

INTRODUCTION

This book is an outgrowth of the articles I wrote for the website of the Blessed Margaret Family Help Center, Inc, <http://www.blessedmargaret.org> over a period of four years. In addition, the experience I gained from running a men's pornography addiction support group, "La Misma Nada" ("nothingness itself" in Spanish) helped me to clarify, edit, and expand the thoughts that I felt compelled to express about how any Catholic, be he man, woman, or child, could use the tools that have always been contained within Catholic spirituality to defeat a sinful addiction. This is the entire premise behind this book: using Catholic spirituality to combat and eventually defeat, what I call "the Hook", grow in sanctity as a fruit of that combat, and to give great glory to God in the struggle. The Hook is the means by which we attain our end, which is God. This method is modeled after the 12-Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) who "stole" it from the Catholic Church to begin with. AA takes those Catholic principles and dilutes them by injecting an indifferent attitude to which religion is practiced and blending together different beliefs to make them "acceptable" to non-Catholics who are only interested in defeating their addictions, not on being converted to the True Faith, which should be their real goal. Acting as if to say, "You can't make things too Catholic, you know!" they confused the "means" with the "end". In other words, these other 12-step programs make the defeat of the Hook the objective and not an intermediate step to the real end, which is to save one's soul through striving for holiness. My job, so to speak, has been to bring things back to their origin, the Origin of all things, which is God Himself.

I wrote this book in a conversational style so you will find it pretty much devoid of "hard statistics", big words, and footnotes on every page. I did this on purpose. I wanted it to be readable by anyone, not just the scholarly or well educated. If I wrote it as a scholarly tome, the common man wouldn't read it. If I used lots of statistics about addictions, probabilities, and current situations, it would become outdated virtually on the day that it was published. Besides, I'm not an expert in anything - just an addict, so I don't have access to all the statistics and studies anyway. I leave that for others to compile. Next, I didn't want to fix the time and place of the book to when I wrote it. With the grace of God, folks all around the world and for many years to come will read this. This will benefit their souls and help, in some small way, To Restore All Things In Christ. If such be the case, Deo Gratias. If not, I only have my own shortcomings to blame for its failure.

Because these are "Catholic" or Universal principles, they apply equally well to the struggle against pornography, alcoholism, overeating, gambling, sex, or whatever your particular obsession happens to be. They also apply equally well to those who have loved ones who are also suffering from sinful addictions. Because of my own personal experience in struggling against pornography, I have included references to the struggle against that hook. Please don't be turned off by this or think that the principles don't apply to your own particular hook. Instead, it should be pretty easy to translate the ideas to your own specific circumstances. I had to have some concrete examples to keep everything practical and not theoretical - besides, it should help you, my dear friend, to see that I'm no different than you.

One may ask how I got started on the path of this book. Skipping the addiction part, I have been involved with the Legion of Mary for a number of years and had attended a Senatus, or conference, over one Labor Day. One of the topics was on the apostolate to alcoholics. I have a friend who is one and I also had a grandfather (RIP) who was one so I felt a certain pulling towards this type of work. I found the talk intriguing but the idea of actually doing something lay dormant for several years until I was "kicked" into starting the Blessed Margaret Family Help Center to help families. This occurred at an Ignatian retreat. The Center was originally going to be only a pregnancy help center - one of what my family calls my "hare-brained ventures". However, as time passed, God's plan became clearer and the Center's purpose broadened to help families, both in and out of crisis. This resurrected the idea of helping addicts and their families. Finally, an article in Angelus magazine, "The Traditional Catholic and Twelve-Step Programs" by Sean Romer in the September, 2002 issue conducted an analysis of AA's 12-Steps from the Catholic viewpoint. Going through the article, I mentally translated each step into what I thought the Catholic version should be. I used that article and my mental analysis (along with much prayer) to develop the Catholic 12Steps. This initial analysis was what I presented on the website. During the acid test of running the men's support group, La Misma Nada, I was forced to seriously think through the missing pieces of those articles and have actually come to the conclusion that there are really 13-Steps! I've kept it at 12 because that's the number people mentally associate with "addiction help" programs. I've also split two steps into halves so that I could inject parts of those two steps earlier into the sequence in which people should begin doing those particular actions. In any case, this book is the result. I don't profess that how I present it is the perfect way but I will stand by my claim that using the principles of Catholic spirituality is the right way to cut your attachment to the Hook (you can never get rid of it), attain your salvation by striving for holiness, and give Almighty God great glory in the process of your struggle.

To ensure that what I present is truly Catholic I've had four priests review the manuscript. Funny, but several of them wanted to remain anonymous. I suppose they didn't want their names associated with what might be just a great big flop or that they didn't agree with everything that I say. I respect that; I needed their advice, and that's what I got. In most cases they provided excellent suggestions on changes that I know strengthen the Catholic 12-Steps. The most important suggestion was to inject more of psychological or natural tools to assist the addict instead of over-focusing on spirituality. This caused me to seriously investigate Alcoholics Anonymous' methods and to incorporate what they had that was fruitful into this program. For these changes I am eternally grateful because I know that it places this program more towards the Golden Mean instead of pushing to the opposite extreme where I had been. This would have been just replacing one error with another; replacing the error of defect with the error of excess. I also had theological errors that needed corrected. Again, they have my sincerest thanks. I just read the stuff; it's their living. In other cases, however, there were some philosophical differences that I'm afraid we'll just have to "agree to disagree".

Having only "experiential" qualifications and not a doctorate from this or that university, I've relied very heavily on the hope that God will guide me to say what He wants me to say so I've backed up everything that I've been inspired to write by sources that are indisputably Catholic so I think I am on solid ground and you will find The Hook and I chock full of quotations and references of my source material. Still, some of what I say they disputed. There are two major sources of disagreement. The first had to do with my assumption about hooks and lines and whether or not you could inherit susceptibility to a particular addiction from your parents. This was the very cornerstone of the entire concept of the Catholic 12-Steps. I either had to scrap the entire project or "continue to march" as we used to say in the Army. We are continuing to march (although with changes). I rewrote the opening chapter to attempt to clarify my approach in case the disagreement was a result of my poor way of expressing my thoughts but it essentially stands as before.

The second major disagreement was over how far I should push the objective of striving for holiness after defeating one's hook. I was advised that just saving one's soul should be the correct objective because it was "frightening to suggest" that addicts should be expected to try to become saints. I agonized over this point but I did change it to be a counsel and not a commandment. I was being told by priests whose opinion I valued above anyone else's that what I understood that I was supposed to say was not right. I was asking for too much and that these souls were not only not capable of sainthood but that they would be turned off from even making the attempt. After much prayer, I concluded that toning down my expectations wasn't the proper course of action. After all, it was possible for numerous saints to totally transform their lives. Why can't we? Sts. Paul and Mary Magdalene from Holy Writ immediately come to mind. Then we have dear St. Augustine who I consider to be my greatest inspiration in this entire project. I could name others like Sts. Ignatius of Loyola and Theresa of Avila; both lived dissolute lives radically different from how they later lived. Lastly, and this is in no way an attempt to even remotely consider myself among the ranks of these remarkable saints, is my own life story that provides living proof that "...with God all things are possible." (Matt. xix. 26)

I think it's common knowledge that if you don't shoot for the stars you'll end up shooting yourself in the foot. To not challenge addicts "to shoot for the stars" of perfection was to my mind giving them Cart Blanche, or permission, to fall into the trap of just defeating their hook and stopping right there. I think that not demanding the ultimate goal from them is to not demand enough of them with the end result that many of them would ultimately backslide into their addictions, or worse, end up losing their souls. It was that way in the National Guard infantry company that I commanded and I believe that it is true here. Men especially need to be challenged. Threaten a man's masculinity and you'd be surprised what you can get him to do! Without a serious challenge, nothing serious is accomplished. From a statistics point of view, I know that only a small percentage of us will actually reach any real level of sanctity but this widespread collective effort will lift up the average sanctity level of the population so that we get the vast majority, or six sigmas worth, into heaven and we all know that everyone in heaven is a saint. Besides, I figure that in challenging them to strive to become saints, they in turn challenge God, so to

speak, to make good on His promise, "Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and you shall find: knock, and it shall be opened to you." (Matt. vii. 7) God being God, will respond with a generosity vastly exceeding ours so I see no reason not to strive for perfection.

Having rejected the advice of these men for whom I have a deep filial affection raises the specter of my pride. Am I being prideful in wanting to have my own way or is this what God wants me to say? Fair point and we will resolve it by putting it in God's hands to settle. Let sales of the book and the testimony of those who work this system judge. If they were right, let it languish as just another "vanity book" with only enough sales to send the two copies to Warner Bros. that I owe them for their permission to use the picture of Scarlett O'Hara standing in a field waving a carrot. I will cheerfully receive the "I told you so's" that I will deserve. On the other hand, if this is what I am supposed to write then there will be respectable growth and I will just as cheerfully sing, "Non Nobis, Domine" for the privilege of doing my little part for God and the salvation of souls. In either case, my affectionate thanks to those good priest friends of mine who gave of their rare time to provide me their feedback and advice; they have made this a much better book as a result.

Regardless of all this, dear reader I want you to know that I am praying for you, both as an individual and as part of the Masses and prayers of the Blessed Margaret Family Help Center, Inc - both to defeat your hook and for you to become a saint. May God richly bless you in your struggle. I'd love to hear from you but if not, see ya on the other side!