

STEP FIVE, CHAPTER FIVE Breathing Under Water

“Almost all religions, and all cultures that I know of, have believed in one way or another that sin and evil are to be punished and retribution demanded of the sinner in this world – and usually in the next world as well”. “It is a dualistic system of reward and punishment, good guys and bad guys, and makes perfect sense to the ego. I call it the ‘economy of merit or meritocracy, and it best that prisons, courtrooms, wars, lawyers, and even most of the church which should know better, can do.”

“The revelations from the cross and the Twelve Steps, however, show that sin and failure are, in fact, the setting and opportunity for the transformation and enlightenment of the offender – and then the future will take care of itself.

“It is a mystery that makes sense to the soul, and is entirely ‘an economy of grace, which makes sense only to those who have experienced it.”

Two kinds of justice: retributive justice – and restorative justice “has always been a small minority position, even though it is the clear and revolutionary pattern of Jesus, before, during and after the crucifixion.

“Any good therapist will tell you, we cannot heal what we do not acknowledge, and what we do not consciously acknowledge will remain in control of us from within, festering and destroying us and those around us.”

Gospel of Thomas: “If you bring forth that which is within you, it will save you. If you do not bring it forth, it will destroy you.”

“In Step Five of the Twelve Steps, a very similar technology for healing and restoration is set forth, a clear structure of accountability for

knowing, speaking, and hearing the full truth so it does not be kill the addict or others.”

“When we human beings ‘admit’ to one another ‘the exact nature of our wrongs’ we invariably have a human and humanizing encounter that deeply enriches both sides, and even changes lives, often forever!”

“It is no longer an exercise designed to achieve moral purity or to regain God’s love, but, in fact, a direct encounter with God’s love...liberating both sides.”

Idea is biblical, starting with the prophet Ezekial, and ‘dramatically lives out by Jesus’. Ezekial ‘laid the biblical groundwork for truth-speaking, total accountability and restorative justice. For him the cement that holds the whole thing together is Yahweh being true to Yahweh’s Self, not merely reacting to human failure, God always acts with total freedom, from divine integrity and unilateral faithfulness to the covenant with Israel, whether the Israelites keep up their side or not. This becomes the foundational theme of radical grace...’

Ezekial says: “ I treat you as respect for my own name requires of me, and not as your own wicked behaviour and corrupt actions deserve”.

Yahweh’s ‘punishment’ comes precisely by loving and forgiving them and keeping Yahweh’s side of the covenant forever, which reduces them to ‘shame, silence and confusion’.

Have you ever experienced the embarrassed and red-faced look of shame and self-recognition on the face of anyone who has been loved gratuitously after they have clearly done wrong? This is the way God seduces us all into the economy of grace, by loving us in spite of ourselves, in the very places we cannot, will not, or dare not love ourselves.”³⁹

God resists our evil and conquers it with good, or how could God ask the same of us? God shocks and stuns us into Love. God does not love us if we change God loves us so we can change. Only love effects true transformation. Love is not love unless it is totally free. Grace is not grace unless it is totally free.

Expected ego pattern is: sin-punishment-repentance- transformation

Yahweh's love: sin-unconditional love- transformation- repentance.

**Looking at the Sacrament of Confession, Reconciliation of a Penitent
447 BCP**

Mercy seat or judgement seat?? "Our judgements are not greater than God's. Our tendency is to resist, doubt, and deny ourselves forgiveness made it necessary for one person to speak and act with absolute authority for the sake of the soul, "I announce to you in the name of God and with the authority of the Holy Spirit, that all your sins are forgiven."

Jesus gave this gift and call to the whole community; and only later did it devolve to the needed role of a specific spiritual authority.

The divorcing of confession of sins from the setting of the whole community 'did not create strong peer relationships in the community or family, as Step 5 practices often do. We did an end run around the needed apologies, the daily admission of faults, and the face to face request for forgiveness, and went to an uninvolved third party. It was good and helpful in some cases but it did not tend to heal or restore actual human relationships at any practical level.

Step 5 tries to remedy these deficiencies in its own honest and practical way. It returned confession to all three levels: God, self and at least one other human being. It returned the mystery of forgiveness

to where Jesus first offered it – to peer confession and peer counseling.

SUNDAY CIRCLE: ADDICTION AND GRACE, THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE 12 STEPS

STEP 5: Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being, the exact nature of our wrongs.

Step Five in the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions of A.A.:

“All of A.A.’s Twelve Steps ask us to go contrary to our natural desires...they all deflate our egos. When it comes to ego deflation, few Steps are harder to take than Five. But scarcely is any Step more necessary to long term sobriety (freedom from addiction) and peace of mind than this one.”

A.A. experience has taught us we cannot live alone with our pressing problems, and the character defects which cause or aggravate them...If we have come to know how wrong thinking and action have hurt us and others, then the need to quit living by ourselves with those tormenting ghosts of yesterday gets more urgent than ever. We have to talk to someone about them.

So intense, though, is our fear and reluctance to do this, that many A.A.’s at first try to bypass Step Five. We search for an easier way..a general and fairly painless admission that when drinking (addicting) we were sometimes bad actors.

But of the things that really bother and burn us, we say nothing. Certain distressing and humiliating memories, we tell ourselves, ought not to be shared with anyone. These will remain our secret. Not a soul will ever know. We hope they will go to the grave with us.

Yet if A.A.’s experience means anything at all, this is not only unwise, but is actually a perilous resolves. Few muddled attitudes have caused us more trouble than holding back on Step Five.

This practice of admitting one’s defects to another person is of course, very ancient. It has been validated in every century and it characterizes the lives of all spiritually centered and truly religious people.

What are we likely to receive from Step Five? For one thing, we shall get rid of that terrible sense of isolation we've always had. Almost without exception, alcoholics (addicts) are tortured by loneliness.

When we reached A.A., and for the first time in our lives stood among people who seemed to understand, the sense of belonging was tremendously exciting. But we soon discovered that while we weren't alone any more, in a social sense, we still suffered from many of the old pangs of anxious apartness. Until we had talked with complete candour of our conflicts, and had listened to someone else do the same thing, we still didn't belong. Step Five was the answer.

This vital Step was also the means by which we began to get the feeling that we could be forgiven, no matter what we had thought or done.

Addiction and Grace: Gerry May

The need for 'consecration' – 'Consecration means dedication to God, it occurs when we claim our deepest desire for God, beneath, above, beyond all other things.

When we simply try to reform a troublesome addiction, our struggle is dedicated to minimizing the pain that addiction causes us and others. But in consecration we dedicate our struggle to something more, consecration is our assent to God's transforming grace, our commitment homeward.

Through grace, with our assent, our desire begins to be transformed. Energies that once were dedicated simply to relieving ourselves from pain, now become dedicated to a larger goodness, more aligned with the true treasure of our hearts.

What had begun as an expedient attempt to reform a behaviour has now become a process of transforming a life.