

Fr. Emmerich Vogt, O.P.



Spring 2015

Dear friends,

I was on the road giving missions and retreats so much of the time this past year that I was not able to do a newsletter before now.

A reminder that if you would like any of our prayer cards, they are free and you can request them from our website.

Here is a listing of some future missions, although changes are

sometimes made, so it's best to phone the hosting entity.

Up and Coming Missions:

✘ Parish Mission: St. Peter Chanel, Roswell, GA. March 2 - 5.

✘ Parish Mission: Christ the King Cathedral, Atlanta, GA. March 9 - 11 (a three day mission).

✘ Parish Mission: Madonna del Sasso, Salinas, CA. March 23-26.

✘ Parish Mission: Saint Gertrude, Cincinnati, OH. March 30 - April 1st.

✘ Preaching the Seven Last Words: St. Catherine, New York, NY, Good Friday, April 3.

**Religion is for people who are afraid of Hell.
Spirituality is for people who've been there.**

Does a Catholic Need a Meeting?

Many Christians are against attending a 12-step meeting. Why? Sometimes it's because those who attend say negative things about the Church. Sometimes it's because reference is made to a "Higher Power" instead of Christ or simply God. Here is my take on it, and I begin with a little background as to the profoundly Christian origin of the 12-step movement.

The 12-Step Movement began back in the 1920's, having sprung from the Oxford Groups, non-denominational groups of Christians committed to four principles: honesty, purity, unselfishness and love. They also practiced a type of confession, which they called "sharing"; and the making of amends for harms done which they called "restitution."

One of these members—a man named Ebby Thacher—was an alcoholic and was able to maintain sobriety by living these principles, which he shared with a man, Bill



Sister Ignatia

The Angel of Alcoholics Anonymous

Wilson, who would become one of the founders of AA.

Ebby Thacher had become sober with his affiliation with the Oxford Group at Calvary Episco-

pal Church in New York, the head of which was wonderful minister named Rev. Samuel Shoemaker.

About his enlightening meeting with Ebby, Bill W tells us:

"When he arrived in New York in the late fall of 1934, Ebby thought at once of me. On a bleak November day he rang up. Soon he was looking at me across our kitchen table at 182 Clinton Street, Brooklyn, New York. As I remember that conversation, he constantly used phrases like these:

- "I found I couldn't run my own life;"
- "I had to get honest with myself and somebody else;"
- "I had to make restitution for the damage I had done;"

[*Something Catholics often forget is a part of our spiritual journey, to repair the damage we've done by our wrongdoings.*]

INSPIRATION FROM SISTER IGNATIA

- “I had to pray to God for guidance and strength, even though I wasn’t sure there was any God;”
- “And after I’d tried hard to do these things I found that my craving for alcohol left.”

Then over and over Ebbie would say something like this: “Bill, you don’t fight the desire to drink -- you get released from it. I never had such a feeling before.”

As they separated from the Oxford Group to begin AA, they began to state their principles something like this:

1. We admitted that we were powerless over alcohol.
2. We got honest with ourselves.
3. We got honest with another person, in confidence.
4. We made amends for harms done to others.
5. We worked with other alcoholics without demand for prestige or money.
6. We prayed to God to help us to do these things as best we could.

Bill W tells us:

“Early AA got its ideas of self-examination, acknowledgement of character defects, restitution for harm done, and working with others, straight from the Oxford Group and directly from [Rev.] Sam Shoemaker.”

THE AKRON CONNECTION:

In 1935 Bill Wilson came to Akron, Ohio, for a business meeting, only to find it canceled. There was a bar in the hotel and he was tempted. Instead, he was given the grace to connect with a local alcoholic—Dr. Bob, who would become the other founder of AA. The two got together and AA was born. As the Christian knows, anywhere two or three are gathered in the name of all that is good and true, God Himself is in their midst (cf. Matthew 18:20).

Also at that time in Akron was Sister Ignatia—the admitting Sister at Saint Thomas hospital. She would later be referred to by AA as ‘the Angel of Alcoholics Anonymous’. She had been a musician and a teacher, but because of a complete physical and mental breakdown as a young Sister, she had to forsake her music career. Mary Darrah, who wrote Sister Ignatia’s biography, notes that Ignatia’s breakdown “taught her the power of letting go of self”, a principle that would influence Ignatia’s treatment of the alcoholic. Mary Darrah explains:

“Since Ignatia seemed destined to live for a purpose higher than one she could then envision, and since heroic, extraordinary people discover new opportunities for love from their own human suffering, what event better than a breakdown would provide the impetus for her dramatic change in direction?”

After her recovery, she was sent to be the admitting Sister at St. Thomas hospital in Akron, run by her Congregation—the Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine.

On August 16, 1939, she admitted the first alcoholic patient, subtly listing the diagnosis as “acute gastritis” so that the nurses wouldn’t freak out. In 1939 no hospital would take an alcoholic, for the alcoholic was regarded back then as a hopeless drunk, and the thinking was, “Why give a good space in the hospital to a drunk when somebody really in need could use it?” But because of the physical, spiritual, and mental problems of her breakdown, and what recovery from that entailed, she was willing to accept the alcoholic into the hospital.

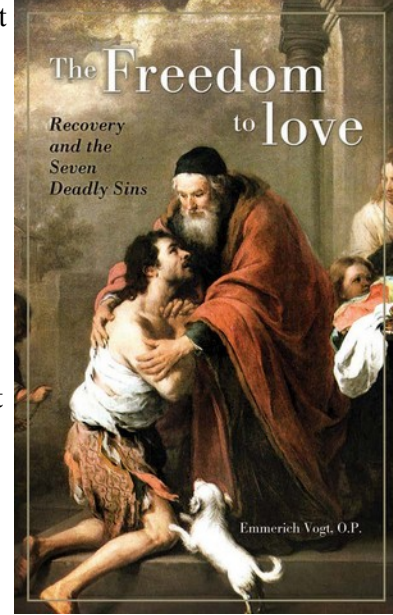
St. Thomas Hospital became the first religious institution to recognize the rights of alcoholics to receive hospital treatment. Today, many of AA’s practices -- including the use of tokens to mark milestones in sobriety -- find their origins with Sister Ignatia. When an alcoholic would “graduate” from the program, Sr. Ignatia would give them a Sacred Heart medallion for which they would promise her (and they loved her) that before they would ever take another drink, they had to first come to her and return the medallion. This kept many of them from relapsing.

Sister Ignatia was among the first to acknowledge alcoholism among priests and nuns. She was also instrumental in implementing the first Al-Anon program, for families of alcoholics. In March 1961, Sister Ignatia received a letter of acknowledgment for her pioneering contributions from the White House. Bill W wrote to Ignatia

FATHER EMMERICH'S CD SETS AND HIS BOOK

DETACHING WITH LOVE: RENEWED AND UPDATED. The original set of *Detaching with Love* was done years ago and Fr. Emmerich has added so much new material that we recently rerecorded it with the updated material in front of a live audience. It is now somewhat longer than the original set and in addition, the talks address what's right and what's wrong with modern psychology. It also gives a Christian understanding of the virtue of love and examines the play of emotions in our lives. Fr. Emmerich presents the principles of the spiritual life, addressing the nature of true detachment, self-righteous behavior, the necessity of self-knowledge, the role of the passions, problems of purity, and the need for appropriate boundaries. In this series we learn to "detach with love." \$35.00 plus shipping and handling.

THE RULE OF OUR WARFARE is a relatively new series given in a retreat format at Casa Maria Retreat House. It continues where "Detaching with Love" leaves off; i.e. it examines the spirituality of each of the 12 steps from a Catholic perspective, giving examples from Sacred Scripture and the lives of the Saints. After a discussion of the origin of the 12-step spirituality, the conferences focus on the importance of each step and how to live them in the fullness of Catholic life. \$35.00 plus shipping and handling.



Father Emmerich's book, *The Freedom to Love*, explores the need for virtue in the life of the Christian. It examines not only the seven deadly sins, but since virtue is the mean between extremes, it studies the opposite extreme. For example, chastity is a virtue that corrects the sin of lust, but to be chaste doesn't mean a person lacks warm affection. Those who overcome lust but are as cold as ice are disturbed by the opposing extreme, prudishness. The book takes a look at the following capital sins, their opposing virtues and opposite extremes, all in the context of recovery.

Capital Sin	Opposing Virtue	Opposite Extreme
Pride	Humility	Self-loathing
Envy	Kindness	Pusillanimity
Avarice	Generosity	Wastefulness
Anger	Patience	Servility
Sloth	Diligence	Workaholism
Gluttony	Temperance	Deficiency
Lust	Chastity	Prudishness

If people are serious about having an authentic prayer life in hopes of recovering from the effects of sin in their lives, good understanding of the virtues and their extremes is a necessity. The more one does what is good, the freer one becomes. The paradoxical nature of true freedom is highlighted by St. Augustine when he comments on Christ's teaching that to die to oneself is to find oneself. Augustine notes that to part with one's will does not mean we lose freedom; it means we gain freedom in the loss. There is no true freedom except in the service of what is good and just. The choice to disobey and do evil is an abuse of freedom and leads to "the slavery of sin" (Romans 6:17; CCC 1733). *The Freedom to Love* explores these issues and shows the path to the freedom that enables a person to love properly. The book is available in an e-form from our website (www.12-step-review.org) for \$6.99. The hardcover can also be ordered from the website for a donation of \$19.99 plus shipping and handling.

Order from The Twelve Step Review

regarding Kennedy's letter, saying:

"We have read the marvelous letter which President Kennedy requested be sent to you. It reminds me that I have no words to tell of my devotion and my gratitude to you, of the constant inspiration you have given me and so many over the years by your example of the finest in all that is spiritual and eternal, as well as temporal."

After her assignment to St. Thomas, Sr. Ignatia was sent to St. Vincent Charity Hospital in Cleveland where she opened a whole ward for Alcoholics called "Rosary Hall." The city of Cleveland named the street on which St. Vincent Charity Hospital stands as "Sr. Ignatia Way."

The professional medical care administered by Sister Ignatia and her Sisters at St. Thomas Hospital, and later at St. Vincent's, afforded the alcoholic spiritual, physical, mental, and moral therapy.

Father Ed Dowling's Influence

Fr. Ed Dowling was another major influence on the 12-step Movement. His contribution is related by one of his fellow Jesuit priests, Fr. Fitzgerald, who tells us:

"At one point in his recovery Bill Wilson got very depressed. What if he-- five years sober--were to drink? It was 10 p.m. The doorbell rang. Tom, the maintenance man, said there was 'some bum from St. Louis' to see him. Reluctantly, Bill said, 'Send him up.' To himself, he muttered, 'Not another drunk.' But Bill welcomed the stranger, all the same. As the man shuffled to a wooden chair opposite the bed and sat down, his black raincoat fell open, revealing a Roman collar. 'I'm Father Ed Dowling from St. Louis,' he said. 'A Jesuit friend and I have been struck by the similarity of the AA twelve steps and the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius.'

'Never heard of them.'

Father Ed laughed, and his infectious laugh endeared him to Bill.

"The curious little man went on and on, and as he did, Bill could feel his body relaxing, his spirits rising. Gradually he realized that this man sitting across from him was radiating a kind of grace....

"Primarily, Father Ed wanted to talk about the paradox of AA, the 'regeneration,' he called it, the strength arising out of defeat and weakness, the loss of one's old life as a condition for achieving a new one. And Bill agreed with everything...

"That night, for the first time in months, Bill Wilson slept soundly.

"Thus began a 20-year friendship nourished by visits, phone calls, and letters. Both men spoke the language of the HEART, learned through suffering: Bill from alcoholism, Father Ed from arthritis that was turning his back to stone.

"Bill turned to Father Ed as a spiritual sponsor, a friend. Father Ed, in a letter to his provincial, noted that he saw his own gift for AA as a 'very free use of the Ignatian Rules for the Discernment of Spirits for the second week of the Spiritual Exercise.'

"Soon Bill was talking about all the steps and taking his fifth step (telling the exact nature of his wrongs) with this priest who had limped in from a storm. He told Father Ed about his anger, his impatience, his mounting dissatisfactions. "Blessed are they," Father Ed said, "who hunger and thirst."

"In 1942 Fr. Ed Dowling wrote to Bill that he had started a national movement for married couples to help each other through the twelve steps: CANA (Couples Are Not Alone). He used the steps to help people with mental difficulties, scruples, and sexual compulsions.

"When their first meeting together was over, Fr. Dowling hobbled to the door and declared, as a parting shot, 'that if ever Bill grew impatient, or angry at God's way of doing things, if ever he forgot to be grateful for being alive right here and now, he, Father Ed Dowling, would make the trip all the way from St. Louis to wallop him over the head with his good Irish stick.'"

"Thus Father Ed endorsed AA for American Catholics with his appendix in the Big Book and his Queen's Work pamphlet of 1947. He was the first to see wider applications of the twelve steps to other addictions, and wrote about that in Grapevine (AA's magazine) in the spring 1960 issue. Bill added a last line to that Grapevine article: "Father Ed, an early and wonderful friend of AA, died as this last message went to press. He was the greatest and most gentle soul to walk this planet. I was closer to him than to any other human being on earth."

Thus a small summary of the deep Christian roots of the 12-step movement whose principles came from two thousand years of lived Christian experience. No Christian should find the steps alien to his Christian beliefs. Once a Jewish alcoholic was in the program and when encouraged to pray, said to Sister Ignatia, "Sister, I'm Jewish. I can't pray to Jesus." She advised him, "Pray to the God of your understanding." The 12-step groups are for anyone who is willing to live according to its principles, which as you can see in the above history, are firmly rooted in Judeo-Christian tradition.

As Christians we need to get over our self-righteousness by following Jesus' custom of table-fellowship with sinners. The only difference between Jesus and us is that we are one of them! ✨

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2001 NW 94th Street
Vancouver, WA 98665
1-800-556-6177

www.12-step-review.org