

Let the oppressed go free: Breaking the bonds of addiction.
Cardinal Justin Rigali (2009). Basilica Press. \$5.95
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In American Christianity over the last century there has been a distinguished, if somewhat hidden, tradition of pastoral and theological reflection on issues of substance abuse and addiction. Many of the most able writers and scholars in this tradition have integrated their theological thinking with deep reflection on the best scientific information available in their day. Interestingly, they have also worked with concerned Church leadership to affect Church policy, moral guidance, and more effective pastoral outreach to family members and recovering persons.

Among the Protestant denominations the names of Howard Clinebell, Jr., the Rev. John Keller, and Pastor David Works stand out in this circle of pastors. In the Catholic community Rev. John C. Ford, S.J., Rev. Joseph Martin, S.S., Edward Cardinal Mooney, Richard Cardinal Cushing, and Pope John Paul II have been leading contributors. In addition, the U.S. Catholic Bishops played a pivotal role in bringing the issue of addiction to national consciousness in the 1980s and 1990s. With a series of pastoral letters from individual bishops and bishops' conferences across the country, culminating in the 1990 pastoral message from the U.S. conference, *New slavery, new freedom*, they combined theological and pastoral reflection with contemporary findings from addiction science to issue a strong and compelling pastoral diagnosis and recommendations regarding a serious national problem.¹ Their work stands as a landmark effort in establishing an informed and integrative pastoral methodology.

Last month Cardinal Justin Rigali, Archbishop of Philadelphia, joined the ranks of these esteemed groups with his publication of *Let the oppressed go free: Breaking the bonds of addiction* (2009, Basilica Press). Published as Volume Seven of The Shepherd's Voice Series by Basilica Press, this little book is a straightforward and well-informed presentation on central topics relating to addiction from one of the American Church's foremost leaders. The book has much to recommend it and, while this reviewer will make several recommendations for

¹ For deeper examination of these issues, see Morgan, 1997, 1998 & 1999. Also available at <http://academic.scranton.edu/faculty/morgano1/>. See also United States Catholic Conference, 1990.

strengthening the work, these amount to no more than quibbles with a passionate and knowledgeable treatise.

The book is written in interview form, as a series of responses to questions posed. It is structured in six parts. Part One addresses The Nature of Addiction, examining it as a harmful dependency or attachment, both physical and psychological, causing not only many negative consequences but also “wounding” the person’s core freedom and dignity. It explores such important contemporary issues as tolerance, withdrawal, cross-addiction, and craving; it describes several powerful “cycles of addiction” that must be understood for adequate clinical or pastoral care. The discussion of these “cycles” is psychologically sophisticated, such as the description of addictive obsession or preoccupation, leading to a ritualistic phase of preparation for use, culminating in the behavioral phase of the cycle that results in guilt and despair, the precursors to a “self-perpetuating spiral.” The last section of Part One addresses the notion of addiction as “sin” – a hotly debated topic over the years – and appropriately balances the notions of “diminished fault,” due to wounded personal freedom, with levels of personal responsibility and the “obligation to take all possible means” to seek help and avoid immoral actions.

Parts Two and Three place the pastoral and theological discussion of addiction within two important, but often missing, realms of discourse: the context of a robust Christian anthropology, and the modern trajectory of problems rooted in widespread access to the Internet and the virtual world. Rigali examines the core *spiritual* aspects of addiction as part of his theological anthropology, seeing addiction as a disease characterized by a clouded will and hijacked appetites. His pastoral demeanor comes to the fore as he describes the actual situation of the addict caught in addictive illness: “*Once caught in the cycle of addiction that may indeed involve objectively sinful behavior, the person involved is unable to escape from the cycle of addictive behavior without the help of God and of other human beings* (p. 19).” His look into the addict’s life, both now and in the future, is shrewdly constructed around the dangers of the immediate and ubiquitous presence of the Internet. In particular his examinations of gambling and pornography are well-informed and welcome complements to the sense of urgency experienced by many addiction professionals.

Parts Four and Five of *Let the oppressed go free* bring the riches of traditional Catholic spirituality to bear on the treatment and management of addictive illness. In innovative ways, Cardinal Rigali focuses both sections around the virtue of temperance. This is his positive nod in

the direction of contemporary “virtue ethics.” Pastors and theologians will remember the treatment of temperance within the body of work written by St. Thomas Aquinas. As this reviewer has pointed out elsewhere, Thomas’ treatment of temperance and the ancillary virtue of sobriety in the *Summa theologia* (II, ii, q.149, art.2), provides traditional ascetical substance to a necessary core element of addiction recovery.² Rigali is eloquent in this matter, and elects to make it the central element in his examination of the role of sacraments, cultivation of virtue, and prayer for recovering persons.

Describing temperance as “the strength God places in us to grow in holiness in regard to our appetites” (p. 43), he examines it as both a “disposition” and a “quality of mind” which God “works in us without us.” With the gift of docility to the action of God within us – one might envision this as the result of an addict’s “surrender” – the Holy Spirit is able to plant the seeds of piety and fear of the Lord in the heart of a recovering person. These two gifts of the Spirit, acting like water and sunlight for a young or damaged plant, assist the virtue of temperance to grow and mature. The way in which Rigali describes this process is quite compelling. “We fear we are not enough,” he says: not rich enough, not athletic enough, not popular enough, not smart enough. Fear of the Lord is the Spirit’s gift that restores to us the awareness of our childhood in God. The love of God replaces our fear. In addition, Rigali maintains, while becoming aware of who we truly are, we also grow in awareness of our common ancestry with others (we are all children of God) and our common environment in a world created in love for us (we are stewards of God’s world). This is the gift of piety at work, teaching us to care for others as brothers and sisters and to refrain from abusing creation by misusing the creatures that co-habit this world of ours.

When we are strengthened to see God as our Father – while also seeing one another as brothers and sisters and the world as God’s gift – we know that temperance has taken root in our appetites and that our appetites have begun to be transformed by the grace of Jesus under the impetus of the Holy Spirit (p. 45).

“How do we foster the virtue of temperance where addiction is present?” asks the anonymous interviewer. Rigali’s response in the rest of this section highlights the role of traditional Catholic spirituality in strengthening recovery. He describes the importance of a sacramental life, particularly in relation to Baptism, Confirmation, Penance, and the Eucharist.

² See Morgan (1998).

He describes the role of *communio* in the Church, the many and varied ways in which the community of the faithful support and strengthen recovery. He examines the importance of self-knowledge and the regular examination of conscience as part of a healthy asceticism. He privileges the role of prayer in a recovering lifestyle, particularly through descriptions of the Rosary and (surprisingly) the Serenity Prayer. He makes a brief and insightful connection between the Serenity Prayer and a personal commitment or style of “abandonment to divine providence” – a change in attitude and lifestyle that is critical in recovery – by referencing the writings of Jean-Pierre de Caussade, S.J. in the eighteenth century spiritual classic of the same name.³

Finally, in Part Six Rigali’s description and elucidation of the Twelve Steps legitimizes for many the search for serenity and sobriety. Calling the Twelve Steps “more a spirituality than a treatment” (p. 65), the Cardinal affirms their intrinsic value as well as their importance for nourishing recovery from alcoholism and other compulsive disorders. He places the Steps within the context of other spiritual traditions (such as Carmelite, Benedictine, Marian devotions) that have enriched the Church, and envisions them as a particularly American contribution to the spiritual life. He also draws connections between each Step and Catholic theology and spiritual practices. Steps 2 and 3, for example, the two that focus on entrusting one’s life into the care of God for healing, he sees in reference to the Catholic approach to justification. Steps 8 and 9 might be the same recommendation made after a good confession, while Step 11 suggests the need for ongoing prayer. Rigali’s positive presentation of the Steps from a Catholic point of view is a welcome addition to the literature of recovery.

I want to point out two final contributions in *Let the oppressed go free* that should be mentioned. Cardinal Rigali adds to the discussion about the “cultures” of life and death that have ensued since the pontificate of Pope John Paul II. This is not a surprise from someone who is Chairman of the Committee for Pro-life Activities at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. What is a revelation, however, is his clear connection between a “culture of life” and support for recovery from addiction. He sees this “culture of life” as emphasizing the dignity of each human person created in the image of God; he understands that the “promises of escape and immediate gratification,” so alluring to the abuser and addict, contradict human dignity and lead to destruction. In a world where one assumes that “pro-life” is narrowly construed as anti-

³ De Caussade (2008).

abortion, Rigali's "tent" seems much bigger and more inclusive. The connection of individual and family recovery to a core contemporary Catholic notion such as "culture of life" enhances our understanding of both realities. Likewise, Rigali's use of scripture throughout the book, but particularly in this last section, underlines the continuing importance of traditional theological sources for contemporary pastoral reflection. He adds to the traditionally understood "canon within the canon" of scriptures that many recovering persons use to reflect on addiction and recovery.⁴

In a particularly appealing paragraph, Cardinal Rigali refers to the Church's openness to hearing and learning from addicts' stories and expressions of pain: "The Church is always ready to listen..." (p. 73). He recalls the story from Mark's Gospel of the woman with a hemorrhage (Mk 5. 25-34). In his reflection Rigali illustrates the critical importance of bringing the truth of ourselves to Jesus for healing, "the whole truth of how the world has pained us, of how we have hurt others and ourselves. We must show him our scars as he heals us with his wounds" (p. 73). For those suffering with the scars of addiction, this is a very welcome message.

As I said at the beginning of this review, my recommendations for this book seem small in comparison to my deep appreciation for this project and the pastoral way in which it is written. I also make these recommendations in the knowledge that the Cardinal has accomplished what he set out to do. I do not mean to suggest that he *should* have done something else. I merely wish to suggest that two other points are important in today's world. My recommendations focus in the areas of methodology and the nature of addiction.

First, then, is the matter of methodology. Cardinal Rigali is clearly well-informed about addiction and recovery, and understands many of the central tenets of contemporary addiction science. However, at least this reader is curious about how he came by this knowledge. And this is not idle curiosity. Rather, I think pastors and theologians have a responsibility, particularly when they are clearly in dialogue with contemporary sources of information, to inform the rest of us about where and how they have come to such an understanding.

Long gone are the days when the assertions of religious authorities are simply taken at face value. Critical readers, even those predisposed to engage in real dialogue with religion, want to know the sources and commitments an authority brings to the table. Knowing the

⁴ See Morgan (1998).

“where” and “how” allows the rest of us to evaluate the scholarly and scientific acumen the writer is bringing to bear, and heightens the credibility of the final document. While there are strengths and pastoral appeal to the question-and-answer format Rigali has chosen, there are virtually no notes or references of any kind (except to scripture), no way to learn about the depth of his knowledge about the science and practice of addiction/recovery. And there is no way to assess the ways in which the science has been brought into dialogue with theology and pastoral experience. This is a lost opportunity, it seems to me. Others, I believe, could learn from Rigali’s method, if only we knew more about it.

Second – and this builds on the first – Rigali’s presentation seems to emphasize one side of the addiction equation while slighting an equally important way to understand the process. Throughout, the Cardinal refers to alcohol and drug use, as well as reliance on processes like compulsive gambling or compulsive sex, in terms of the search for pleasure, gratification, *euphoria*. For some abusers, some addicts, at some times, this is surely an accurate description of their pursuits. However, focusing here may lead one to miss the equally powerful need to seek *analgesia*.

For many clinical and pastoral practitioners, it has become clear that abusers and addicts are pursuing self-medication, the surcease of pain (physical, emotional and psychological), and an end (or at least moderation) to suffering. Many addicts themselves tell us that they use to “feel normal” and as a way to “self-medicate.” This is also one of the key things that all psychoactive drugs – illegal, prescription, and legal drugs – do; they help us to cope with pain. Nowhere is this more clear than in the deep connections between addiction and trauma.⁵ While the Cardinal’s overall treatment does refer to this from time to time – how could it not? – he does not seem to have put this pursuit at the center of his thinking. Rather, the addict’s search for euphoria seems to have more of Rigali’s attention. It seems a bit unbalanced.

However, as I say, these two suggestions do not lessen this reviewer’s deep appreciation for what Cardinal Rigali has accomplished here. This is a readable, theologically and clinically sophisticated, presentation of a core pastoral challenge. It is written with real warmth and care. I recommend it highly to anyone interested in understanding how the Church at its best cares for those struggling with these issues.

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⁵ See, for example, Morgan & Poray (2009).

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