

# THE TWELVE STEP REVIEW

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## Moral and Spiritual Antibodies: The Path of Peace

As I write this, we have just celebrated the miracle of Easter—the miracle of Christ revealing God as unconditional love, forgiveness, and mercy—even for enemies. This message of mercy is something Mother Teresa has brought to the eyes of the world. And recently four more of her nuns have been martyred while witnessing to God’s mercy as they cared for Muslim poor in Yemen (see article on pages 2-3).

What a contrast to radical Islam. We see God’s love in the first resurrection appearance to the Apostles who are locked away in fear. Although they abandoned their Lord through fear, some having even denied knowing Him, Jesus greets them with “Peace be with you,” again manifesting God’s unconditional love. St. Thomas tells us that peace is an effect of love. This is the love that saves. This is the love that is eternal life. It is our origin and our fulfillment, but it necessitates moral goodness. One has to be free from slavery to sin in order to love rightly. Thus the need for moral and spiritual values in order to love, in order to have deep inner peace in a troubled world.

Viktor Frankl (1905-1997) was an Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist as well as a Holocaust survivor. Writing about his experiences in the Nazi concentration camps, he noted that it was those people who had lost their hold on moral

and spiritual values who were the ones who fell victim to the dehumanizing influences of the camps.

This is my argument for the tragedy we see in today’s world with so much violence, so many serial killers, mom-killers, child-killers, road rage killers, etc. Without acquiring solid virtues and spiritual values, people cannot resist the assaults of sin successfully. We are wounded. We have temptations of anger, lust, envy, gluttony, pride, sloth, and avarice—the seven deadly sins that kill the life of grace and cause us to gravitate toward addiction and codependency.

### Love and Peace

AA encourages the addict to inventory the seven deadly sins in his life [*Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, pp. 48ff]. Is there a connection between addiction and sin? Apparently AA thinks so. According to the founders of AA, when any of the seven deadly sins dominates our lives, fear is generated, “a soul-sickness in its own right” for “these fears are the termites that ceaselessly devour the foundations of whatever sort of life we try to build” [p. 49]. As Scripture shows us, love is able to overcome fear (1 John 4:18). The focus of our spiritual life, our life of prayer, should be fostering a closer relationship with the unchanging God of love. Then fear loses its power over us.

Taking a serious look at ourselves, a thorough moral inventory of the seven deadly sins operative in our lives, is not a once-in-a-lifetime job but an ongoing life practice, that is, if we wish for genuine serenity. How important is serenity for the Christian? St. Paul tells us, “Let the peace of Christ reign in your hearts, since as members of one body, you were called to peace” (Col 3:15). Deep inner peace should be the state of the Christian soul. It is the first thing to be spoken by the Risen Lord:

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you” (John 20:19).

### God as Love

To further illustrate God as unconditional love, we can look at the only two individuals in Sacred Scripture whom Jesus refers to as friends: Lazarus (which makes sense since we are told how He loved Mary, Martha, and their brother Lazarus) and Judas! Judas? Yes, Judas. What a shock. And precisely when is it that Jesus calls Judas friend? The moment he comes to betray Jesus (Matthew 26:50). Jesus doesn’t spit in his face and curse him to hell; rather, He once again manifests that God is unconditional love. In His person Jesus once again reveals God

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## MOTHER TERESA'S MARTYRS

A quote from Mother Teresa is seen in the refectory of her Contemplative Sisters: "I've promised to give many martyrs to the Church."

In the last newsletter I offered some photos that I had taken of Mother Teresa and her Missionaries of Charity. One was a photo of a painting done honoring Mother Teresa's first martyrs. Since then, new martyrs have been added.

On Friday, March 4 of this year, four more of her Sisters were martyred. I have transcribed the account below from a text written by Sister Rio to Sister Adriana. The martyrdom took place in Yemen, where Mother Teresa opened a home for Muslim sick poor back in 1972.

### SISTER RIO'S WORDS TO SISTER ADRIANA

Friday, midday, March 4, 2016

Sisters had Mass, breakfast as usual. As usual, Father stays back in chapel to say prayers, then to fix things around the compound.

8:00am: [The Sisters prayed] the apostolate prayer and all 5 went home.

8:30am: ISIS dressed in blue came in, killed the guard and driver.

5 young Ethiopian men (Christian) began running to tell the sisters ISIS was here to kill them. The Ethiopian men were killed one by one. They tied them to trees, shot them in the head and smashed their heads.

The sisters ran 2 by 2 in different directions, as they have both a men's and a ladies' home. 4 working women were screaming, "Don't kill the sisters! Don't kill the sisters!" One was the cook for 15 years. They killed them as well.

They caught Sr. Judith and Sr. Reginette first, tied them up, shot them in the head and smashed their heads. When the sisters ran in different directions, the Superior ran to the convent to try to warn Father Tom.

They caught Sr. Anselm and Sr. Marguerite, tied them, shot them in the head and smashed their heads in the sand.

Meanwhile, the Superior could not get to the convent. It is not clear how many ISIS men were there.

She saw all the sisters and helpers killed. The ISIS men were already getting to the convent so she went into the refrigerator room, since the door was open. These ISIS men were everywhere, searching for her, as they knew there were 5 Sisters. At least three times they came into the refrigerator room. She did not hide, but remained standing behind the door — they never saw her. This is miraculous.

Meanwhile, at the convent, Father had heard the screaming and consumed all the Hosts. He had no time to consume the large Host, so after throwing the oil out of the sanctuary lamp, he dissolved it in water.

A neighbor saw them put Father Tom in their car. They did not find any trace of Father anywhere. All the religious articles were smashed and destroyed — statue of Our Lady, crucifix, altar, tabernacle, lectionary stand — even their prayer books and Bibles.

10:00 or 10:15am: The ISIS men finished and left.

Sr. Sally came to get the bodies of the sisters. She got them all. She went to the patients, to each one individually, to see if they were OK. All were OK. Not one was hurt.

The son of the woman who was the cook (who was killed) was calling her on her cellphone. Since she was not answering, he called the police, and he went with the police there and found this great massacre. The police and the son arrived at about 10:30am.

The police tried to take Sr. Sally out of there — she refused to leave the people who were crying, “Don’t leave us; stay with us.” But the police forced her to go with them because the ISIS knew there were 5 sisters, and they were convinced ISIS will not stop until they kill her too. So finally she had to leave. She took one set of clothes and the sisters’ bodies, and the police brought them to an international hospital called “Doctors Without Borders” for protection. As there was not enough room in the mortuary of that hospital for the sisters’ bodies, the police brought their bodies to a bigger hospital mortuary.

Sr. Sally told Sr. Rio she is so sad because she is alone and did not die with her sisters. Sr. Rio told her God wanted a witness and told her, “Who would have found the sisters’ bodies and who would ever tell us what happened? God wants us to know.”

Pope Francis had his secretary contact the Yemen Secretary of State very often — about once a week to check up on the sisters and reassure them of his closeness. Today, the Pope’s secretary sent the message: “I thank them — little M.C. martyrs.” He said he is offering the 40-hour First Friday devotion for them.

Sr. Sally told Sr. Rio that Fr. Tom would tell them every day, “Let us be ready for martyrdom.”

Sr. Judith — they were trying so hard to take her for senior course, but they were not able to get her out.

Sr. Reginette — they were trying to send her for junior course but could not get her out.

God wanted them there.

Aden is a rich city — a port city. Aden wanted to be its own state, so they got ISIS in to help them fight against Yemen. So ISIS won for Aden. That was the war last year, with all the bombing. They won, so that is over, but ISIS won’t leave. They want to take over and exterminate any Christian presence. They did not kill the sisters in the war because they had no political reason to waste time on them. But now, they are the only Christian presence, and ISIS wants to get rid of all Christianity. So they are real martyrs — died because they are Christians. They could have died so many times in the war, but God wanted it to be clear they are martyrs for the faith.

Sr. Rio said Sr. Sally is fully surrendered. The police are trying to get her out because ISIS will just keep after her until they kill her. She is fully surrendered and told Sr. Rio — whatever God wants. She said the other Muslims are so respectful of them. She said to pray that their blood will be the seeds for peace in the Middle East and to stop the ISIS.

She said that if they kidnapped Father Tom most probably they will wait 2 days, then ask in exchange for Father Tom either money or the release of their members held in prison.

Sr. Rio said they were so faithful — ISIS knew exactly when they leave and when to break in. And because of their faithfulness, they were in the right place at the right time and were ready when the Bridegroom came.

Sr. Adriana said she thinks the crushing of the heads has some evil connection with “She will crush head of the serpent,” some kind of mockery or evil meaning.



**Holy Martyrs of Yemen**

**Pray for Us**

as mercy, compassion, forgiveness — even for enemies. What Good News has been revealed to us! Although all religions have much in common since we are all created in the image and likeness of God and have the same interior call for happiness, love, beauty, and truth, yet the ultimate fulfillment of those religions is in the revelation God has given in and through His only-begotten Son. This is the God the devil tries to hide from us through fear. That fear can be cast out by love alone. It is the unchanging God of love that we must in our earthly pilgrimage keep our focus on. St. Bernard spoke of this back in the 12th century (*On the Song of Songs*, Vol. III, Sermon 57):

My opinion is that all those who lack knowledge of God are those who refuse to turn to Him. I am certain that they refuse because they imagine this kindly God to be harsh and severe, this merciful God to be callous and inflexible, this lovable God to be cruel and oppressive. So it is that wickedness plays false to itself, setting up for itself an image that does not represent Him.

*Serenity isn't freedom from the storm, but peace amid the storm.*

This is often how the atheist seeks to portray God, no doubt because there is deep hurt within them. See, for example, the book written by Dr. Paul Vitz (a convert to Catholicism) called *Faith of the Fatherless: The Psychology of Atheism*. Dr. Vitz studies strident atheists in history and, from the same periods, strong believers. What the atheists have in common is having had a creep for a father, if there was one in the first place. This is true of Madeline Murray-O'Hare, whose son William (a convert to Christianity and now a Christian minister) tells us in his autobiography (*My Life Without God*) about his mother's hatred for her father. Fortunately William discovered the God who loves him and now lives in peace.

Peace, then, as St. Thomas noted, is an effect of love. When we do the loving thing, the peace of Christ dwells deep within. This doesn't mean we don't suffer. Christ told His followers: "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Christ suffered, showing us the way to eternal life. The choice given to our first parents is the choice now given to us: we can choose to eat from the Tree of Life, which is the Cross, or the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which is to decide (as if gods) what will be for our good or evil, always a trick of the Evil One. As the New Testament puts it, "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it" (Matthew 16:25). This peace whose source is Christ Himself cannot be taken from us, for it doesn't come from the world, nor from people or situations in life. It comes from doing the loving thing.

St. John Cassian was born around 360. As a monk, he made it his vocation to record much of what was best in

Eastern monasticism and bequeath it to the West. As you may recall, Christian monastic life has its origins in Africa. We know of the African hermit St. Anthony from one of the great Bishops of Africa, St. Athanasius, who personally knew St. Anthony and wrote his life. It was in Africa that the first rules for monastic life were written. And one of the great monasteries was St. Catherine's in the Sinai. The monks are still there, and have been there since the 3rd century. In the 6th century the Emperor Justinian built the giant walls around the monastery. St. Catherine's is the oldest continuously-inhabited Christian monastery. It is the only Christian shrine never to have been destroyed by invading Muslims.

In his writings on the desert monks, St. John Cassian notes:

The peace of our spirit does not depend on the good nature and kindness of other people. Our neighbor's good nature and kindness are in no way subject to our control... That would be absurd. The tranquility of our heart depends on ourselves. The ability to avoid anger with all its ridiculous effects has to come from within ourselves and not be dependent on the nature of other people. The power to overcome the evil in our character must not depend on some perfection outside us but on our own virtue.

When we hear in the news of so much evil behavior on a daily basis, we can see what the lack of moral and spiritual values does to people. St. Augustine makes a similar point as St. John Cassian, that peace depends on a life of virtue. Augustine notes (*City of God*, p.145):

They are being tossed on the high sea of their hearts, with no rock of truth or virtue to save them from the waves of their wild and depraved desires.

As responsible Christians in recovery from the effects of that original wound we've inherited from Adam and Eve and from our own personal sins, it is necessary to cultivate on a daily basis the virtues and thus to maintain the peace of Christ with the freedom to love rightly. This allows us to be responsible citizens of our free country. But a country cannot remain free without responsible citizens, as Dr. Viktor Frankl once noted:

Freedom is in danger of degenerating into mere arbitrariness unless it is lived in terms of responsibility.

## THE 12-STEP REVIEW

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