



Effective Management

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2 Kings 5:1-19 presents a story about Naaman, the general officer of the armies of Syria, who suffered from leprosy. He seeks a cure from the prophet Elisha, fully expecting a dramatic intervention in answer to his prayers. He is quickly disappointed. Instead of asking God to unleash the powers of heaven, Elisha sends Naaman a message, telling him to wash seven times in the River Jordan to heal his flesh and make him clean. Naaman resists the ordinary instructions, desiring the extraordinary. But his attendants urge him to follow the prophet's directions. Naaman bathes in the Jordan and is healed.

Scrupulous people often live in the grips of high drama. An undisciplined thought can unleash an avalanche of mortal sin. An unexpected emotion can ignite a torrent of fear and anxiety that a feeling displeases God. They may think a forgotten word or an incomplete listing of the details of a sin during the sacrament of reconciliation can deny them forgiveness and make them guilty of the serious sin of sacrilege. This unneeded byplay makes the ordinary seem unappealing and ineffective.

But consider this truth. With few exceptions, scrupulous people will not benefit from a sudden and dramatic intervention by the Spirit of God. Don't expect such healings. The path to peace and a sense of relief typically is not

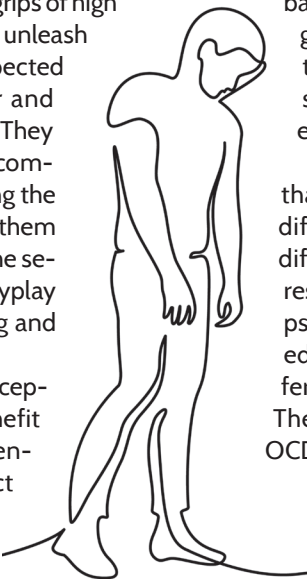
discovered in the extraordinary but in the ordinary. Well-reasoned healing strategies can be claimed, discovered, and put to effective use in learning to manage the disorder of scrupulosity. The use of these strategies will not be dramatic, but they will be effective.

For a person who suffers with "a tender conscience"—the classical understanding of scrupulosity—the counsel of a consistent confessor/spiritual director is essential. The director, a type of mentor, helps the person with the tender conscience learn

the essentials about sin and discover reasonable balances and safeguards to enable spiritual growth. The testimony of the saints and the experiences of countless tens of thousands of men and women witness to the effectiveness of this approach.

For those who suffer something more than classical scrupulosity, an altogether different approach is required. The main difference today between the traditional response and what we now understand as a psychological disorder is our growing knowledge of human behavior. Some people suffer from more than a form of "tenderness." The condition might best be described as OCD with a religious focus.

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) cannot be cured, but it can be managed effectively in such a way that the person



who suffers with the disorder can be freed from its burdens and achieve an ordinary lifestyle. Two basic remedies have proven to be effective.

The first remedy is the diagnosis of the disorder and the prescription of effective drug therapy from your medical doctor. A variety of drugs with varying dosages have proven to be quite helpful. The drugs supply what is missing or in short supply within the human brain. When faced with an obsessive and/or a compulsive thought, the drug effectively provides the necessary help to resist the destructive ritualistic behavior that follows. In a sense, the thought is both tamed and effectively managed. It does not go away, but a sense of control returns, enabling the person to respond in ways that promote a more integrated and healthy way of living. Relief from the burdens of guilt, anxiety, and fear often results.

A second effective remedy is the use of Exposure Response Prevention (ERP) therapy. ERP therapy is a type of cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT). This therapy involves the person with OCD facing his or her fears and then refraining from ritualizing. At first, this type of therapy is frightening for a person with OCD with a religious focus (scrupulosity) because it seems to promote “sinning.” However, with the help of an understanding therapist and often with the support of a confessor (at least in the initial stages of treatment), this therapy is very effective and life-giving.

In some cases, both remedies are required in order to achieve the management results that are hoped for. Small steps—one step at a time and with little or

no drama—will often produce the intended results and help a person who suffers with this disorder to achieve a sense of peace. Like Naaman in that story from 2 Kings, what may well be needed is a commitment from the sufferer and lower expectations.

Who wouldn't appreciate a miracle, but who also wouldn't choose to take less-than-dramatic steps that would achieve the same result but with far less fanfare?

A frustration that many of our readers often express when I offer this kind of pastoral advice is that it produces even more anxiety. Some live in a part of the country where the medical and spiritual care they require are not readily available. This can be frustrating and seem like an impossible obstacle.

In part, this problem can be responded to by visiting the *Scrupulous Anonymous* website sponsored by Liguori Publications. Every edition of this newsletter is there for reference. A second response is to visit my *Scrupulous Anonymous* page on Facebook. There, I answer questions, post an occasional podcast, and provide links to helpful resources. I have recently added a new link that may prove very beneficial in addressing some management concerns. I encourage you to check it out.

Successful management of OCD and scrupulosity is possible. What once was an option for only a few people with access to all the resources they need is now a reasonable possibility for everyone. I know this new reality is an answer to many prayers that have been offered over the years and is a gift of God's grace. ✨



MARY, PRAY FOR US

JUNE 27 IS THE FEAST DAY OF OUR MOTHER OF PERPETUAL HELP

Of Mary, St. Alphonsus Liguori writes in his *Visits to the Most Blessed Sacrament*: “Those who make her known and loved by others are well on their way to heaven.”

Since 1866, the Redemptorists have been making Our Blessed Mother known, singing her praises under the title of Our Mother of Perpetual Help.

Please feel free to offer your prayer intentions to Our Mother of Perpetual Help on the enclosed form and return them in the envelope provided.



Sophia Spirit

Advocate, Comforter, Teacher

The physical departure of Jesus isn't the end of his revealing presence. In a relay race in athletics, the baton is passed from one runner to the next, but the actions take place in the same race. The inner dynamic of love within the Holy Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—opens out in mission to embrace all of humanity and all of creation. The Father sends the Son. The Son asks the Father to send the Spirit in his name. Three divine persons, but still one mission, the same mission of love. It's all about love among the persons of the Trinity, expanded to include us and all of creation. Significantly, the promise of the Holy Spirit follows immediately upon the command to love one another as Jesus loves us.

Jesus describes the Spirit as the one who also communicates truth. Sophia Spirit is the ongoing presence of the revelation of God in the world. But that revelation is received and understood only by disciples of Jesus. Alongside believers is a world of unbelief, a world that cannot recognize the Paraclete. Only those who are part of the world of Jesus, who are open to his revelation, are also open to the abiding presence of love and truth in the Spirit.

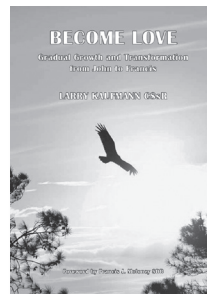
As Paraclete, the Spirit's role is twofold. First, its role is akin to that of a legal representative or advocate in a court of law. It is a forensic function, defending disciples accused of being just that: disciples who follow Jesus and the way of his gospel. There is a second meaning: as conveyor of liberating truth, Paraclete also means the one who comforts and consoles. Thus, the word means both "advocate" and "comforter."

Another role of Sophia Spirit is teacher, as when the Spirit brings to remembrance all that Jesus said and did. The teaching of the Holy Spirit calls to mind the words and actions of Jesus, taking them deeper into the memory and consciousness of the disciples who live in the in-between time.



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There is nothing superficial about bringing to remembrance. The Spirit does not act like an internet search that we employ when we've forgotten some detail or other, or a spouse to whom you frantically turn when you've forgotten the name of someone who is approaching you. Spirit-given memory is not a cerebral memory boost, or "memory on steroids." Biblical "remembering" is more profound than that. By the grace of the ever-abiding Holy Spirit, disciples of all generations do more than simply remember the life of Jesus as a historical curiosity. In a real and true way they participate in its salvific meaning. It becomes their spiritual DNA. ✨



Adapted from *Become Love: Gradual Growth and Transformation from John to Francis*, Fr. Larry Kaufmann, CSsR (a Redemptorist Pastoral Publication, Liguori Publications, 2019, 719713). To order, visit Liguori.org or call 800-325-9521.

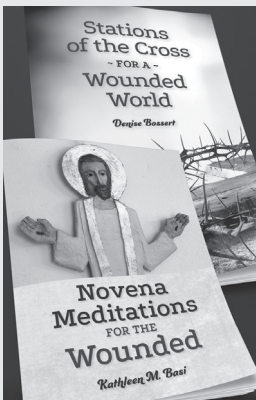
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Q. *I have very strong feelings for a male friend of mine. It is all the more complicated by the fact that he is discerning a vocation to the priesthood. I feel like I am sinning whenever we go out, even if it is with a group of friends.*

A. Good for you and good for him. Isn't it wonderful to be a human being? Isn't it wonderful to be attracted to another person and enjoy his company? Isn't it wonderful that we have the privilege of discerning what the Holy Spirit may be asking us to consider? These are all moments of grace and of life. Be thankful, not concerned and worried.

Q. *Can my horrible and terrible thoughts make something bad happen? I know this sounds silly, but I really worry about it.*

A. The only person who has any reaction to your thoughts, good or bad, is you. The only power your thoughts have is the power to influence your feelings and your emotions. You have no other power. In a sense, you are both the generator and the receptor, the producer and the consumer of your thoughts. End of story.



"We are afflicted in every way, but not constrained; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed."

—2 CORINTHIANS 4:8-9

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- + ***Stations of the Cross for a Wounded World*** by Denise Bossert.

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