

The Anthropological Support for the Sacrament of Confession Provided by the Fifth Step
of The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous

by

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THESIS

Submitted to the School of Theology
of Sacred Heart Major Seminary
Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS (IN THEOLOGY)

May 2010

CONCENTRATION: Systematic Theology/Spirituality

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Turn and be converted from all your crimes, that they may be no cause of guilt for you. Cast away from you all the crimes you have committed, and make for yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. Why should you die, O house Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies, says the Lord God. Return and live!

Ezekiel 18:30b – 32 (NAB)

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INTRODUCTION

“Human” versus “Theological” Anthropology

Since meaning is always important to communication, we begin with a distinction of a very significant term for the sake of understanding that is most applicable to our study. What is meant by “anthropology?” “Anthropology” is typically applied in the human sciences to study man as animal and living in society. This study, however, views a “theological anthropology” that understands a graced human existence in relationship to God that is known to us through our human experience. For it is by way of evaluating our human experience that we come to understand that our anthropology tells us specific things about “I,” “me,” or “myself” as a human person in relationship to God while being a mysterious combination of body and soul, and mind and spirit held together by an integrating power called “grace,” which is a gift of a creator God who loves us dearly.

The Sacrament of Confession and the Fifth Step

The Council of Trent (1551) defined the Sacrament of Confession “as a true and proper sacrament instituted by Christ for the purpose of reconciling the faithful to God as often as they fall into sin after baptism,” having in its sacramental rite “the acts of the penitent – contrition, confession, and satisfaction – as well as the absolving action of the priest.”¹ The Sacrament of Confession is also called the Sacrament of Reconciliation, Penance, conversion, forgiveness, or commonly referred to as simply “confession.”² For our purposes, we will refer to the sacrament as the Sacrament of Confession, which is that sacrament of healing of the Catholic Church that is a confession of sins committed

¹ Paul F. Palmer, *Sacraments of Healing and of Vocation* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1963), 5.

² United States Catholic Conference, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (English Translation for the United States of America, Second Edition, Washington D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, *Modifications from the Editio Typica* – Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), paragraphs 1423-1424.

against God to a priest in order that one may be certain of forgiveness and be healed.³ Before one makes an actual confession (a telling of one's sins in the Sacrament of Confession) the Catholic prays over an examination of conscience, which is an aid to helping people discern their offenses against God. Yet, even before an examination of conscience, the Catholic who is seeking the Sacrament of Confession, called a penitent, must feel a sense of sorrow or guilt for their wrongdoing.

Step Five of Alcoholics Anonymous' (A.A.'s) Twelve Step Program is much like a "confession" since it is a life-story-telling of harmful activities and persons hurt. The fourth step of A.A., much like an examination of conscience, is a moral inventory that honestly searches for those character defects and undesirable qualities in the self that has led him/her to cause so much harm to self and others. The fourth step of A.A. results in a written list of character defects. Then, in the fifth step, the recovering alcoholic actually tells another human being about their character defects, embarrassing activities, and damaging behaviors. Catholics, in particular, have combined their fifth step with the Sacrament of Confession since 1939, right around the time of the publication of the original manuscript, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, by William Griffith Wilson (Bill W.).⁴

Origin and Thesis

Why this particular topic? As a priest in training it was only a matter of time before I arrived at in-depth studies of the sacraments of healing of the Catholic Church; the Sacrament of Confession and the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick. Regarding the

³ *Ibid.*, paragraphs 1420-1421. One way sin can be understood is as a spiritual wound in need of healing, thus, since "We are still in our "earthly tent," subject to suffering, illness, and death, this new life as a child of God can be weakened and even lost by sin" (2Cor 4:7, Col 3:3, 2Cor 5:1), and so our new life in Christ received through the sacrament of baptism is in need of healing from time to time.

⁴ Ernest Kurtz, *A.A. The Story, A revised edition of Not-God: A History of Alcoholics Anonymous* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988), 48, 52.

Sacrament of Confession, I became acquainted with a particular article as assigned reading: *Humankind in Need of Reconciliation: Anthropological Reflections on the Theme of Penance and Reconciliation* by Karl-Heinrich Bieritz.⁵ I was quite intrigued with the idea that guilt, as it is experienced, causes a need to confess our most heinous crimes to someone else. This need to confess is previous to any kind of willed conscious thought, and thus inherently rooted in our humanity. A memory, for instance, that arises within us without any willing it, and having heavy guilt associated with it, is an example of a non-willed conscious thought.

Knowing about my own experiences of having a great need for reconciliation with self and others, and the experience of healing involved, has helped me empathize with all of humankind's need for reconciliation. Accordingly, Bieritz's article became the seed that began a thought process leading to a conviction that a human need to confess guilt was placed in us by God's design for our health and happiness. So I desired to make this my thesis topic of study. Theologically I knew of the need for confession, but how could I prove it from an anthropological (a human experiential) approach? I needed someone (my class professor) who had heard years of sacramental confessions to point me in the right direction in order to make the connection between anthropological (human experiential) need and confession. The fifth step of A.A. was that link.

The Sacrament of Confession and Step Five of A.A. are both, indeed, "confessions." In addition, the examination of conscience (preceding the Sacrament of Confession) and

⁵ Karl-Heinrich Bieritz, "Humankind in Need of Reconciliation: Anthropological Reflections on the Theme of Penance and Reconciliation." *Studia Liturgica* 18 (n. 1, 1988): 40-53. The main thrust of the article is that a need to confess guilt is rooted in our humanity so deeply that it makes itself known to us without us even willing it. Bieritz also presents the idea of mitigated culpability due to behavioral programming, and self-hate springing from a harmful act – a boy who murders his father after seeing his mother abused by him for years – both ideas are applicable to our study in that they embrace the concepts of anthropological guilt and a need to tell/Confess it.

Step Four are both sincere searches for our wrongdoing, offenses against God, moral weaknesses and character defects that cause us to hurt others. Moreover, from my own experience with confession and spiritual direction, I am very familiar with the particular spiritual, emotional, psychological and even physical effects and feelings directly connected to confession (before, during and after). Thereupon, discovering the definition of the fifth step as a life-story telling (mainly of wrongdoing), it was easy to understand that precisely the same kind of spiritual, emotional, psychological and physical effects and feelings are directly connected with the fifth step as well. In analyzing the feelings and effects of both confessions, the sacrament and the fifth step, it became very evident that God has designed human beings to have an inherent need to confess their wrongdoing in order to be emotionally, psychologically, spiritually and physically healthy.

Thus, this study will show the theological anthropological support for the Sacrament of Confession by looking at Step Five of Alcoholics Anonymous' Twelve Step Program. In other words, by comparing the emotional, psychological, spiritual and physical effects on the human person in the story-telling of Step Five and the Sacrament of Confession, I hope to prove that human beings have an inherent need to confess guilt. Moreover, I will prove that good emotional, psychological, spiritual and physical health is the very reason God has given to mankind through the Catholic Church the very Sacrament of Confession that helps us cope in the human condition. The "human condition" being understood as that existential state of humankind that always appears in "both-and" (not "either-or") situations, collisions of differences, and mixtures of theses and antitheses in life where the unity of all things is found in Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER I, THE HUMAN DIMENSION AND THE FIFTH STEP OF A.A.

The Ministry of Alcoholics Anonymous

Established and growing since June, 1935, A.A. has shown consistent results bringing alcoholics to sobriety from varying cultural and educational backgrounds for decades.⁶ A Catholic deacon, Doctor Roy Barkley, who has written extensively on alcoholism, asserts

AA is not, of course, a treatment center, or a method of treatment, or even an organization of any conventional sort. It is instead a very large group of people who have learned to use a set of Christian spiritual principles to help solve a life-threatening problem.⁷

Furthermore, "... the features that have contributed most markedly to the success of AA are distinctly spiritual and lend themselves readily to elaboration in terms of Catholic teaching."⁸ "The Twelve Steps are certainly not incompatible with the Catholic spiritual tradition. On the contrary, the parallels between Catholic teaching and AA teaching are numerous and compelling."⁹ Barkley writes that the Twelve Steps are a

Christian-based method of problem-solving that takes into account both the involuntary aspects of addiction and the responsibility of the addict for his own recovery. They do not gloss over the wrongs that addicts do; indeed, Step 5 calls for formal confession of those wrongs. Though this is not the same thing as sacramental confession, it is surely derived from it and can be of real benefit to the addict who is trying to get his life in order. At the same time, the steps acknowledge that the compulsion to drink is largely not of the alcoholic's own choosing. AA strikes a needed balance between the disease theory, with its emphasis on involuntary factors, and the fact that an alcoholic *can* voluntarily recover."¹⁰

⁶ Robert E. Burns, "The Catholic Church and Alcoholics Anonymous," *Columbia*, 31 May 1952, 15-16 [database on-line]; available from www.silkworth.net/religion_clergy/01035.html; Internet; accessed December 17, 2009. "A.A. has had phenomenal success, and it is estimated roughly that about 75% of its members have remained permanently dry from the time they entered the organization." The percentage is likely higher due to the date of the article. See also: *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* (Alcoholics Anonymous Publishing, Inc., 1953), 121. "To a surprising extent, A. A. has offset the damage to family life brought about by years of alcoholism. ... Permanent marriage breakups and separations, however, are unusual in A. A. Our main problem is not how we are to stay married; it is how to be more happily married by eliminating the severe emotional twists that have so often stemmed from alcoholism."

⁷ Roy Barkley, *The Catholic Alcoholic* (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, 1990), 118.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁹ Roy Barkley, *Catholic Ministry to the Addicted* (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, 1992), 128.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 127.

Moreover, using A.A. principles, twelve step programs for other addictions have since developed also with great success.¹¹ Barkley writes, “[t]he AA program is by far the most widely used and effective method of helping addicts to stay sober. The Alcoholics Anonymous Twelve Steps are derived ultimately from Catholic Christianity. With certain adjustments, they apply to almost any human problem.”¹²

A.A.’s ministry is also a process of human maturation. Early in the development of A.A. “a number of eminent psychologists and doctors made an exhaustive study of a good-sized group of so-called problem drinkers” who concluded that most held in common childishness, emotional sensitivity, and grandiose characteristics.¹³ A.A. trains adults in maturity and emotional health to genuinely learn to “begin to see that all people, including ourselves, are to some extent emotionally ill as well as frequently wrong” leading to “true tolerance and ... real love for our fellows.”¹⁴ Lacking maturity inhibits seeing life and its circumstances in a realistic and proper perspective causing enormously heavy guilt that drives people to drink in order to escape the guilt. Thus, alcoholics are people trying to escape feelings of guilt they cannot resolve due to immature or childish perspectives or understandings. The sources of guilt itself are as numerous as there are alcoholics; and guilt is often associated with fear: “at heart we [(the alcoholics)] had all been abnormally fearful.”¹⁵ Even cofounder of A.A., Bill Wilson’s history shows the source of his guilt for his drinking lay in his parents’ separation. Wilson’s father left, and

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 7. “... the focus of this book is on alcoholism. Whatever it says about alcoholism, however, can be taken to apply to the more general problem of addiction.” See for instance *Breaking Free, 12 Steps to Sexual Purity for Men* by Stephen Wood (Greenville, SC: Family Life Publications, 2003), against internet pornography addiction, which is also well known to destroy marriages and families just as alcohol does.

¹² *Ibid.*, 91.

¹³ *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* (Alcoholics Anonymous Publishing, Inc., 1953), 127.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 94-95. The quotation continues: “It will become more ... evident ... that it is pointless to become angry, or to get hurt by people who, like us, are suffering from the pains of growing up.”

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 128.

it was most likely that childhood trauma Wilson himself associated to be guilty of that led to his alcoholism:

Bill Wilson later nursed a memory and interpretation perhaps not unusual in such situations. “If only his parents had loved him more they wouldn’t have separated. And this meant if he had been more lovable, it never would have happened. It always came around to that. It was, it *had* to be, his fault. He was the guilty one.”¹⁶

Therefore, A.A. seeks and roots out origins of guilt – origins that are almost always linked with fear in relation to love. Hence, the Twelve Steps strive to correct untruthful perspectives and interpretations of reality in order to replace them with new, truthful ones – many name this maturity, or prudence (seeing things in their proper reality).

The Origin of Alcoholics Anonymous (Brief History)

The origins of A.A. can be traced back to “four founding moments.” The first founding moment was when Doctor Carl Gustav Jung, after treating a wealthy financial wizard and alcoholic named Rowland H., exchanged letters with Bill Wilson in 1931. Jung advised Wilson that there was no hope for recovery from alcoholism for Rowland H. by any medical or psychiatric treatment. Jung also advised Wilson, however, that a genuine conversion of a spiritual or religious nature may help, but those kinds of recoveries, he added, were rare.¹⁷

The second founding moment was the effect left on Bill Wilson during an alcoholic binge when an old friend, Ebby T., visited in November 1934. Described by Wilson the previous summer as a “hopeless drunk” and committed to a mental hospital, Ebby T. was

¹⁶ Kurtz, 10.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 8-9, 33.

shining and sober. When Ebby T. told his story to Wilson, it was then that he realized the significance of one alcoholic talking to another.¹⁸

The third founding moment, mid-December 1934, is Wilson's spiritual experience of a felt presence of God. Wilson was completely estranged from religion and relied only upon the power of the rational, inquiring mind as he lay in a bed "drying out" at Charles B. Towns hospital in New York. Yet, in hopelessness, he prayed the prayer of a despairing man: "If there is a God, then show yourself to me! I will do anything." Wilson's experience was illuminated by some literature of William James, from *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, which was dropped off at the hospital by Ebby T.¹⁹

The fourth founding moment, credited with the beginning of A.A., is the interaction between Doctor Robert Holbrook Smith (Dr. Bob) and Wilson from May through June, 1935. Wilson, a New York stock broker, travelled to Akron for business. When the deal fell through he knew he needed to find another alcoholic in order to retain sobriety. After a desperate search, dialing several phone numbers, he was finally put in touch with Dr. Bob, a local surgeon. Wilson and Smith talked for hours, and that conversation saved Wilson from taking a drink; it was essentially Wilson's fifth step – telling his life-story.²⁰

Lastly, there was the influence of The Oxford Group, a moral application for sobriety demanding "Four Absolutes" of honesty, purity, unselfishness, and love.²¹ Although unsuccessful for Bill W., Dr. Bob and many other participants, The Oxford Group did

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 7-9, 21, 33.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 19-24, 33.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 26-33; and *The Founders, Bill W. and Dr. Bob Started Alcoholics Anonymous* [database on-line]; available from <http://alcoholism.about.com/cs/history/l/aa041597.htm>; Internet; accessed November 3, 2009.

²¹ Kurtz, 25. This was The Oxford Group, stateside, different from the 19th c. Anglican Oxford movement. The Group focused on the principles of self-survery, confession, restitution, and the giving of oneself in service to others: it "was a non-denominational, theologically conservative, evangelically styled attempt to recapture the impetus and spirit of what its members understood to be primitive Christianity" (pp. 8-9).

nonetheless offer Wilson the foundational ideas for A.A. Thus, from his experience with The Oxford Group and his “four founding moments,” Bill Wilson had learned a better means to sobriety and systematized the method.

After the publication of A.A.’s first manuscript, growth of treatment with The Twelve Steps ensued. According to Edward Sellner’s research, in addition to “what A.A. learned from the Oxford Group Movement there was also the profound influence of certain Christian men and women – from the Episcopalian priest, Sam Shoemaker, the Roman Catholic nun, Sister Ignatia, to the Jesuit priest, Father Ed Dowling.”²²

Noteworthy is Sister Mary Ignatia Gavin, known as the “Angel of Alcoholics Anonymous,” who was closely involved with the treatment and recovery of many alcoholics in the Akron, Ohio area, and, being female, she was the first woman to offer a feminine perspective to A.A.. Sister Ignatia worked closely with Dr. Bob and Bill Wilson and was instrumental in “providing reliable hospital services [which at one point] was ... part of A.A.’s growth problem that ... [she eventually] solved.”²³ Sister Ignatia is credited with streamlining treatment for addictions in hospitals because of her many gifts. “More than fifty years later, the microcosm of Ignatia’s work is found in all credible treatment programs around the world.”²⁴

²² Edward Cletus Sellner, “The Event of Self-Revelation in the Reconciliation Process: a Pastoral Theological Comparison of A. A.’s Fifth Step and the Sacrament of Penance” (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 1980), 244.

²³ Mary C. Darrah, *Sister Ignatia: Angel of Alcoholics Anonymous*, Second Edition, Center City, Minnesota: Hazelden, 2001 [Book on-line]; available from: http://books.google.com/books?id=hclVXawAy4C&dq=Sister+Mary+Ignatia+Cleveland&printsec=frontcover&source=bn&hl=en&ei=HsgqS_ibKZC6Nsf0zYYJ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=5&ved=0CBMQ6AEwBA#v=onepage&q=&f=false; Internet, accessed 17 December 2009, *xvi*.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, *xvii*. Sister Ignatia’s gifts consisted of “The basic ingredient of quality sobriety [which] is one of spiritual surrender to this spiritual illness and recovery through the spiritual values so exemplified in Sister Ignatia’s life. To recall her life is to recall her work, and her work was the spiritual conquest of addiction. ... Sister Ignatia was the only person in AA’s long and colorful history to be the lifelong friend and spiritual advisor to both male cofounders,” Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob Smith.

The Twelve Steps

The Twelve Steps are spiritual principles that require action. The entire program of A.A. has conversion as its goal – a complete change of life from drunkenness to sobriety. The program recognizes that alcoholics must be converted from self-centeredness through recognizing that they are “utterly hopeless,” in need of being “totally deflated,” and generally in need of others; “the drinking alcoholic ... is not perfect, not absolute, *not God.*”²⁵ Alcoholics believe they are in complete control of life and can never make any major mistakes. As a result, for them their problems are caused by other people. With honest reflection upon their human experiences, alcoholics come to realize that they are not in complete control of their lives, that they actually consider themselves failures, and that they escape this feeling of failure through drinking. Sobriety then begins with the realization of hopelessness, total deflation of the ego, an acceptance of weaknesses and limitations, and a realization of the need for others.²⁶

Now to put Step Five in its proper context, a brief explanation of all twelve steps will be helpful. Step One is “We admitted we were powerless over alcohol – that our lives had become unmanageable.”²⁷ No one likes to admit total and utter personal defeat; for the alcoholic, this acknowledgment is completely revolting. Still, the first action is acceptance of weakness; which ironically becomes the “firm bedrock upon which happy and purposeful lives may be built.”²⁸ Few alcoholics will follow any of the eleven other steps until they believe they are utterly hopeless and will die due to their own self-destructive obsession with alcohol. Hence, alcoholics need to obtain help because, as

²⁵ Kurtz, 35.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 34-35.

²⁷ *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, 21.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions says, “alcoholics almost never recovered on their own resources. And this had been true ... since man had first crushed grapes.”²⁹

Step Two is “Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.”³⁰ Alcoholics must believe that they cannot recover on their own; they must believe in a “higher power” of some kind for assistance – even if that “higher power” is the A.A. group itself consisting of former alcoholics. The substitute of the A.A. group for the “higher power” proves to be a good beginning for belief in God, which does not have to happen immediately, but can come gradually, later on. Step Two is rooted in humility. “Whether agnostic, atheist, or former believer ... true humility and an open mind can lead us to faith, and every A.A. meeting is an assurance that God will restore us to sanity if we rightly relate ourselves to Him.”³¹

Step Three is “Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood him.”³² While the first and second steps only involve reflection, Step Three calls for an action, “for it is only by action that we can cut away the self-will which has always blocked the entry of God – or, if you like, a higher Power – into our lives.”³³ The third step is a willingness to let go, to give up absolute control of life and human will over to “God,” a Power, or the A.A. group. The alcoholic ego is afraid of losing independence and becoming a thing that no longer exists: “If I keep on turning my life and my will over to the care of Something or Somebody else, what will become of *me*? I’ll look like the hole in the doughnut.”³⁴ The alcoholic ego rests on a lie believing that

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 34.

³² *Ibid.*, 35.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

the more it relinquishes control over itself, the less control it has. The facts are, however, that “the more we become willing to depend upon a higher Power, the more independent we actually are. Therefore dependence, as A.A. practices it, is really a means of gaining true independence of the spirit.”³⁵ Step Three is choosing God’s will over my own so that alcoholics realize the correct use of will power – a real revelation for them. “Our whole trouble had been the misuse of will power. We had tried to bombard our problems with it instead of attempting to bring it into agreement with God’s intention for us.”³⁶

Step Four is “Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.”³⁷ All human beings have natural desires (for sex and companionship, material and emotional security, and a place in society) that become disordered: “no human being, however good, is exempt from these troubles.”³⁸ These troubles, disordered natural desires, or “misdirected instincts” cause “nearly every serious emotional problem” – and these are the physical and mental liabilities that make up the moral inventory of the fourth step.³⁹

Step Four is our vigorous and painstaking effort to discover what these liabilities in each of us have been, and are. We want to find exactly how, when, and where our natural desires have warped us. We wish to look squarely at the unhappiness this has caused others and ourselves. By discovering what our emotional deformities are, we can move toward their correction. Without a willing and persistent effort to do this, there can be little sobriety or contentment for us. Without a searching and fearless moral inventory, most of us have found that the faith which really works in daily living is still out of reach.⁴⁰

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 42. Simply going to A.A. shows at least a willingness: a beginning of turning the life and will over to God.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 43.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 44. Overcoming the fear of one’s defects for depressive temperaments involves the newcomer’s sponsor to point out some assets of his/her character, which serves “to clear away morbidity and encourage balance” (p. 47). For the “power driver” temperaments, the sponsor will have to challenge the newcomer with reason that reveals the chink in the armor of walls the ego has built – these are blinded to their own defects because their prideful reasoning always makes excuses, and blames other people or circumstances for their misconduct (see pp. 47-49).

Step Four thus acknowledges ugly and unlikeable characteristics about the self with a willingness to face them, while also enabling alcoholics to settle with their past.⁴¹

Step Five is “Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being, the exact nature of our wrongs.”⁴² When the thorough moral inventory of Step Four is complete, Step Five requires the telling, to another human being, the wrongs, harmful activities, hurt and pain the alcoholic has caused to others. Most critical for a successful fifth step is to speak to the listener about those severely distressing and humiliating memories that the alcoholic would rather take to their grave. Otherwise, to hold back on Step Five almost always leads the alcoholic back to drinking: “Most of us would declare that without a fearless admission of our defects to another human being, we could not stay sober.”⁴³

Step Five, therefore, opens up alcoholics to relationships with God and other people freeing them from the long-felt feelings of isolation because it enables them to relate to another human being in complete candor about their conflicts.⁴⁴ Step Five also gives the alcoholic the first “feeling that we could be forgiven, no matter what we had thought or done;” as well as the first feeling of being able to forgive others, “no matter how deeply we felt they had wronged us.”⁴⁵ Moreover, Step Five enables alcoholics to be humble, which “amounts to a clear recognition of what and who we really are, followed by a sincere attempt to become what we could be. Therefore, our first practical move toward humility must consist of recognizing our deficiencies.”⁴⁶

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 56.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 57-58.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Step Six is “Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.”⁴⁷ Step Six entails a willingness to cooperate with God’s will, as well as continual effort to realign one’s will with God’s concerning all character defects. Then, the recovering alcoholic can ask God to take away this self-destructive character defect, obsession with alcohol, which leads to suicide. The request for God to remove such a defect will be granted because suicide is against the basic instinct of self-preservation in the human nature as well as God’s will. Moreover, the sixth step aids the recovering alcoholic to understand that their character defects cause disorder to their natural desires of sex and companionship, material and emotional security, and a place in society to the degree of driving them on blindly, unreasonably demanding more satisfactions or pleasures than are possible or due. That unreasonable demand “is the point at which we depart from the degree of perfection that God wishes for us here on earth.”⁴⁸ *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* says that

If we ask, God will certainly forgive our derelictions. But in no case does He render us white as snow and keep us that way without our cooperation. That is something we are supposed to be willing to work toward ourselves. He asks only that we try as best we know how to make progress in the building of character.⁴⁹

Step Six “is A. A.’s way of stating the best possible attitude one can take in order to begin this new lifetime job” – improving character defects.⁵⁰ Patient improvement of character defects becomes the lifetime job after the drive to drink is lifted out of the alcoholic.⁵¹ Thus the goal of Step Six is a “striving for” moral and spiritual perfection – God’ will.⁵²

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, 69. Step six also understands thinking such as “This I cannot give up yet,” which admits that certain defects of character are not ready to be given up, but in time, can also be brought under the will of

Step Seven is “Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.”⁵³ “Indeed, the attainment of greater humility is the foundation principle of each of AA’s Twelve Steps. For without some degree of humility, no alcoholic can stay sober at all.”⁵⁴ Greater humility, “a genuine reliance upon a higher Power,” is Step Seven’s focus.⁵⁵ Through humility, alcoholics gain “the perspective to see that character-building and spiritual values had to come first, and that material satisfactions were not the purpose of living.”⁵⁶ Hence, Step Seven counsels alcoholics to “clearly see that we have been making unreasonable demands upon ourselves, upon others, and upon God.”⁵⁷ Through the recovering alcoholics’ experiences of A.A., they learn that humility is what has transformed weakness to strength, fear into peace, and self-centered, unrealistic demands into simple, realistic (reasonable) requests.⁵⁸ *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* puts it:

The Seventh Step is where we make the change in our attitude which permits us, with humility as our guide, to move out from ourselves toward others and toward God. The whole emphasis of Step Seven is on humility. It is really saying to us that we now ought to be willing to try humility in seeking the removal of our other shortcomings just as we did when we admitted that we were powerless over alcohol, and came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. If that degree of humility could enable us to find the grace by which such a deadly obsession could be banished, than there must be hope of the same result respecting any other problem we could possibly have.⁵⁹

Step Eight is “Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.”⁶⁰ Step Eight is concerned with personal relationships, and “the

God with His help of grace (p. 70). For instance, many alcoholics find self-righteous anger, which must be given up, very enjoyable; but the Twelve Steps are willing to wait (p. 68).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 77-78.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 79.

beginning of the end of isolation from our fellows and from God.”⁶¹ Step Eight is a call to forgive all those who have harmed the recovering alcoholic; and then upon making a list of all those whom the alcoholic has hurt, become willing to ask for their forgiveness.

Step Nine is “Made direct amends to such people whenever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.”⁶² Like Step Eight, Step Nine also entails personal relationships. While Step Eight created the list of those harmed, Step Nine puts Step Eight into action – the alcoholic must seek to be reconciled with those he/she has hurt. The “very spirit of Step Nine” is “the readiness to take the full consequences of our past acts, and to take responsibility for the well-being of others at the same time.”⁶³

Step Ten is “Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.”⁶⁴ Step Ten puts A.A. principles into daily practice: “can we stay sober, keep in emotional balance, and live to good purpose under all conditions?”⁶⁵ Step Ten requires the willingness to continue what recovering alcoholics have begun: continual self-survey and self-criticism frequently and daily. The goal, after a while, is accurate self-appraisal; and most recovering alcoholics have only begun this good habit with the Twelve Steps. Step Ten also teaches daily “spot-check” inventories, which are careful examinations of our thoughts, feelings and motives whenever interiorly disturbed (feeling hurt, jealous, envious, self-pitying, or having hurt pride – anything not peaceful).⁶⁶ Step

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 85.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 92-93. See also: Saint Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, trans. Louis J. Puhl (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 119-120. Step Ten is very similar to the Fifth Rule for Discernment of Spirits to discern in the spiritual life whether one is being led by an evil or a good spirit. Thoughts, feelings and desires of discontent and disturbance against inner peace are signs of evil at work. Fifth Rule: “We must carefully observe the whole course of our thoughts. If the beginning and middle and end of the course of thoughts are wholly good and directed to what is entirely right, it is a sign that they are

Ten also prompts a modest inventory of something done right, for certainly “the waking hours are usually well filled with things that are constructive. Good intentions, good thoughts, and good acts are there for us to see. Even when we have tried hard and failed, we may chalk that up as one of the greatest credits of all.”⁶⁷ Step ten calls the alcoholic to a realistic attitude towards character formation. “An honest regret for harms done, a genuine gratitude for blessings received, and a willingness to try for better things tomorrow will be the permanent assets we shall seek” for building virtuous character.⁶⁸

Step Eleven is “Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.”⁶⁹ Through prayer and meditation a conscious contact with God, and “His grace, wisdom, and love,” is established and remains because “[w]e all need the light of God’s reality, the nourishment of His strength, and the atmosphere of His grace.”⁷⁰ When self-examination, meditation and prayer are “interwoven, the result is an unshakable foundation for life[:] emotional balance.”⁷¹ Summarized well, we read:

Perhaps one of the greatest rewards of meditation and prayer is the sense of *belonging* that comes to us. We no longer live in a completely hostile world. We are no longer lost and frightened and purposeless. The moment we catch even a glimpse of God’s will, the moment we begin to see truth, justice, and love as the real and eternal things in life, we are no longer deeply disturbed by all the seeming evidence to the contrary that surrounds us in purely human affairs. We know that God lovingly

from the good angel. But the course of thoughts suggested to us may terminate in something evil, or distracting, or less good than the soul had formerly proposed to do. Again, it may end in what weakens the soul, or disquiets it; or by destroying the peace, tranquility, and quiet which it had before, it may cause disturbance to the soul. These things are a clear sign that the thoughts are proceeding from the evil spirit, the enemy of our progress and eternal salvation.”

⁶⁷ *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, 96.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 100, 104.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

watches over us. We know that when we turn to Him, all will be well with us, here and hereafter.⁷²

Step Twelve is “Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.”⁷³ Joy is received by alcoholics who turn their efforts outside themselves towards others taking the message of A.A. to other alcoholics. “The joy of living is the theme of A. A.’s Twelfth Step, and action is its key word.”⁷⁴ Step Twelve hopes for a

spiritual awakening, the most important meaning of it is that he has now become able to do, feel, and believe that which he could not do before on his[her] unaided strength and resources alone. He has been granted a gift which amounts to a new state of consciousness and being.⁷⁵

The spiritual awakening of Step Twelve brings together the overall goal of all the steps:

For it is only by accepting and solving our problems that we can begin to get right with ourselves and with the world about us, and with Him who presides over us all. Understanding is the key to right principles and attitudes, and right action is the key to good living; therefore the joy of good living is the theme of A. A.’s Twelfth Step.⁷⁶

Specific Importance of the Fifth Step of A.A.

The fifth step of A.A. parallels the Sacrament of Confession in both action and nature. As an action, the fifth step is a telling of wrongs and harmful activities to another person; the Sacrament of Confession entails the telling/confession of sins to a priest. As the fifth step is the declaration “to God, to ourselves, and to another human being, the exact nature

⁷² *Ibid.*, 108.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 109-110. The meaning of the spiritual awakening continues to be described: “He has been set on a path which tells him he is really going somewhere, that life is not a dead end, not something to be endured or mastered. In a very real sense he has been transformed, because he has laid hold of a source of strength which, in one way or another, he had hitherto denied himself. He finds himself in possession of a degree of honesty, tolerance, unselfishness, peace of mind, and love of which he had thought himself quite incapable. What he has received is a great gift, and yet usually, at least in some small part, he has made himself ready to receive it” (p. 110).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 129-130.

of our wrongs,”⁷⁷ so the Sacrament of Confession is also a statement of sins, our exact nature of our wrongs, and our character defects, to a priest, to God, and to ourselves. In nature, the fifth step and the Sacrament of Confession both lead to healing, to greater inner peace, and a sense of having a weight of guilt lifted. Although the fifth step is formally not a religious action, it is still a ritualistic action resulting in a real healing effect through the release of guilt. Thus, Step Five provides healing for the non-religious. Therefore, the specific importance of the fifth step and the Sacrament of Confession is that both are very similar (anthropological) rituals that lead to healing through the release of guilt.

Suffering addicts “cannot live alone with [their] pressing problems and the character defects which cause or aggravate them.”⁷⁸ Anything in our past that “irks” us, that is, causes us any type of anger, resentment, rumination, pain, or hurt must be discussed with another human being in order to gain relief and release. All of these “pressing problems” that the sufferer deals with must be spoken of in complete honesty, from the perspective of personal responsibility, about “me.” Recovering alcoholics can no longer blame anyone or anything but themselves for their problems. Hence, the fifth step is admitting that “I” am the cause of my problems because of my lack of knowledge of true self, emotional instability, and disordered demands for sex and companionship, material security, and place in society or community. The fifth step is considered to be the most difficult action because it requires the alcoholic to admit “what is wrong with me,” instead of what is wrong with others or God’s plan of humanity.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

Thus the fifth step directly parallels the Sacrament of Confession. This parallel is shown in the need to relieve heavy guilt carried by both the alcoholic and the sinner:

[The alcoholic] will tell how they tried to carry the load alone; how much they suffered of irritability, anxiety, remorse, and depression; and how, unconsciously seeking relief, they would sometimes accuse even their best friends of the very character defects they themselves were trying to conceal. They always discovered that relief never came by confessing the sins of other people. Everybody had to confess his own.⁷⁹

As quoted above, it is very clear from A.A. literature that the authors recognize the powerful healing effect of the telling of one's "character defects" to another person; and how identical, in action and nature, the fifth step is to the Sacrament of Confession. Note that *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* uses the very words "confessing" and "sins," as cited above, in their (non-religious) description of Step Five.

Finally, the authors of A.A. write that

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. But today religion is by no means the sole advocate of this saving principle. Psychiatrists and psychologists point out the deep need every human being has for practical insight and knowledge of his own personality flaws and for a discussion of them with an understanding and trustworthy person.⁸⁰

The parallels between Step Five and sacrament are stunning. The admission of defects of character is "validated in every century, and ... characterizes the lives of all spiritually centered and truly religious people," and is a "saving principle," which is "advocated" by "psychiatrists and psychologists" who "point out the deep need of every human being ... for practical insight and knowledge of his own personality flaws and for a discussion of them" (again) in order to release the heavy burden of guilt. The results are described:

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 57-58.

The dammed-up emotions of years breakout of their confinement, and miraculously vanish as soon as they are exposed. As the pain subsides, a healing tranquility takes its place. And when humility and serenity are so combined, something else of great moment is apt to occur ... the [feeling] of the presence of God.⁸¹

Thus has been the experience as recounted by many of agnostics and atheists who make their fifth step. Healing enters in when character defects are spoken “out.” As stated earlier, the significance of the fifth step is that, like the Sacrament of Confession, it brings healing and relieves the weight of guilt through nearly identical rituals.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 63.

CHAPTER II THE SACRED DIMENSION AND THE SACRAMENT OF CONFESSION

History of the Sacrament of Confession

Paul Haffner recognizes the existence of moral evil in the human condition since the human race began. Human beings have always harmed themselves and others. Haffner says that “the literature and history of the human race bear witness to a general interest in the most empirical fact of moral evil.”⁸² Benedict Groeschel agrees that “in a wounded world marked by the mystery of the original fall of the human race, life cannot always be beautiful, but it can be filled with meaning.”⁸³ Haffner explains the reason for moral evil:

At the beginning of human existence, there occurred the tragedy which is known as the Fall, and this primordial act of disobedience left its mark on human beings in original sin transmitted throughout the race. A propensity for wrongdoing remained and throughout history men and women, recognizing that objective value of right and wrong, have sought somehow to set right the account of sin and guilt. In most religions there are rites which convey a sense of penance and reparation for wrongdoing.⁸⁴

The Christian Faith believes that the “Fall” caused “original sin” leaving every human being with “a propensity for wrongdoing,” as Haffner states. Therefore, wrongdoings, or harmful acts committed against God or neighbor, are inevitable. Thus, recognizing the value of right and wrong men and women seek to set right the account of sin and guilt, but they could not do it on their own. So Christ established, through the ministry of His Church, the Sacrament of Confession “most especially intended for the forgiveness of sins.”⁸⁵ It was necessary for Jesus to establish the forgiveness of sins in a sacramental way so that men and women throughout history could have the certainty of forgiveness

⁸² Paul Haffner, *The Sacramental Mystery* (Hevefordshire, England: Gracewing, 1999), 113.

⁸³ Benedict J. Groeschel, *Arise from Darkness, When Life Doesn't Make Sense* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 18.

⁸⁴ Haffner, 113.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 114.

and reconciliation with God. As with any sacrament “the thing” signified is truly and really made present. The “thing signified” in the Sacrament of Confession is indeed, “reconciliation with God;” and like the fifth step’s results, the Sacrament of Confession “is likely to be followed at times by peace and serenity of conscience with an overwhelming consolation of spirit.”⁸⁶ Additionally, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches

The new life received in Christian initiation has not abolished the frailty and weakness of human nature, nor the inclination to sin that tradition calls *concupiscence*, which remains in the baptized such that with the help of the grace of Christ they may prove themselves in the struggle of Christian life. This is the struggle of *conversion* directed toward holiness and eternal life to which the Lord never ceases to call us.⁸⁷

Hence, the parallel themes between the fifth step and the Sacrament of Confession admit human nature is weak with the propensity for wrongdoing and inclined to sin. As a result, humankind needs to be redeemed from sins.⁸⁸ In A.A. language, all of us have a need to release guilt by the telling of one’s wrongdoing and defects of character because all of us give offense to God and neighbor. In addition, humankind retains a struggle for continued purification so that we, as the Body of Christ, that is the Church, become “holy and without blemish” (*Eph 1:4; 5:27*). The human need of guaranteed forgiveness of sins, found in the Sacrament of Confession, is shown in conversion, which is the

⁸⁶ J. Neuner and J. Dupuis, *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, ed. Jacques Dupuis (New York: Alba House, 2001), General Council of Trent, Fourteenth Session, Doctrine on the Sacrament of Penance (1551), paragraph 1621. See also: Palmer, 34, who cites the same Council.

⁸⁷ United States Catholic Conference, paragraph 1426.

⁸⁸ J. Neuner and J. Dupuis, General Council of Trent, Fourteenth Session, Doctrine on the Sacrament of Penance (1551), see paragraph 1615, which states “If in all those who are regenerated there were such gratitude towards God that through his kindness and grace they constantly preserved the justice which they have received in baptism, there would have been no need to institute another sacrament for the forgiveness of sins besides baptism itself. But since God, who is “rich in mercy” [*Eph 2:4*], “knows how we are made” [*Ps 103 (102):14*], he has given a remedy of life also to those who after baptism have delivered themselves up to the bondage of sin and the devil’s power, namely the sacrament of penance [(confession)] whereby the benefit of Christ’s death is applied to those who have fallen after baptism.

continual call to Christians to deeper purification by sanctifying grace who are “at once holy and always in need of purification.”⁸⁹

Consequently, we read in the decree on the Sacrament of Penance (Confession) from the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship of the Catholic Church that

Reconciliation [(confession)] between God and his people was brought about by our Lord Jesus Christ in the mystery of his death and resurrection (see Roman 5:10). The Lord entrusted the ministry of reconciliation [(confession)] to the Church in the person of the apostles (see 2 Corinthians 5:18ff.). The Church carries out this ministry by bringing the good news of salvation to people and by baptizing them in water and the Holy Spirit (see Matthew 28:19). Because of human weakness, however, Christians “leave [their] first love” (see Revelation 2:4) and even break off their fellowship with God by sinning. The Lord therefore instituted a special sacrament of penance [(confession)] for the pardon of sins committed after baptism (see John 20:21-23) and the Church has faithfully celebrated the sacrament throughout the centuries – in varying ways, but retaining its essential elements.⁹⁰

So Catholics have the ability to be forgiven for their sins (wrongdoing) against God and neighbor in “the ministry of reconciliation” (Sacrament of Confession). The Sacrament of Confession releases guilt and heals the human conscience, filling it with peace and consolation. For Catholic alcoholics in particular, Barkley summarizes important points from the “Pastoral Statement on Substance Abuse” given by the Bishops of New Jersey:

The “Pastoral Statement on Substance Abuse” ... rightly emphasizes the use of the sacrament in helping addicts. What they have in mind principally is the use of homilies to deliver “a supportive, positive message” that will help “everyone to embrace the struggles of the human condition with confidence and hope.” They stress, however, that an “atmosphere of condemnation ... serves only to entrench an addict in feelings of guilt and inadequacy.” Addicts should be encouraged to recover in order to preserve human personal, society, and familial goods, not in order to keep from running afoul of prohibitive, condemnatory

⁸⁹ United States Catholic Conference, paragraph 1428.

⁹⁰ The Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, *Decree on the Sacrament of Penance* (Protocol No. 800/73), December 2, 1973, the First Sunday of Advent, as cited in International Commission on English in the Liturgy (I.C.E.L.), trans., *The Rites of the Catholic Church* (The Liturgical Press: Collegeville, Minnesota, 1990), 523.

rules. In addition to the Liturgy of the Word at Mass, a further, and obvious, use of the sacraments to encourage freedom from addiction is through the sacrament of reconciliation [(confession)].⁹¹

The Church recognizes “human weakness” that breaks off friendship with God through sin. Thus, God knowing all things has given humankind a *certain* way to be forgiven for wrong and harmful acts throughout history in the Sacrament of Confession.⁹²

Summary of the Sacrament of Confession

In order to understand the Sacrament of Confession a brief explanation of a sacrament is helpful. As mentioned earlier, a sacrament involves the “thing signified,” truly and really made present. Likewise, Coleman O’Neill says “the sacraments ... give reality to what they signify.”⁹³ A sacrament is a sign and a reality; but it is a sign that points to the sign’s own reality. Said another way, sacraments “are signs ... [that] form part of the visible aspect of the Church [and] signify the divine mystery of redemption in its application to individuals ... they signify the gift of grace.”⁹⁴ Thus, when persons receive sacraments, signs and realities, they confer grace causing an inward sanctification of the soul.⁹⁵ In other words, every sacrament is a sanctifying encounter with Jesus

⁹¹ Barkley, *Catholic Ministry to the Addicted*, 128.

⁹² Our study will be concerned with the first Rite of Confession only – the “*Rite of Reconciliation of Individual Penitents*,” which is a private person-to-person confession (the second and third rites are communal celebrations). For Further details see “The Rite of Penance” in *The Rites of the Catholic Church* translated by International Commission on English in the Liturgy (I.C.E.L.) (The Liturgical Press: Collegeville, Minnesota, 1990).

⁹³ Coleman E. O’Neill, *Meeting Christ in the Sacraments* (New York: Society of St. Paul/Alba House, 1991), 67.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁹⁵ John A. Hardon, *Modern Catholic Dictionary* (Bardstown, Kentucky: Eternal Life, 2001), 477. Sacrament is defined as “A sensible sign, instituted by Jesus Christ, by which invisible grace and inward sanctification are communicated to the soul. The essential elements of a sacrament of the New Law are institution by Christ the God-man during his visible stay on earth, and a sensibly perceptible rite that actually confers the supernatural grace it symbolizes. In a broad sense every external sign of internal divine blessing is a sacrament. And in this sense there were already sacraments in the Old Law, such as the practice of circumcision. But, as the Council of Trent defined, these ancient rites differed essentially from the sacrament of the New Law, they did not really contain the grace they signified, nor was the fullness of grace yet available through visible channels merited and established by the Savior.”

Christ Himself whereby the power of God (or God Himself) is delivered through every sacrament: actual new life in Jesus is delivered through Baptism incorporating the faithful into Christ; real strengthening in the Holy Spirit and sending forth for mission is delivered in the oil of Confirmation; the real body and blood of Jesus is delivered to us in the appearance of bread and wine of the Eucharist; a real supernatural union between man and woman and God occurs in Matrimony; a real and actual transformation of a person, at the level of the soul, into Christ bearing His sacred power occurs in Holy Orders; spiritual and potentially physical healing is delivered through the oil of the Anointing of the Sick; and actual forgiveness of sins comes through Jesus in Confession.

So the “sign” of the Sacrament of Confession, along with contrition and satisfaction, is the speaking of the penitent’s sins to the priest and his words of absolution spoken back; and this causes the forgiveness of sins because Jesus does the forgiving in the priest. Therefore, the experience of the Sacrament of Confession is real forgiveness of sins by the Lord Jesus that reconciles the person with God and the Church whom the penitent has harmed through sin.

Moreover, there are seven sacraments of the Catholic Church. Two of the seven are the sacraments of healing; and of these two, one is the Sacrament (or Anointing) of the Sick and the other is the Sacrament of Confession. As mentioned earlier, among its other names the Sacrament of Confession is also called the sacrament of “conversion because it makes sacramentally present Jesus’ call to conversion, the first step in returning to the Father from whom one has strayed by sin.”⁹⁶ I point this out at this time not due to its theological implications but rather because “conversion” is precisely the word used to

⁹⁶ United States Catholic Conference, paragraph 1423.

describe a “personality change” that occurs in the fifth step.⁹⁷ The staff of the Hazelden Treatment Center for addiction, Northeast of Minneapolis-St. Paul, considers the first five steps “as essential in the treatment process ... [and] at the center of the conversion process that must take place in a successful recovery.”⁹⁸ Recall that the first five steps are admitting powerlessness over alcohol, belief in some higher power, belief in the higher power that can restore “me” to sanity, making a moral inventory, and then telling our harmful (immoral) activities and character defects to another person. It is not until completing the fifth step that the “personality change” or “conversion” is seen to occur.

While conversion can be narrowed down to the completion of the fifth step, there is also, however, an overall goal of a full conversion of life lived without alcohol (and without the sins/wrongdoing that go along with alcoholism) found in the entirety of the Twelve Steps. For instance, steps eleven and twelve emphasize a newly converted life lived without alcohol while taking the message and method of conversion (sobriety) to other alcoholics. Step Eleven’s goal is carrying out God’s will, which constitutes “a profound change of the whole person by which we begin to consider, judge, and arrange our life according to the holiness and love of God” (called *metanoia* in sacramental language); and Step Twelve emphasizes the carrying of the message of healing to other alcoholics, which constitutes doing good works for they Mystical Body of Christ.⁹⁹ Therefore, the Sacrament of Confession and the Twelve Steps both aim at conversion and

⁹⁷ Sellner, 13, 57. Sellner uses the term “conversion” throughout his dissertation to describe the “change” in the person that occurs upon completing the fifth step.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁹⁹ International Commission on English in the Liturgy (I.C.E.L.), trans., *The Rites of the Catholic Church* (The Liturgical Press: Collegeville, Minnesota, 1990), 529.

contrition, “which is ‘heartfelt sorrow and aversion for the sin committed along with the intention of sinning no more,’” *metanoia*, and a change of attitude.¹⁰⁰

Furthermore, in the Sacrament of Confession there are acts of penance or satisfaction that assist the penitent in completing conversion that parallel Steps Eight and Nine on making amends: “True conversion is completed by expiation for the sins committed, by amendment of life, and also by rectifying injuries done.”¹⁰¹ The *Rite* continues, “[t]he kind and extent of the expiation must be suited to the personal condition of penitents so that they may restore the order that they have upset and through the corresponding remedy be cured of the sickness from which they suffered.”¹⁰²

The first five steps of A.A. very closely parallel the dynamics in, and leading up to, the Sacrament of Confession. The first three steps of A.A. are in place for the practicing Catholic (belief of powerlessness over sin, belief in God, and belief that God can restore me to spiritual health). Step Four parallels the examination of conscience, and Step Five parallels the confession itself. Steps Six and Seven acknowledge the willingness to give up our shortcomings and ask God to remove them, which parallels contrition – giving up sin, and asking God to remove the desire for sin. Steps Eight and Nine (making amends) parallels the sacrament’s need for satisfaction and expiation. In Step Ten one promptly admits when wrong and continues the personal inventory, which parallels the sacrament’s continual self-examination of conscious for life. Step Eleven seeks God’s will as does the Catholic after making expiation/satisfaction. Step Twelve, which carries the message of sobriety to others, parallels making satisfaction by good works and evangelizing others

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

in the Mystical Body of Christ. It is clear that A.A. is a spiritual program closely parallel to the Sacrament of Confession for Catholics who practice their faith regularly.

There is a need for expiation or satisfaction for sins, either in this life or in purgatory, because every sin leaves a disorder in the sinner and God's universal order.¹⁰³ The person who commits a sin injures and weakens himself as well as his relationships with God and neighbor. Even though "[a]bsolution takes away sin ... it does not remedy all the disorders sin has caused."¹⁰⁴ The very nature of sin leaves an impurity, that temporal punishment or attachment to creatures, from which the sinner requires purification.¹⁰⁵ Sin harms both ourselves and others for two reasons: (1) because every sin is a disruption in God's universal order and an offense against the Mystical Body of Christ; and (2) because the sinner himself suffers either eternal or temporal punishment (or both) due to sin depending upon the gravity of the sin.¹⁰⁶

Furthermore, the Catholic Church explains that the three major acts of the penitent in the Sacrament of Confession are contrition, confession and satisfaction, which are commonly referred to as the "parts of penance" (or the parts of the Sacrament of Confession); and when these major acts are present in the penitent "full and complete forgiveness of sins" is attained.¹⁰⁷ The parts of the Sacrament of Confession are

Contrition of the heart, which requires that one be sorry for the sin committed with the resolve not to sin in the future. The second is oral confession which requires that the sinner confess to one's priest in their integrity all the sins he or she remembers. Third is satisfaction for the sins

¹⁰³ Pope Paul VI, *Indulgentiarum Doctrina*, Apostolic Constitution of Paul VI (1967), paragraph 2. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_p-vi_apc_19670101_indulgentiarum-doctrina_en.html. Accessed February 8, 2010.

¹⁰⁴ United States Catholic Conference, paragraph 1459.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, paragraphs 1472-1473.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, paragraph 1472; and Pope Paul VI, paragraph 4.

¹⁰⁷ J. Neuner and J. Dupuis, General Council of Trent, Fourteenth Session, Doctrine on the Sacrament of Penance (1551) and The General Council of Florence, Decree for the Armenians (1439), paragraphs 1620, 1612, respectively.

according to the judgment of the priest, which is mainly achieved by prayer, fasting and almsgiving. ... The effect of this sacrament is absolution from sins.¹⁰⁸

Although there is “full and complete forgiveness of sins,” a need for satisfaction exists. Since sin offends God and wrongs our neighbor, simple justice demands that the person do something to make up for the wrong committed; for instance, return stolen goods, restore the reputation of someone slandered, or pay compensation for injuries.¹⁰⁹ While absolution does forgive sins, at the same time it does not remedy all the disorders caused by sin. Foremost is the sinner’s wounded spiritual health; and making satisfaction or expiating sins completes the spiritual health and heals the soul. In addition, if a sinner does not act to “make up” for sins in some manner, then it is likely that the sinner will learn by way of repeated action that there is very little involved in offending the majesty of God and reconciling oneself with Him. Thus,

... sins should not be pardoned to us without any satisfaction, with the consequence that we would consider sins as trivial and, when the occasion arises, would fall into more grievous sins, insulting as it were and outraging the Holy Spirit ... For without a doubt these satisfactory penances greatly detach penitents from sin; they act like a bridle to keep them in check, and make them more cautious and vigilant in the future. They also heal the after-effects of sin and destroy evil habits, acquired through a bad life, by acts of virtues opposed to them.¹¹⁰

The end result of satisfaction is conforming ourselves to Christ Jesus; and if satisfaction or penances are borne patiently, then it will be proof of our love for God and neighbor.¹¹¹

Moreover, there are two principal effects of the Sacrament of Confession, namely complete and full forgiveness of sins, and restoration to God’s grace rejoining the

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, The General Council of Florence, Decree for the Armenians (1439), paragraph 1612.

¹⁰⁹ United States Catholic Conference, paragraph 1459.

¹¹⁰ J. Neuner and J. Dupuis, The General Council of Trent, Fourteenth Session, Doctrine on the Sacrament of Penance (1551), paragraph 1631.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, and paragraph 1634.

penitent with Him in intimate friendship. “For those who receive the [S]acrament of Penance with contrite heart and religious disposition, reconciliation ‘is usually followed by peace and serenity of conscience with strong spiritual consolation’” (these effects are similar to the effects experienced and described by those completing the fifth step).¹¹² One principle effect, restoring the penitent to God’s grace, also reconciles the sinner with the Church (also a spiritual effect, see next paragraph). Since sin damages and breaks fraternal communion in the Mystical Body of Christ (the Church), then sin is like a poison in a body that spreads throughout; the Sacrament of Confession is like an antibiotic that restores the health of the whole body. What is more, just as when one part of the body is healed, so the body begins to heal other parts; likewise, when one is reconciled it leads to more reconciliations, repairing other breaches caused by sin.¹¹³

Finally, there are seven spiritual effects of the Sacrament of Confession; namely, an increase for the capacity of grace, reconciliation with the Church, remission of eternal punishment incurred by mortal sins, some remission of temporal punishments resulting from sin, peace and serenity of conscience, spiritual consolation, and an increase of spiritual strength for the Christian battle.¹¹⁴

Modern culture suggests no need for the Sacrament of Confession, but John Paul II differs, who believes the Sacrament of Confession remains significant for contemporary times because, as a pastor with a discerning heart for the flock (the whole world), he has observed profoundly deep divisions among individuals, groups, countries, races (*et. al.*) while, paradoxically and simultaneously, a powerful and deep desire for reconciliation,

¹¹² United States Catholic Conference, paragraph 1468; and Palmer, 34; and J. Neuner and J. Dupuis, The General Council of Trent, Fourteenth Session, Doctrine on the Sacrament of Penance (1551), paragraphs 1620, 1621. The *Catechism* is quoting the General Council of Trent; as does Palmer.

¹¹³ United States Catholic Conference, paragraph 1469.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, paragraph 1496.

which will effect peace.¹¹⁵ John Paul II continues, “it happens not infrequently in history, for more or less lengthy periods and under the influence of many different factors, that the moral conscience of many people becomes seriously clouded.”¹¹⁶ John Paul II attributes the cause of the loss of the sense of sin to secularism, “which advocates a humanism totally without God, completely centered upon the cult of action and production and caught up in the heady enthusiasm of consumerism and pleasure seeking, unconcerned with the danger of ‘losing one’s soul.’”¹¹⁷ John Paul II summarizes other contributing factors to the loss of the sense of sin, namely “errors made in evaluating certain findings of the human sciences,” relativized moral norms, wrongly identifying sin with feelings of guilt,

rejection of any reference to the transcendent in the name of the individual’s aspiration to personal independence; from acceptance of ethical models imposed by general consensus and behavior, even when condemned by the individual conscience; from the tragic social and economic conditions that oppress a great part of humanity, causing a tendency to see errors and faults only in the context of society; [and] ... from the obscuring of the notion of God’s fatherhood and dominion over man’s life.¹¹⁸

Furthermore, John Paul II says “that the essential and decisive distinction [between mortal and venial sins] is between sin which destroys charity and sin which does not kill the supernatural life: There is no middle way between life and death.”¹¹⁹ John Paul II also reaffirmed the teaching of the Council of Trent, which “recalled that mortal sin is sin whose object is grave matter and which is also committed with full knowledge and

¹¹⁵ Pope John Paul II, *Reconciliation and Penance*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II to the Bishops, Clergy and Faithful on Reconciliation and Penance in the Mission of the Church Today (1984), paragraphs 1-4. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_02121984_reconciliatio-et-paenitentia_en.html. Accessed February 8, 2010.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, paragraph 18.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, paragraph 17.

deliberate consent.”¹²⁰ From the gifted Pope of beloved memory and what we’ve learned about the parallel action, nature and dynamic of A.A.’s fifth step in comparison to the Sacrament of Confession, there can be little doubt for the need of the Sacrament of Confession, or at least, for people to make some kind of “fifth step” of their own.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER III
THE RELATIONSHIP OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL (HUMAN) NEED AND THE
SACRAMENT OF CONFESSION

Existence of Guilt in Human Person Due to Wrongdoing

People experience guilt, and while the sources of guilt vary, one particular source of guilt is “wrongdoing.” We may classify wrongdoing as actions that harm others or cause damage of any kind. When we commit, enable or hide wrongdoing it leaves a burden of guilt in us. This burden of guilt is known to have negative emotional, psychological, spiritual and physical effects associated with it. So the question then becomes “how do people release guilt?”

For a scientific perspective, let us turn to Carl Jung, the popular psychoanalyst. Jung believes guilt can be released through therapy, which is a “dialogue or discussion between two persons.”¹²¹ The result of this therapeutic dialogue leads to healing and personality integration.¹²² So healing of guilt comes through dialogue, such as that in the fifth step or in the Sacrament of Confession. Incidentally, Jung names the first stage of healing therapy as *confession*, which is an “acknowledgement of secrets, emotions, and human limitations.”¹²³ A secret is anything concealed, “and the possession of secrets ‘acts like a psychic [(soul)] poison that alienates their possessor from the community.’”¹²⁴ So it is clear that Jung testifies that secrets, or anything that is concealed, leaves a burden of guilt, which acts as a psychic or soul poison that self-alienates the person from his

¹²¹ *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, eds. Herbert Read, Michael Fordham, Gerhard Adler, trans. R.F.C. Hull, Vol. 16, *The Practice of Psychotherapy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979-1983), 3, 10. This is Sellner quoting Jung; see Sellner, 79.

¹²² Sellner, 79. This is Sellner’s summary of Jung’s thought.

¹²³ Carl G. Jung, “Problems of Modern Psychotherapy” in *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* (New York: Harvest, 1933), 28-54. This is Sellner’s summary of Jung’s thought; see Sellner 79-80.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, This is Sellner quoting Jung; see Sellner, 80. Alienation also occurs within the self: the repressed secrets, those that are hidden from one’s own conscience, are the ones that cause a neurosis – a split consciousness existing independent of the true one where slips of the tongue, inexplicable memory loss, and unconscious desires to commit suicide occur (paraphrased from Sellner, 80).

relationships and community as well as his/her inner self. Moreover, *confession*, as Jung describes it, is the story-telling of the character defects of the fifth step, and parallels the confession of sins in the sacrament; both resulting in healing and a release of guilt.

In particular, alcoholics suffer from a great deal of guilt. Barkley offers a strong insight into the need of self-forgiveness and the lightening of the sense of guilt for the alcoholic. A need for self-forgiveness logically implies a presence of guilt from something harmful done to self. Although alcoholism has been understood as a disease and no longer “considered primarily a moral problem,” and, as a result, the forgiving of self becomes much easier, the alcoholic still has the responsibility to seek recovery.¹²⁵ If alcoholics do not seek recovery, they are in denial or have misdiagnosed their disease. As a result, alcoholics have feelings of guilt for behaving the way they do. Additionally,

the problem involved here is not in the fact of alcoholism but in the denial itself. The fact of alcoholism should be no more a cause of shame than the fact of cancer or lupus. But the denial represents an unwillingness to come to terms with what one really is, to face the truth squarely. This moral aberration lies at the heart of the alcoholic disease.¹²⁶

Thus, according to Barkley, any unwillingness to come to terms with the truth constitutes a “denial” and a “moral aberration” creating a burden of guilt – but this describes nearly everyone, not only alcoholics. Anyone who is not willing to face the truth is “in denial,” has created a “moral aberration” by not facing the truth, and is thus under a burden of guilt. To some degree then, “experiencing guilt” applies to nearly all of us.

In agreement with Barkley, priest psychologist Benedict Groeschel describes a *universal denial of reality* in *Arise from Darkness*:

There is an incredible untruth communicated to children as they grow up in our technologically advanced world, namely, that most people have a

¹²⁵ Barkley, *The Catholic Alcoholic*, 26.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

good chance of living out their lives without times of suffering or pain, times of darkness. This illusion is created by the media, especially by advertising (a world of happy endings), by education, by generalized attitudes that make up the social customs of our people, and even by our religious thinking. Everyone's life is supposed to be filled with sunshine; and when it is not, luck will change, things will work out well, and the sunny carefree times will return. Not to worry – all will be roses. This untruth is not a deliberate lie – in fact it is the universal denial of reality. It is not a deception to be condemned but an illusion to be dispelled. We must do this if we are ever to arrive at any mature sense of relative peace and security in this world. ... If one does not face this very obvious fact – that times of suffering, pain and difficulty are inevitable – one will run neurotically through life like a frightened animal. One is likely to become disillusioned and deeply depressed or cynical or filled with a brooding anger. Very likely this anger will be aimed at God; he should have made the world a better place.¹²⁷

The “universal denial of reality” shows that some guilt is present, or at least has been present, in all of us. Groeschel uses “disillusioned and deeply depressed or cynical or filled with a brooding anger” (understood as a above) alluding to the state of a person who denies truth. The ultimate point is that guilt is experienced particularly by alcoholics, and by all who are not willing to face the truth.

In addition, Barkley says, “[a]gainst the backdrop of Catholic teaching on marriage, alcoholism must be seen as a serious moral threat.”¹²⁸ While alcoholism is “seriously sinful” with the implication that it is mortal sin, any Catholic who denies the truth and knowingly refuses to follow it commits an immoral act – an omission of the truth.¹²⁹ As

¹²⁷ Groeschel, 17-18.

¹²⁸ Barkley, *Catholic Ministry to the Addicted*, 66. “Maintaining a Christian marriage in our world is difficult. It requires the conscious cultivation of the complete well-being of one's spouse – spiritual, physical, intellectual, emotional, moral. Alcoholism inevitably prevents this by producing a morbid preoccupation with alcohol. Further, it destroys intimacy by setting up an environment of denial and emotional repression. Alcoholics and their loved ones can't communicate their feelings since they must stifle their emotions under the blanket of denial. That is a requirement of the disease. And no marriage can develop or continue as it should under these conditions.”

¹²⁹ Barkley, *The Catholic Alcoholic*, 50-51. “In passing I have mentioned honesty as a requirement for recovery. One aspect of the dishonesty that can keep a Catholic alcoholic drinking is failure to recognize the seriousness of his action. Sober reflection on the gravity of wasting one's life and destroying the lives of others should dispel any illusions that the sin involved is venial. It is not. Choosing not to recover from

alcoholics must acknowledge a lack of control over alcohol to begin recovery, so Christians must acknowledge a lack of control over a complete avoidance of sin in order to begin the forgiveness of sins in the Sacrament of Confession, “for a Catholic knows that ‘no sinner can simply stop sinning through his or her unaided power.’”¹³⁰

Barkley continues, in acknowledging a general lack of control over life one opens the door to God.¹³¹ Thus, someone who has not acknowledged a lack of control over alcohol – or sin – “has stopped letting God run his life and given himself over to other guidance [and in this] ... direction lie dissolution, the fragmentation of life, [and] the diminution of being.”¹³² “Instead of peace within a self offerable to God, the alcoholic [and the “controlling person” who cannot stop sinning] has self-accusation, self-recrimination, a sense of failure, a bad self which his good self cannot accept.”¹³³ “Alcoholic drinking always, without fail, has the effect of causing a shameful and pitiful waste of one’s life.”¹³⁴ In the end, it remains the alcoholic’s responsibility to seek recovery, and “the one who fails to move toward recovery affirms and implicitly approves the further destruction of good” in their life as well as their specific vocation to fulfillment in Christ.¹³⁵ All of the above add up to a great deal of guilt to be experienced.

alcoholism is seriously sinful. It might be possible to find a priest who would shrug the matter off, but no Catholic alcoholic who honestly looks at the damage his drinking has caused will.”

¹³⁰ Germain Grisez, *Christian Moral Principles* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983), 694. This is Barkley quoting Grisez; see Barkley, *The Catholic Alcoholic*, 115. On a lack of control, Barkley refers to recovering alcoholic, Langley, whose “life is out of control. But as we have seen, this is a painful thing to admit. Everyone likes to maintain the illusion of control” (p. 109).

¹³¹ Barkley, *The Catholic Alcoholic*, 62. “[A truthful concept of self] includes the knowledge that self-confidence without the help of God is foolish, that control over oneself is a prideful delusion. The best we can hope for is to let God control us.”

¹³² *Ibid.*, 30. We need God for our weak wills because fallen human nature is strongly, negatively, influential: “Recovery for the alcoholic is not a matter of acquiring willpower but of developing a new sort of willpower. That is, the inner strength that comes only from a knowledge of one’s true weakness; the daily realization that one’s will, unaided by God, is defective and destructive” (p. 47).

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 43, 40.

The alcoholic's feelings of guilt are similar, if not the same as that of the sinner who consistently denies the truth of lacking control over complete avoidance of sin and living in perfect virtue. Above all, Christian alcoholics who know God's revelation about Jesus Christ and the authentic truth surrounding the mysteries of God also know that they are called to respond to God in their particular vocation and state in life. Thus the Christian alcoholic experiences tremendous guilt because he/she says "no" to God in order to continue drinking. Barkley illustrates in the case of Grove, a daily Mass attendee who knew God's will for him, but said no: "In spite of appearances, in spite of his daily Mass, he was subordinating the great good of his religious life to his drinking. And this racked his mind with guilt."¹³⁶ The alcoholic unavoidably damages all his/her own personal goods in complete self-destruction: peace, self-confidence, and inner harmony are replaced by resentment, fear, and escapism.¹³⁷ It is an unfortunate state that no

alcoholic esteems himself properly as a highly favored creation who God loves ... Instead of this understanding, alcoholics are grossly burdened with self-doubt, fear, guilt, a deep belief in their own inferiority that necessarily indicates their lack of trust in God.¹³⁸

The person who has committed an offense, wrongdoing of any kind, also exhibits low self-esteem, has feelings of inadequacy, and self-hatred. If there is a lack of trust in God in the alcoholic who experiences these aforementioned feelings, so it is for the person guilty of any wrongdoing, or even for a "controlling person" who does not trust in God.

The Effects of Guilt (Emotional, Psychological, Spiritual, Physical)

Since alcoholics experience a great deal of guilt, we can examine their experiences in order to understand the common effects of anthropologically rooted guilt. Barkley

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 57-58.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 59, 60, 61, 62.

writes, “[u]nderstanding the disease of alcoholism requires a rejection of any dualism that divides body and mind or soul and body. Alcoholism is a disease of the whole person. As such it is mental, emotional, spiritual, moral, and physical.”¹³⁹ Not only does alcoholism cause social problems, being “contagious” to the family, but it is also “an intellectual sickness.”¹⁴⁰ Guilt in alcoholics affects the whole person. Hence, guilt in any person will have similar effects; although perhaps to a lesser degree, but still the effects of guilt are universal. Some negative effects observed by psychologist Harry Tiebout in alcoholics before the fifth step are “eight personality tendencies,” namely depression, aggressiveness, feelings of inferiority/superiority, perfectionism, loneliness, self-centeredness, defiance, and isolation.¹⁴¹ Thus, these are some identifiable negative effects of guilt as experienced in our human anthropology.

Benedict Groeschel and Roy Barkley write extensively on the effects of guilt, especially as it is experienced by alcoholics. Generally speaking, all alcoholics (addicts) suffer from feelings of inadequacy, which lead to actions of escape. “Addicts notoriously evade problems rather than face them; drugs for them have become a first resort in any kind of adversity.”¹⁴² Thus, as we extend the experience of guilt in the alcoholic to the universal experience of guilt (in the human anthropology), we can agree that we human

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁴¹ Harry Tiebout, *Conversion as a Psychological Phenomenon* (New York: National Council on Alcoholism, n.d.), 2-10. This is Sellner quoting Tiebout; see Sellner, 58. Additionally, isolation is isolation from other people; Tiebout explains a felt experience by the alcoholic of some kind of physical barrier (shell, moat, or wall) that keeps them from relating to people or having effective relationships with the outer world (this is paraphrased from Sellner, 58, who summarizes Tiebout’s thought).

¹⁴² Barkley, *Catholic Ministry to the Addicted*, 122. “Alcoholics universally suffer from feelings of inadequacy. They drink precisely because they subconsciously consider themselves unable to cope with some aspect of their lives. But then they feel guilty for the drinking itself because it confirms their inadequacy, as well as for antisocial or wrong acts that they commit while intoxicated. They also learn early that alcohol will help them to forget about their feelings of guilt, or at least to achieve some kind of oblivion, and so they drink more. Thus drinking and guilt chart a downward spiral course for the sufferer. Evasion of reality begets drinking, which begets guilt, which begets drinking to assuage the guilt, and so on. The guilty feeling grows off of its cure ...” (p. 51).

beings do not like the feeling of guilt. We know how true our aversion to guilt is due to our own experience. As with the alcoholic so with any human being, we go to great lengths to avoid experiencing feelings of guilt, even to the extremes of pure self-destruction – a commitment to sin, as Groeschel says:

Another popular road to self-destruction is indulgence in things that are forbidden. I know many who say they would like to do God's will and really consider themselves Christian, but ... then comes the fine print. Of course we all sin, and sin often, out of weakness, concupiscence, feebleness, and confusion. We may even, in a stupid moment, sin with deliberate will. But knowingly and deliberately to stay on a course of action that one knows is contrary to the law of God is to open oneself for disaster. This is a commitment to sin.¹⁴³

Many people turn to different means of escaping any small undesirable reality because it induces an illusory freedom from those things in life that are difficult. Any illusory and addictive means of escape only emphasizes the feelings of guilt because the escapist inevitably realizes very quietly within him/herself that inadequacy again when the “high” is over. Feelings of inadequacy come out of a person's inability to care properly for their own life, their spouse, children, and to be a contributor to society.¹⁴⁴ Thus, guilt over privations of good that should be there are experienced as full blown failure as well.

Additionally, other feelings of inadequacy that lead to guilt are low self-esteem, self-hate, inferiority, resentments, hostilities, feelings of disturbed relationship with God, meaningless angst, non-resolved issues in life, depression, renewed denial, sense of loss, worthlessness, anger, pain, guilt associated with knowing that the alcoholic is the cause of the family breakdown, an inability to recognize the truth that reality presents, and a

¹⁴³ Groeschel, 89.

¹⁴⁴ Barkley, *Catholic Ministry to the Addicted*, 64-65. “When family dysfunctions are widespread in a society, many members of that society will suffer from the deprivation of human goods that subsist in the family. Sick families produce sick individuals, who then produce sick families. One cause of family sickness in our society is alcoholism. ... A shaky marriage won't improve as long as one of the partners is feeding an addiction.” The alcoholic experience is the same as the addict/escapists experience since we have established that the feelings of guilt are universal.

continued struggle to accept the fact that “my life is unmanageable” on my own.¹⁴⁵ Fear and shame are deeply rooted in the alcoholic, or any addicted escapist sinner.¹⁴⁶ General feelings of inadequacy arise from all sorts of specific feelings of fear and failure that add up to shame and guilt.

Closely connected with the effects of guilt is our own lack of maturity. In fact, a general cause for guilt is our lack of growing in maturity. Groeschel writes,

Now we must look at the problems we have with ourselves. You may find that if you look into your own life (especially as you get older) one of the most important realizations in the process of maturation is that we bring many, if not most, of our problems on ourselves. When things don't make sense, it's often because we didn't make sense out of things. There may be some consolation in knowing that this is *a general human experience* [emphasis added]. ... Few are exempt from being their own enemies at least some of the time. ... We can all say with a certain amount of conviction that “we've met the enemy and it's us.”¹⁴⁷

Here again we see Groeschel illustrating the point about denial of the truth that causes our own problems. Groeschel continues,

The defense mechanism of denial is one of the more dangerous forms of human behavior. It was Neville Chamberlain, the Prime Minister of England, who came home from his meeting with Hitler and said, “There

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 120. “We should never forget that addicts have lost their legitimate self-esteem as children of God, as brothers and sisters of Christ, and have replaced it with deep self-loathing and feelings of inferiority.” See also 121, “Pastoral workers should be aware that, in spite of a general sense of well-being, recovering addicts usually take years to work their way out of their deep-seated resentments and hostilities.” See also 121-122, “A feeling of unrightness with God, including a sense of both meaningless angst and unresolved guilt, afflicts sixty-seven percent of those who relapse ... depression ... renewed denial” (one of the ten principle triggers of a relapse of an alcoholic). See also 123, “Finally, a sense of loss is acutely painful to many addicts. Most addicts have spent years, sometimes decades, operating at a fraction of their capacity for work, play, intellectual pursuits, spirituality. ... [This pervasive aspect of addiction] contributes to the addict's feeling of worthlessness, which can in turn be used as an excuse for relapse.” See also 124, “On the other hand, the deep anger, pain, and loss felt by the family of an addict may make reconciliation impossible.” See also 126, “Most recovering addicts know that they must constantly evaluate their behavior with relation to the truth and not with relation to an abstract standard. The truth in their cases is that their lives are “unmanageable.” The price to pay for drinking and drugging is destruction of personal, familial, and social goods. The addict who forgets this is doomed to self-destruction, no matter what oaths he has taken or what laws the state has passed.”

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 73. “Alcoholics ... are deeply agoraphobic – that is, they are afraid to be out in public; indeed, fear is one of the chief character traits, though it is often disguised by much boasting and bluster. ... Pastors should realize, however, that the alcoholic usually already knows all of this and is deeply ashamed of it.”

¹⁴⁷ Groeschel, 85-86.

will be peace in our time.” He denied the obvious evidence of his senses.”¹⁴⁸

Denial, according to Groeschel, “is a general human experience,” and, again, as we’ve shown above, creates guilt. We begin to understand how deeply rooted in our humanity is the experience of guilt.

Theologian Rosemary Haughton would agree with a maturation process, which she labels “transformation.” Haughton believes that before a total transformation to greater maturity occurs the person must experience much adversity, such as “illness, bereavement, sudden poverty, professional or social failure, the impact of sexual passion in adult life, or a sudden confrontation with a human need or misery, or the experience of personal degradation.”¹⁴⁹ Edward Sellner, pastoral theologian, reading Haughton, says these experiences of “emotional upheaval, crisis, and suffering ... can produce violence, resentment, hatred, and despair,” but also become opportunities for maturation through the breaking down of internal barriers potentially leading to “the discovery of new life[,] ... a greater awareness of the reality of the spirit and a more loving realism about life itself.”¹⁵⁰ Transformation also results in a “new awareness” and “loving realism,” which is “mysteriously connected with ... the strong awareness of personal sinfulness, the recognition that one not only has committed harmful acts, but that one lives in a sinful state which is “not simply a state suffered, but my responsibility.”¹⁵¹ Fittingly enough,

this awareness and the acceptance of responsibility for it is called “repentance” or “conversion,” and the difference between whether this painful recognition leads to isolation and death or repentance and life is the experience of love, of being loved. Such an experience, in fact, brings

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 88.

¹⁴⁹ Rosemary Haughton, “Penance and Asceticism in the Modern World,” in *Sin and Repentance*, ed. Denis O’Callaghan (Staten Island, New York: Alba House, 1967), 83. As cited in Sellner, 159.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 73-92. This is Sellner’s extended summary of Haughton’s thought; see Sellner, 159.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 73-92. As cited in Sellner, 159-160.

about repentance itself, for “it is only when people have the assurance of being lovable in some sense ... that they can dare to face up to the evil in themselves and repent.”¹⁵²

Therefore, while on one hand the person experiences mental or psychological, emotional, spiritual, moral, and physical negative effects, on the other hand there is a means of releasing and healing the effects of guilt: confession, according to Sellner.

The Release of Guilt: Freedom and Liberation through “The Telling” or Confession

That the release of guilt occurs with “the telling” of harm done in the fifth step or the confession of sins in the Sacrament of Confession brings to mind how identical the fifth step and the Sacrament of Confession are in practice. Recall that liberation from guilt occurs through healing therapy (Jung) such that emotions repressed or unexpressed associated with human limitations in need of being acknowledged are given up (spoken) in order to allay and release guilt, feelings of moral exile, and isolation.¹⁵³ Liberation from guilt results in an experience of cleansing, healing, and personality integration.

For Tiebout, healing therapy that releases guilt is “conversion.” After conversion (healing) occurs in the fifth step, Tiebout observed changes in personality patterns from anxious and depressed to being at ease in both thinking and feeling; “from aggressiveness and stubbornness [to] ... ‘sweetly reasonable;’ from feelings of inferiority and superiority [to becoming] ... more accepting and tolerant of others and gentler with him[her]self,” but most significantly “is that of the total loss of the sense of isolation and loneliness.”¹⁵⁴

In Haughton’s transformation process as it occurs within the person, guilt is released in a “release of power”: “a major change [that] overcomes the barriers which previously

¹⁵² *Ibid.* This is Sellner summarizing, and quoting Haughton; see Sellner, 160.

¹⁵³ Sellner, 87. This is Sellner summarizing Jung’s thought.

¹⁵⁴ Tiebout. This is Sellner quoting Tiebout; see Sellner, 58. See also footnote 141 for the meaning of “isolation.”

separated the person from his or her “authentic self,” others, and God.”¹⁵⁵ Haughton appears to describe transformation as a maturity process, which can be “a sudden or dramatic event ... [but] nevertheless comes as the culmination of a long process and continues on as a life-long process in which people struggle ‘to live a life of real love.’”¹⁵⁶ Transformation leads to “‘the birth of the whole human being’ and to ‘reconciliation and communion, a sharing in a new community of life.’”¹⁵⁷ Maturation (transformation) occurring in those common adversities of life, stated earlier (see page 40), present opportunities for “the discovery of new life[,] ... a greater awareness of the reality of the spirit and a more loving realism about life itself.”¹⁵⁸ Yet, recall that the new awareness and loving realism is “mysteriously connected with ... the strong awareness of personal sinfulness, the recognition that one not only has committed harmful acts, but that one lives in a sinful state which is “not simply a state suffered, but my responsibility.”¹⁵⁹ Thus personal sinfulness, the committing of harmful acts, and living in a sinful state, indicating the existence of guilt and a need for release of it occurs in the release of power.

In addition, transformation is a “total revolution, a complete change of the mode of existence from the estrangement and muddle of sin to sharing in the life of God.”¹⁶⁰ “Estrangement from God” and the “muddle of sin” indicate the existence of guilt for Haughton, which, again, is released in the release of power. Therefore, we can

¹⁵⁵ Haughton, *The Transformation of Man* (New York: Paulist Press, 1967), 122, 130-132. This is Sellner summarizing Haughton’s thought. See Sellner, 163 and 166.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 102, 119-120. This is Sellner directly quoting and summarizing Haughton’s thought. See Sellner, 157.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 7, 139. This is Sellner directly quoting and summarizing Haughton’s thought. See Sellner, 157.

¹⁵⁸ Haughton, “Penance and Asceticism in the Modern World,” in *Sin and Repentance*, 73-92. This is Sellner’s summary of Haughton’s thought; see Sellner, 159.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, As cited in Sellner, 159-160.

¹⁶⁰ Haughton, *The Transformation of Man*, 215-216. This is Sellner summarizing Haughton’s thought. See Sellner, 157.

understand that the stage of “release of power” in Haughton’s transformation is also a release of guilt. Accordingly, Sellner observed a

transformation to greater maturity, for all four [parishioners interviewed after confession for his research study] ... as the movement from a state of powerlessness to new power: a new level of power based on the humble acknowledgement of human limitations, the need for others and one’s God.¹⁶¹

As we have shown, maturity indicates a release of guilt, and, as shown above, also creates a state of power, or the “birth of a whole human being,” which is simply personal maturation in the faith, from seeing God as judge to seeing Him as “daddy” or friend.¹⁶²

For the Sacrament of Confession, healing therapy that releases guilt occurs in a person-to-person confession of sins (wrongdoing) resulting in self-acceptance for the penitent (or the alcoholic in Step Five). The confession must be in a human relation, which is why Step Five mandates the telling of defects to another human being. Paul Tillich says that “[a] wall to which I confess cannot forgive me. No self-acceptance is possible if one is not accepted in a person-to-person relation. Acceptance by something which is less than [a] person could never overcome personal self-rejection.”¹⁶³ Thus, the person in the telling of one’s own character defects and the confession of sins is critical to the release of guilt, and empowering of the sufferer. Groeschel would agree, writing that

[p]retense, denial and repression are all causes of the neuroses that are so characteristic of the so-called “first world.” The only nations in the West appearing to avoid this neurotic stoicism and pretense are the Latin nations. You may remember, if you are old enough, immigrant relatives who were not yet smitten by the denial of the first world. They told you how they really felt when you asked them.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ Sellner, 178.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 179-180.

¹⁶³ Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1952), 165-167. As cited by Sellner, 186.

¹⁶⁴ Groeschel, 20.

Groeschel's point is that those who are honest about their feelings and tell other people "everything" do not suffer from various "neuroses" and guilt associated with them.

Harry Tiebout (close friend and counselor of Bill Wilson) and Jung concur that "interior acts of surrender (discussed by Tiebout) must lead to exterior manifestation, [namely] verbal acts of surrender (discussed by Jung) if conversion itself is to become more of a reality and if inner barriers are to be broken, isolation ended, [and] new power released."¹⁶⁵ Thus, when the acts causing the negative feelings are confessed guilt is released breaking inner barriers and ending feelings of isolation resulting in conversion.

For alcoholics, or any addict, guilt can only be released after completing Steps One, Two and Three, which constitute a complete surrender of will; Barkley calls it the "turn:"

the turn is more than a mere cessation of drinking. It is ... a willingness to submit to a sort of spiritual surgery, to let God remove our character defects as a surgeon would remove a bad appendix. This readiness to let God determine us is central to the teachings of Alcoholics Anonymous, derived as they are from Christian principles.¹⁶⁶

The "turn" also includes acknowledgement of character defects and willingness for God to remove them. The "turn," or conversion, can also be thought of, in Catholic terminology, as learning spiritual poverty.¹⁶⁷ The surrender or re-learning of spiritual poverty destroys misguided intellectual habits of denial, rationalization, and swearing off or vow making, as well as the elimination of feelings of personal inadequacy for alcoholics and habitual sinners alike.¹⁶⁸

Conversion is not easy, for it requires a real internal change, a receptive heart, an attitude of complete honesty and complete acceptance (of our own abnormality), which

¹⁶⁵ Sellner, 100. This is Sellner summarizing Tiebout's and Jung's thought.

¹⁶⁶ Barkley, *The Catholic Alcoholic* 105.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.* Barkley quotes Revelation 3:17, "You say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing; not knowing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked" (p. 111).

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 105-113.

“in theological terms, [is] a proper recognition of the nature of his [the alcoholic’s] own disease as a “quasi-compulsive sin of weakness” lead[ing] the alcoholic ‘directly to genuine humility.’”¹⁶⁹

The cleansing of guilt is an on-going event throughout life, but after major releases(s) of guilt, the person can then begin to focus on forgiveness, which is a large part of the overall goal of the Twelve Steps. Freedom, a further release of guilt, and peace come about in a decision to “let go” and forgive. *Facing Forgiveness* (by Sofield, Juliano, and Aymond) teaches us about the human (anthropological) need for forgiveness by illustrating that there are real effects of forgiveness and non-forgiveness. Some of these “real effects” of forgiveness experienced by nearly all those who have been able to forgive are described as “a rebirth, an overpowering sense of new life.”¹⁷⁰

Conversely, those who had made the decision to hold on to their anger and not forgive continued to bear the weight of non-forgiveness. Sadly, some reported their inability to forgive someone who was long dead, never realizing that it was not hurting the offender, but was causing the non-forgiver eternal grief, physical trauma, and at times, clinical depression. In the retelling of these stories of non-forgiveness, ambivalence is evident. These people struggle with the desire to be free of the burden on the one hand, while also desiring to nurse the offenses of the past. They cannot tolerate the personal pain they are experiencing in holding on to the evils of the past, yet for reasons sometimes unclear even to themselves, they cannot bring themselves to forgive.¹⁷¹

“Bearing the weight of non-forgiveness” is a reference to that burden of guilt referred to earlier throughout our study. Thus guilt leads to “eternal grief, physical trauma, and at times, clinical depression;” and forgiveness is the key to that “rebirth” and “new life.” *Facing Forgiveness* reinforces the fact that guilt exists in people due to wrongdoing, that

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹⁷⁰ Loughlan Sofield, Carroll Juliano, and Gregory M. Aymond, *Facing Forgiveness, A Catholic’s Guide to Letting Go of Anger and Welcoming Reconciliation* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 2007), 10.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

guilt creates real negative effects, and that it can be released. The negative effects of non-forgiveness can be healed, but it begins with a choice to forgive. By God's grace, a person is able to choose forgiveness.¹⁷² "Forgiveness is neither a cognitive nor an emotional response. Forgiveness is an act of the will. It is the choice to let go of the desire to get even with an offending party."¹⁷³ "...[T]hose who chose forgiveness experienced a profound sense of freedom and would often describe it as if a physical, emotional, and spiritual weight had been lifted from their shoulders."¹⁷⁴ Therefore, real emotional, psychological or mental, spiritual, and physical effects of not forgiving those who have hurt us are what weighs us down, and can drive us to escapist addictions. We suffer when we do not forgive, but when we forgive healing rolls right into us bringing us inner peace and freedom.

"As an event within the entire process of conversion, forgiveness is considered by him [(Paul Tillich)] the greatest experience anyone can have, and whoever helps another experience such forgiveness becomes a medium of grace and an instrument of healing power: a healing power which has appeared in Jesus' Christ."¹⁷⁵

As he [(Tillich)] explains it, "the deeper our experience of forgiveness is, the greater is our love," but "we cannot love where we feel rejected," nor where "we feel judged, even if the judgment is not expressed in words." To experience acceptance, to be "suddenly grasped by the certainty that we are forgiven," however, is to gain the power to love not only God, but oneself as well [thus] ... [e]quating the event of forgiveness with the experience of acceptance.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ Paul Tillich, "Psychoanalysis, Existentialism, and Theology," *Pastoral Psychology*, 9 (October, 1958), 17; *The Eternal Now* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), 117; *The New Being* (New York: Charles Scribner's Son, 1955), 7-8. This is Sellner summarizing and directly quoting Tillich; See Sellner, 182.

¹⁷⁶ Tillich, *The New Being*, 3-14. This is Sellner summarizing and directly quoting Tillich; See Sellner, 185.

For Sellner, forgiveness is an event that comes through any person who acts as a “minister-healer” bringing acceptance, activating the conversion process moving a person from “existential estrangement” of anxiety, hostility, despair, divisions between God, others, and self to reconciliation and self-integration into a community in a new reality of faith, love and hope by way of being forgiven.¹⁷⁷ Therefore, Sellner concurs that guilt released through forgiveness would also lead to freedom by way of acceptance.

In addition, Sellner’s studies confirm a dramatic process of change occurring in the very being of the persons through the fifth step, which A.A. literature calls a “spiritual awakening;” this change affects entire personalities, relationships with others and God, as well as, and most particularly, their own self-image.¹⁷⁸ Furthermore, “the participants [interviewed in his research study upon completing the fifth step] experienced many of the effects A.A. associates with the Fifth: all four recovering alcoholics experienced increased self-knowledge; three experienced such things as delight, gratitude, relief, release, forgiveness of themselves and others, and evidently a closer relationship with their God.”¹⁷⁹ The above is further testimony to the positive healing effects that come with the release of guilt; we can describe the overall effect as freedom and inner peace.

Whether alcoholic, penitent, escapist addict of any kind, the sufferer must tell their whole story about everything that weighs upon them and causes their guilt *to another person* for a successful release of guilt and for healing to occur. Otherwise, character defects, guilt, and bad memories will block inner healing and outer reconciliation, leaving the alcoholic with that familiar compulsion to drink.¹⁸⁰ If the sufferer is able to

¹⁷⁷ Sellner, 188-189.

¹⁷⁸ Sellner, 55.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

release the guilt, however, he/she will experience “feelings of delight, gratitude, the loss of fear, healing tranquility, increased self-knowledge, [and] the emergence from “a terrible sense of isolation.”¹⁸¹ In the end, the telling of all of one’s story results in “what A.A.’s co-founder, Bill Wilson, called a “‘mysterious process’ of ‘conversion’”¹⁸² Therefore, as stated earlier, the telling or confession has power to release guilt and all those negative emotional, psychological, mental, spiritual and physical effects caused by it. The power to release guilt through the telling or confession to another person or priest is shown in Sellner’s research study of four recovering alcoholics from Hazelden after completing the fifth step and four Catholics from St. Cyprian’s Parish, Riverview, Michigan, after going to confession. Sellner concludes that

despite the diversity and varieties of experience each [life] story contains[, there] is a common theme: The passage from a stage of powerlessness, isolation, fear and lack of self-worth to a new state of increasing power, community, trust, and self-acceptance; [and] the movement from various dimensions of disharmony and estrangement to new harmony and reconciliation with self, others, and one’s God.¹⁸³

Therefore, whether one calls it therapy according to Jung, conversion according to Tillich or Tiebout, a life-story-telling or the fifth step according to Bill Wilson and A.A. literature, transformation according to Haughton, or Confession according to the Catholic Church, the process leads to that release of guilt, the gain in true freedom, and, ultimately, reconciliation – “the word which names the [S]acrament of [P]enance and the role of the priest as well.”¹⁸⁴ Finally, the anthropology is unmistakable; one simply cannot ignore the negative effects of guilt – one cannot not know when they are guilty.

¹⁸¹ *Alcoholics Anonymous* (New York: A.A. World Services, 1952), 72-75 and *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, 56-63. This is Sellner drawing from the fifth step; See Sellner, 11.

¹⁸² *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age* (New York: A.A. World Services, 1957), 46. This is Sellner directly quoting and summarizing *A.A. Comes of Age*; See Sellner, 11-12.

¹⁸³ Sellner, 204.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

Proof of the Anthropology of the Sacrament of Confession by Way of the Fifth Step

Essentially, the proof for the anthropology of the Sacrament of Confession by way of the fifth step of A.A. follows the simple logical argument:

1. Human persons have guilt.
 2. Guilt causes negative emotional, psychological, spiritual, and (damaging) physical effects.
 3. The fifth step is a telling/confession of wrongdoing.
 4. The Sacrament of Confession is a telling/confession of wrongdoing.
 5. Guilt is released in telling/confession.
 6. The release of guilt causes positive emotional, psychological, spiritual, and physical (healing) effects.
- (therefore) ▲ A person with guilt who tells/confesses in the fifth step or in the Sacrament of Confession has a release of negative, damaging effects and a gain of positive healing effects.

The above conclusion demonstrates the anthropological need to confess guilt because, from the perspective of acknowledging the truth, human beings are meant to be healthy and not disordered or diseased. A healthy human being is a happy and fulfilled human being. A diseased and disordered human being is a sad and unfulfilled human being. Therefore, the fifth step and the Sacrament of Confession confirm that there is a human (anthropological) need to confess/tell guilt for positive emotional, psychological, spiritual and physical health. The need is to be healthy, happy and fulfilled, and no one escapes this need. Since both Step Five's telling and the Sacrament of Confession's confession result in a release of negative emotional, psychological, spiritual, and physical effects resulting in positive emotional, psychological, spiritual, and physical effects, then the human (anthropological) need to release those negative effects caused by guilt through telling or confession is proven.

For the believer, then, God designed human personhood to have a need to confess guilt so He gives us the Sacrament of Confession in the Catholic Church. For the non-

believer, it means the same thing said a different way: human nature exists such that it has a need to tell another person about the cause of guilt in order to achieve emotional, psychological, spiritual, and physical health. Either way, anthropologically speaking, humans have a need to confess their wrongdoing, harmful activities, and character defects in order to free them from the burden of guilt that weighs upon them (the negative effects of guilt). Therefore, the anthropology of the Sacrament of Confession is shown in the human need to confess guilt in order to be healed from the negative effects of guilt. The fifth step also applies to the anthropological basis of the Sacrament because it shows a human need to release guilt. The fifth step clearly exemplifies a release of guilt by way of telling (it's a "confession"). Hence, the Sacrament of Confession is something that fulfills a fundamental human need. Moreover, the Sacrament of Confession is anthropologically rooted for the dual purpose of healing and happiness.

Appraising the movement of what occurs in the fifth step from its telling to its release and feelings of peace and harmony with self and world, it is clear that an anthropological need exists to alleviate the negative emotional, psychological, spiritual, and physical effects of guilt through the action of confession so that a person's human health does not suffer living under the burdensome negative effects caused by guilt. Moreover, the fifth step and the Sacrament of Confession both entail a "telling" or "confession" of guilt, and that this "telling" of the fifth step or "confession" in the Sacrament of Confession both result in feelings of liberation, freedom, peace, tranquility, a burden being lifted (and other positive feelings), which shows that anthropological need to confess.

In addition, Sellner quotes Jung, who testifies to the existence of the anthropological need to confess guilt or suffer from human nature's disease caused by "keeping secrets:"

To withhold emotions “tends to isolate and disturb us quite as much as the unconscious secret,” and it is “equally guilt-laden,” for “to cherish secrets and restrain emotions are psychic misdemeanors for which nature finally visits us with sickness.” As is, apparently, the unwillingness or inability to acknowledge one’s limitations which is yet another form of concealment: “It seems to be a sin in the eyes of nature to hide our insufficiency ... There appears to be a conscience in mankind which severely punishes the man who does not cease to defend and assert himself, and instead confess himself fallible and human. Until he can do this, an impenetrable wall shuts him out from the living experience of feeling himself a man among men.” If there is a way through the impenetrable wall which divides people from others and from their inmost selves; if there is a way from sickness to greater health, it is for Jung the action of “genuine, straightforward confession,” defined as “not merely the intellectual acknowledgement of the facts, but their confirmation by the heart and the actual release of suppressed emotions.” Such confession, with its accompanying experience of release or being cleansed or purified has “great significance,” for in the revelation of one’s secrets, in the full expression of emotions, in the admission that one is a human being like any other, isolation is brought to an end: “It is only with the help of confession that I am able to throw myself into the arms of humanity freed at last from the burden of moral exile ... [S]uch confessions have great effect and their curative results are often astonishing.”¹⁸⁵

Thus, Jung states that “we are all in some way or other kept asunder by our secrets,” and confession is the “firm bridge” by which we cross ‘the gulf.’”¹⁸⁶ It astonishes me that a popular psychoanalyst, Carl Jung, ends up to be one of the strongest advocates for the anthropological need for the Sacrament of Confession. Essentially, Jung describes healing through the Sacrament of Confession while noting the implications of the negative effects for keeping things hidden.

The anthropologically-rooted human need for healing is unmistakable; it is even seen in our innate response to ritual. Sellner says “the ritual dimensions of the event [(confession)] should not be overlooked.”¹⁸⁷ Sellner advocates “some appropriate sign” to

¹⁸⁵ Carl Jung, “Problems of Modern Psychotherapy” in *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, 28-54. This is Sellner directly quoting and summarizing Jung’s thought; see Sellner, 81.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, this is Sellner directly quoting Jung; see Sellner, 82.

¹⁸⁷ Sellner, 212.

be made by the listener, such as a handshake, so that the acceptance of the sufferer or penitent by the listener is clearly shown.¹⁸⁸ Sellner writes:

More concretely this [ritual sign] means that people who are trained to be truly effective Fifth Step ministers (whether ordained or not) should have an understanding of and be given courses in ritual awareness: the role of ritual in personal development, its importance especially at critical moments in people's lives, its ability to convey and express interior realities through exterior actions and signs. It is precisely here that Christian churches, especially the Roman Catholic, can be of help. (Jung himself, for example acknowledges that it is the Roman Church, with its "rich" ritual and symbolism, that has a pastoral advantage in regard to confessional encounters.) With its historically developed respect and recognition of the value and power of ritual action, the Roman Church and other churches can teach A.A. more about the dynamics of the Fifth Step – a confessional encounter which itself has Christian origins.¹⁸⁹

"Ritual" speaks to the human anthropology; mostly unconsciously or non-intellectually because a ritual consists in actions, or words that communicate an invisible meaning behind the actions.¹⁹⁰ Sellner advocates recognition of ritual for the fifth step in order for it "to be a truly healing and significant event for alcoholics," which means an experience of a "healing confession."¹⁹¹ Additionally, according to Sellner's findings, the listener of the fifth step or the priest who hears the penitent's confession must not communicate any sense of condemnation in order for the teller/penitent to have a real healing moment, for "...only when there is no fear of condemnation can people identify and fully acknowledge those painful, disharmonious aspects of their lives," which was the case for

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ James Shaughnessy, ed., *The Roots of Ritual* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1973), and Leonel L. Mitchell, *The Meaning of Ritual* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), no pgs. listed; Carl Jung, "Psychoanalysis and the Cure of Souls," *Psychology and Religion: West and East* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), especially p. 353; Walter Clark, *The Oxford Group: Its History and Significance* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1951), and Irving Benson, *The Eight Points of the Oxford Group* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), no pgs. listed. This is Sellner summarizing much of what he has learned about ritual from these five sources; see Sellner, 212.

¹⁹⁰ John A. Hardon, *Modern Catholic Dictionary* (Bardstown, Kentucky: Eternal Life, 2001), 470. "Ritual is the prescribed words and ceremonies for religious service." Ritual comes from "Rite: the manner and form of a religious function. Hence the words and actions to be carried out in the performance of a given act, e.g., the rite of baptism, or rite of consecration, the Roma Rite."

¹⁹¹ Sellner, 214.

the alcoholics in Sellner's study.¹⁹² Based on his interviews, Sellner states "...it is clear that alcoholics equated their healing experiences of the Fifth Step with 'forgiveness,'" which offers further proof testifying to the anthropological need to confess guilt since the word *forgiveness*, as used by the alcoholics, implies a feeling of a need to be forgiven for a harmful act, by virtue of the feeling described as *forgiveness*.¹⁹³ In other words, the anthropology of the need to confess guilt is revealed once again since the experience of the alcoholic's feeling of *forgiveness* shows that the need to confess guilt was already there in the person. The alcoholic did not know he was releasing guilt and being forgiven, he was only following the instructions for the fifth step.

Additionally, in fifth step language "humbly, honestly telling all of one's "story" to another human being" means "verbally acknowledging all those feelings, attitudes, acts which consciously and unconsciously divide us from our more authentic selves, one another, and our God," and this is, in sacramental language, confession.¹⁹⁴ The value in telling or confession is healing, release, harmony, tranquility, peace, and other positive emotional, psychological, spiritual and physical feelings and effects mentioned. Sellner testifies to the value of confession describing what he calls the event of self-revelation: "Through such events of self-revelation [confession], we often discover common roots and experience in some mysterious way a healing of our pasts, the transformation of weakness into strength, despair into hope, [and] isolation into community."¹⁹⁵ The event is a revealing of oneself to another, and a self-revealing – a gain in self-knowledge.

¹⁹² Sidney Jourard, *Disclosing Man to Himself* (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand, 1968), no pgs. listed; and *The Transparent Self* (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1971), no pgs. listed. This is Sellner referencing Jourard's thought; see Sellner, 225.

¹⁹³ Sellner, 245.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 242.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

Whether fifth step or Sacrament, both reveal the equal anthropological need to alleviate guilt in order to achieve human health for both the alcoholic and the penitent. Thus the anthropological need for telling or confession is equal because the guilt is so deeply rooted in the person due to wrongdoing. The guilt cries out from our own humanity to be released. What is more, is that the fifth step causes a “personality change” or “conversion” in recovering alcoholics, constituting “a fundamental psychic occurrence or a psychological event in which there is a major shift in personality manifestation that happens instantaneously or over a period of time.”¹⁹⁶ Sellner writes,

This shift in personality is from a negative state of mind to a positive one; from one set of feelings to another; from a set of predominantly hostile, negative attitudes to a set of predominantly positive, affirmative ones. Such a change in mind, feelings, and attitudes is considered by Tiebout a purely psychological phenomenon, yet has, according to him, “many of the earmarks of a religious conversion,” and is “far more frequent than I personally ever realized.”¹⁹⁷

Further proof of the anthropological need to confess guilt is not only the complete personality change that occurs in telling/confession, as described above, but also that the psychologist Tiebout even classifies the experience as having “many of the earmarks of a religious conversion.”

As the anthropological need is experienced in felt sorrow for sin in the Sacrament of Confession, so it is experienced by the alcoholic in the “conversion” process. “Conversion occurs when the individual hits bottom, surrenders, and thereby has his ego

¹⁹⁶ Harry Tiebout, “The Act of Surrender in the Therapeutic Process” (New York: The National Council of Alcoholism, no date), 3, and “Conversion as a Psychological Phenomenon” (New York: National Council of Alcoholism, no date), 2. This is Sellner’s summary of Tiebout’s thought; see Sellner, 57.

¹⁹⁷ Harry Tiebout, “Alcoholics Anonymous: An Experiment of Nature,” *Pastoral Psychology* (April 1962), 43, and “Conversion as a Psychological Phenomenon,” 2, 10; and “Therapeutic Mechanisms of Alcoholics Anonymous,” *American Journal of Psychiatry*, No. 100 (1944), 472-473. This is Sellner summarizing Tiebout’s thought; see Sellner, 57.

reduced. His salvation lies in keeping that ego reduced, in staying humble.”¹⁹⁸ Then for healing to occur in a telling or confession, conversion or sorrow for sin must be present. Despite what we label it, conversion or sorrow, the experiences of alcoholics or penitents, the Twelve Steps or the Rite of Confession, all show the “in-ness” of God’s design of humanity. The need to confess guilt is in us; and then so is prayer and meditation, as Step Eleven shows:

Of course we finally did experiment [with meditation and prayer], and when unexpected results followed, we felt different; in fact we *knew* different; and so we were sold on meditation and prayer. And that, we have found, can happen to anybody who tries. ... Those of us who have come to make regular use of prayer would no more do without it than we would refuse air, food, or sunshine. And for the same reason[,] when we refuse air, light, or food, the body suffers. And when we turn away from meditation and prayer, we likewise deprive our minds, emotions, and our intuitions of vitally needed support. As the body can fail its purpose for lack of nourishment, so can the soul. We all need the light of God’s reality, the nourishment of His strength, and the atmosphere of His grace. To an amazing extent the facts of A. A. life confirm this ageless truth.¹⁹⁹

Thus, the soul, mind, emotions and intuitions, suffer without prayer and meditation. One could also conclude, and this is well attested to, that religious people have less stress and anxiety, and therefore less negative physical ailments of guilt, as well as experience more happiness.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ Tiebout, “Alcoholics Anonymous: An Experiment in Nature,” 44 and 51. This is Sellner directly quoting Tiebout; see Sellner, 63.

¹⁹⁹ *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, 99-100.

²⁰⁰ See, for instance, Moments in Time, “Study proves that Religious People Have Less Stress and Anxiety,” *Canada Health* on March 8, 2009 at 5:47 am; Psychological Science. Accessed February 13, 2010. <http://timeinmoments.wordpress.com/2009/03/08/study-proves-that-religious-people-have-less-stress-and-anxiety/>.

CONCLUSION

Restatement of Thesis

This study set out to show the (theological) anthropological support for the Sacrament of Confession by way of looking at Step Five of Alcoholics Anonymous' Twelve Step Program. By examining the negative emotional, psychological, spiritual and physical effects of guilt in the human person and the release of those effects connected to the story-telling confession of the fifth step, I hoped to prove that by God's design of our human nature, human beings have an inherent need to confess guilt; and moreover, that good emotional, psychological, spiritual and physical health is the very reason and purpose God has given to mankind through the Catholic Church the very Sacrament of Confession that helps us cope in the human condition.

Statement of Conclusions

Recall our simple proof for the anthropological need to confess guilt:

1. Human persons have guilt.
 2. Guilt causes negative emotional, psychological, spiritual, and (damaging) physical effects.
 3. The fifth step is a telling/confession of wrongdoing.
 4. The Sacrament of Confession is a telling/confession of wrongdoing.
 5. Guilt is released in telling/confession.
 6. The release of guilt causes positive emotional, psychological, spiritual, and physical (healing) effects.
- (therefore) ▲ A person with guilt who tells/confesses in the fifth step or in the Sacrament of Confession has a release of negative, damaging effects and a gain of positive healing effects.

Acknowledging the truth that human beings are meant to be healthy and not disordered or diseased, the above logical argument proves the anthropological need to confess guilt. Human beings are happy and fulfilled when they are healthy and properly ordered in body, mind and spirit. Therefore, the fifth step and the Sacrament of Confession both

show that there is a human (anthropological) need to confess/tell the harmful activities or character defects associated with guilt for positive emotional, psychological, spiritual and physical health. No one escapes the need to be healthy, happy and fulfilled.

Additionally, so that we may know we have both a valid and a sound argument, we will check if the premises are all true. Guilt exists in human persons due to wrongdoing is a true statement; we know this experientially and intellectually. In the same way we know that guilt causes negative emotional, psychological, spiritual, and (damaging) physical effects. We know either or both intellectually or experientially, that Step Five and the Sacrament of Confession are both tellings/confessions. We know that, either or both intellectually or experientially, guilt is released in telling/confession; this is also true. Finally, we know that the release of guilt causes positive emotional, psychological, spiritual, and physical (healing) effects, either or both intellectually or experientially; and this too is a true statement. As all six premises are true, the argument is not only valid, but sound as well. Thus, it is true that the conclusion is true too: a person with guilt who tells/confesses in the fifth step or in the Sacrament of Confession has a release of negative, damaging effects and a gain of positive healing effects (especially with absolution in the Sacrament). Moreover, this conclusion combined with the honest truth that human beings are supposed to be healthy and happy allows us to confidently conclude that the fifth step and the Sacrament of Confession prove that there is a human (anthropological) need to confess/tell guilt for positive emotional, psychological, spiritual and physical health.

Whether the person who suffers from the negative effects of guilt is conscious of the suffering or not, this does not change the fact that the humanity still requires a release of

these effects. The anthropological proof that human beings require a release is due to the experience of the unavoidable negative effects. Since the negative effects are experienced, then so is the need to release them because human beings were not meant to constantly be in a state of guilty suffering – “unhealthiness.” God put a need in us so that we would seek reconciliation with Him for the sake of healing, health and happiness. Sellner uses the term “reconciliation” to identify the goal of where anthropology directs us – to healing and confession. Conversion (Tiebout), harmony (Jung), transformation (Haughton), and encounters with the spiritual presence of God (Tillich) all occur after the telling/confession, which shows the confession’s healing power that calls to us through our humanity.

Furthermore, if we are God-centered anthropologists than we know we are meant for healing and happiness. If we are non-believers, than the best we could hope for is food, shelter, sex, and some creative outlet; but even this kind of existence will not last long before the person becomes depressed and self-destructive due to the guilt one would amass interiorly through the inevitable harmful activities that come with the human condition. The choice between living a life with God or without God is really a choice between self-preservation and self-destruction. Groeschel makes a convincing case for self-preservation instead of self destruction: “Failure to organize our behavior around our everlasting goal and our God-appointed purpose in life makes us the fools that Christ speaks about in the parables. We should organize our lives around eternity to avoid self-destruction.”²⁰¹ To organize our lives around eternity is to focus on our eternal salvation:

The vast majority of things that go on in the world about us have nothing to do with salvation. Yet salvation is the only task that we have set before us that will last forever. Our Lord says this very clearly, “What does it

²⁰¹ Groeschel, 88.

profit a man, to gain the whole world and to forfeit his life? (Mk 8:36). Clearly, one of the highways to self-destructiveness is to fail to organize your behavior around your eternal salvation.”²⁰²

The world is full of things that distract us from our eternal salvation. Recognizing that eternal salvation and the fact that we, as human beings, need God’s help to survive and come into the truth of ourselves with all our defects is what matters. Acceptance of my weakness paves the way to forgiveness, but we must be willing to choose it, or we will continue to be self-destructive. The regular practice of the Sacrament of Confession can also be a means to learn forgiveness. Groeschel concludes his case for the choice of self-preservation agreeing with the significance of forgiveness as an aid to eternal salvation:

Another very effective way to defeat yourself is to keep alive all kinds of hurt feelings. ... If you want to live on resentment and hurt feelings, you’ll have an unhealthy diet for the rest of your life, pure psychological cholesterol. How many people spend much of their energy lamenting, crying, being unhappy or sad or driving themselves literally crazy by living on resentments toward those who failed them? Yes, people do fail us. Some don’t even know they’re failing us; some don’t mean to fail us. Some are so preoccupied with their own problems, they don’t even know what they’re doing. And some just don’t care. The motto of the follower of Christ must be, “Keep going ahead. Don’t look back.” ... For our own spiritual, as well as psychological, good, we must forgive those who trespass against us.²⁰³

Final Remarks

I began my research endeavor with the Step Five of A.A. and the Sacrament of Confession in order to demonstrate the unavoidable human need for confession of wrongdoing that causes harmful effects in our lives, the lives of those around us, and the whole world around us. The hope was to show the anthropological link between

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 89.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 92. Incidentally, in footnote 6 of Sellner, 53, he writes “Step Ten as described by Bill Wilson in Alcoholics Anonymous, pp. 84-85, and Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, pp. 90-97, recommends annual or semiannual “housecleaning’s,” thus advocating the use of the Fifth Step as an ongoing aspect of one’s life” – like the regular use of confession recommend by the Catholic Church.

confession and healing (or reconciliation) with ourselves, others, and God – indeed, all of our relationships. I am confident of the truth of this endeavor.

Even if a person does not believe in God, we can still speak of the anthropological need of confession in order to bring about healing in the self and the improving of all relationships (or to bring about new relationships). We can say that for the non-believer human nature exists in such a way that it can only take on so much felt guilt until it needs to release it in a telling about the source of the guilt so that a person may feel a burden lifted and find improved and healthy relationships. In this way the non-believer ascribing to no God is invited to believe in one through the acknowledgement of the undeniable truth of his/her own human need to release guilt. Here lays the profound meaning underlying this thesis: it is evangelical.

If anyone has ever personally experienced continued wrongdoing, continued harming of others, alcoholism, addiction of any kind with themselves or someone close to them, and they've acknowledged (honestly!) these types of harmful behaviors or character defects, and they've experienced the lifting of a burden when they tell someone else about their experience (even their fellow addicts), then they cannot deny the healing effects of this "telling." Nor can they deny the great design of the fifth step of A.A. or the wisdom of the Church's Sacrament of Confession. Thus, given the situation described above, it leaves a person only to accept the great healing effects found in the Sacrament of Confession in the Catholic Church, even for one who ascribes to no religious belief at all. Therefore, in so acknowledging the wisdom of the Church and the gift to humanity that is the Sacrament of Confession, soon to follow then, will be the acceptance of the Church and the person's ultimate conversion to the Catholic faith.

You people say, “Our crimes and our sins weigh us down; we are rotting away because of them. How can we survive?” Answer them: As I live, says the Lord, I swear I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked man, but rather in the wicked man’s conversion, that he may live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! Why should you die, O house of Israel?

Ezekiel 33:10b – 11 (NAB)

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