

## **OUR STRATEGY**

Welcome to our strategy briefing, General! I've given snippets and dropped hints about our goals up to this point and also throughout the book but I think it necessary that I lay out in one place exactly what our strategy is to defeat our hooks, what we are aiming for once this is accomplished, and in a general way describe how we intend to accomplish our goals. In this way you'll be able to keep your strategic objectives in mind amid the tactical wins and losses on your own battlefield.

## **STRATEGY STATEMENT**

I think it essential to put our strategy into one sentence it is this: **Employing a firm act of the will to succeed and God's grace as the foundations of our efforts, we will use natural tools, especially the tools of helping others who share my hook, along with all the supernatural tools of the Catholic Faith to restore my soul to its proper order: 1) to defeat my hook by permanently cutting the line of my attachment as short as I am able and 2) to give glory to God in eternal gratitude for His assistance in helping me to overcome my hook by striving for perfection for the rest of my life in order to a) gain my salvation, b) eliminate the temporal punishment due to my many sins, and c) edify my neighbor by being a living witness for the Gospel and by performing the Works of Mercy.**

Long sentence, huh? Let me re-list this in outline form to separate the main and sub parts in order to make it clear.

## **STRATEGY OUTLINE**

- Employing the foundation elements of:
  - Act of the Will to Succeed
  - God's Grace
- Using:
  - Natural Tools
    - Helping others who share my hook
    - Other Tools
  - Supernatural Catholic Tools to restore my soul to proper order
- In order to:
  - Defeat my hook by cutting the line as short as possible
  - Give glory to God in gratitude for assistance by striving for perfection to:
    - Gain my salvation
    - Eliminate the temporal punishment of my sins
    - Edify my neighbor by:
      - • Being a living witness for the Gospel
      - • Performing the Works of Mercy

That's our strategy in a nutshell and in two different forms so that you can refer back to it in the days, months, and years ahead when you need to refresh your memory or to re-focus your efforts. However, this doesn't really help you to see the different steps and how they fit into this overall picture and that I will cover in the next section

## **THE SYLLABUS**

When I went to school for any class past, say the 7th Grade, the teacher always gave out an outline or what is called a "syllabus" of what we were going to cover in the class. It included what we were going to cover in the class, the order we were going to do it, when the quizzes, tests, and the final were scheduled, and how the different assignments were weighted that made up our grade. Well, I'm not going to be the one issuing out the grades, my friend. I'm going to let God do that since that's His job since, "He will come to judge the living and the dead". I do think it's my job, however, to give out the syllabus in the first place. It always helped me to know what was expected of me and what was coming up. The same applies here for The Hook and I. Now, I didn't organize it with respect to the order of the chapters in the book; I ordered it in light of the strategy statement. In this way you'll know what you're going to be doing and how everything falls into our strategy.

## **THE HOOK AND I SYLLABUS**

- Foundation Elements (Required for success)
  - Act of the Will to Succeed
  - God's grace
- Two-Fold Purposes
  - Defeat my hook
  - Give glory to God
- How?
  - Natural Tools
    - Helping fellow addicts
    - Determine my temperament
    - Creating Lists of:
      - Grudges
      - Amends
      - NOS (Near Occasions of Sin)
    - Other tools (Depending on individual circumstances)
  - Supernatural tools
  - Beginning virtues
    - Humility
    - Hope
  - Return to grace actions
    - Examination of Conscience
    - Going to Confession
    - Making Amends
  - Increase Flow of Grace
    - Attending Mass
    - Receiving Holy Communion
    - Receiving other Sacraments as necessary
    - Saying Tier I Prayers
      - Nothingness Itself Prayer
      - Morning Offering
      - Rosary
    - Saying the Tier II Prayers
    - Creating my own Tier III Prayers

- Work with Fellow Addicts (La Misma Nada, if available)
  - Remove isolation/Gain strength through fellowship with others
  - Psychological boost of helping others
  - Substitute works/Priest directed (if no LMN available)
- o Increase Acceptance of Grace by strengthening the soul
  - Restore my soul to be in line with Original Harmony
  - Identify and avoid NOS (aids the memory)
  - Beginning mortification and penance (strengthens the Will over the body)
  - Learning the Faith and Catholic Culture (fortifies the Intellect)
- o Strive for Perfection (Increase My Sanctity)
  - Beginning to do Catholic meditation
  - Helping others for love of God and to edify neighbor
    - With talents and "calling"
    - The Works of Mercy
    - Fellow Addicts
    - Others in need
    - Other charitable works
    - Existing Catholic organizations
    - Creating new ones as appropriate
    -

You didn't see any tests or quizzes did you? No, actually the whole "course" is "self-taught" so you go at your own pace. However, all testing is done in the form of "pop quizzes" and "pop tests", you see. God will give them to you as He sees fit and when He thinks you are ready. Since "...you know not the hour nor the day" (Mt xxv.13) you better be ready for them. This is not a course for the casual, dear friend, so be warned that it will take a lot of "study" effort and "out of class" time but, I can totally assure you with the greatest of confidence, that the results are well worth the effort.

I have one last bit of information that I want to close this chapter out with and that entails adding the goal of striving for perfection as one of the goals of the Catholic 12-Steps instead of just proceeding to the point of saving your soul. That I will cover next.

### **STRIVE FOR PERFECTION?**

The first thing I want to do here before we begin our discussion is to define what I mean by the term, "striving for perfection" since it certainly isn't a commonly used phrase out in society and I want to make sure we are clear about what we are discussing. By the term "striving for perfection" I mean that a soul works to become united to God in this life insofar as he is capable. To quote from The Spiritual Life, "This we do when we practice the Christian virtues, theological and moral...St. Thomas answers that perfection essentially consists in charity, first and foremost in the love of God, then in the love of

neighbor." (Paragraphs 308 & 309, page 157) This "charity" means seriously striving to become a real living example of the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ through practicing virtue and not just being a hypocrite that spouts Christianity but his personal life is full of contradiction to what he preaches (in fact, living the Gospel really means living a silent example of the Gospel more than it does being a preacher of the Gospel since actions speak volumes louder than words). To live for perfection means that you strive to fall in love with Christ more and more each day. I believe that we all know to what level of sacrifice earthly lovers go to please their beloved so there is going to be a degree of sacrifice and self-denial required for spiritual lovers as well. It means that we follow not only the commandments but also the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience at least to a certain extent; the commandments we obviously have to follow for they are the bare minimum, and the counsels depending on what our state in life is. Anyone in religious life follows these counsels as specified by the vows they take for whatever religious group they join. That comes as no surprise but for those of us outside the religious state this means that we have to strive to live the spirits of poverty, chastity, and obedience within the demands of our own duty of state. For example, if you're single, absolute chastity is demanded of you just as if you were a religious; if you're married the demands of chastity are lessened but you still have to observe fidelity and even for you there are periods where you have to be chaste so everyone has to observe at least some level of the evangelical counsels. Do you remember "...the poor in spirit...the meek...the clean of heart," (Matt v. 3-4, 8) that Jesus talks about in the Sermon on the Mount? He's talking to the crowd, not just the Apostles, so His message is for everyone, not just the select few.

Another way to describe this "striving for perfection" is that you could call it trying to become a saint or living for holiness. OK, I know what some of you are thinking. "I'm not a Goodie Two Shoes!" I didn't say you had to be. That's why I prefer the term "striving for perfection" because "to strive" means "to try very hard to do something"; it doesn't mean that you succeed or even how well you accomplish what you are striving to do but it does mean that you attempt it to the best of your ability and that's what God is asking for. If this sounds impossible for you, don't feel bad. I didn't start out my fight against my hook with anything other than a resolution just to defeat it - nothing more! Trying to strive for perfection never even entered my mind! Just start at that point of just wanting to cut the line to your hook, my friend, and follow the method I describe with the best effort you can. If Alcoholics Anonymous, which most assuredly isn't trying to make you a saint and practices charity to others ONLY as a means to help themselves, can boast of the "spiritual experiences" that change its members all the time, there's no reason that people who work a truly Catholic method shouldn't also see their share of "spiritual experiences" that change their lives as well. In any case, however you want to think of it, I like to think of striving for perfection as living in a way to bypass purgatory altogether and go straight to heaven when I die. That hell fire and brimstone stuff just scares the stuffin's out of me.

There, that puts the goal on the table in clear language and now we're ready to cover the explanation as to why I think this is the right goal for "we few, we happy few, we band of brothers" who are struggling

against our hooks. As I mentioned back in the Introduction, there was some controversy stemming on how far I should push the striving for perfection in the Catholic 12-Steps. After all aren't all Catholics just commanded to save their souls? Isn't this all that's required? Isn't the supreme law of the Church the salvation of souls, not their sanctity? What's more, to demand upon souls mired in the depths of their addictions requiring more than these people are capable of? These are fair questions and I'll try my best to answer them.

First of all, just saving your soul is indeed all that is required of any Catholic and, yes, the supreme law of the Church is the salvation of souls, not their sanctity. Having admitted all that, I am going to answer these questions with the following evidence that there are reasons that some people need to strive to do more than just the minimum requirements and we addicts are people with those reasons to strive to do more. Without a doubt, there should be no argument about folks with a religious vocation. As I just brought up in my example of chastity, we know that they are obviously called to strive for perfection; they take vows to follow the counsels and live under the Rule of their order so what were counsels become obligations. We're not talking about them. They've been exposed to all the concepts in this book anyway and they have all the tools at hand for them to defeat their hooks. The ones I'm addressing this to are those of us who are living in the world. Of course, there will be souls with hooks who will find that God is calling them to the religious life once they've cut the line to their hooks and, I pray, that what they learn here will just be a head start to their pursuit of their vocation. Here, I will be addressing the need for those of us in the world who have defeated (or will defeat) their hooks to pursue perfection as the completion of the war against their hooks. Said a different way, the struggle against their hooks will be the slingshot that will propel them into the pursuit of perfection. Loading the rock into the pouch, drawing back the sling, and aiming it will be the fight against the hook itself; Releasing the shot to go as far and as high to the target as possible will be the striving for perfection. Whether or not you hit the "perfection" target is all up to your generosity of spirit and how holy God desires you to be.

I wish I could say that the arguments for justifying my position are my own original thoughts but that would be a lie. Instead, I am going to use the arguments on why everyone should, at least at times, strive for perfection presented in The Spiritual Life: A Treatise on Ascetical and Mystical Theology, (paragraphs 352-361) by Fr. Adolphe Tanquerey, which is a book used in seminaries to train priests. I will paraphrase the good Father's arguments in my own way but they will basically be his thoughts. We will first present evidence from Church authority such as Scripture and the Doctors of the Church. Next we will present arguments based on our reason that it is logical and reasonable that we should strive for perfection. Lastly, as this book is semi-autobiographical in that it describes the general process that I personally lived through to overcome my own hook, I will add my own personal testimony that those who overcome their addictions by relying on God's grace will feel a "pull" or a compelling desire to strive for perfection if only to satisfy our duty of gratitude for God's assistance against our hooks if not to express our ever-deepening love for Him.

### **THE VOICE OF AUTHORITY**

As Fr. Tanquerey points out, the Bible doesn't directly answer this question for us but it does draw a separation between what he calls "precept" and "counsel" although it doesn't make clear what's mandatory and what is optional for our salvation. Certainly, the spirit of the Gospel is the ideal of holiness, as evidenced by the entire Sermon on the Mount and Our Lord's admonition to: "Be ye therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matt v. 48) Anyone who lives to do the bare minimum would in no way be living this spirit. This spirit of the Gospel includes elements of sacrifice or self-denial, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother and wife and children and brethren and sisters, yea and his own life also, cannot be my disciple" (Luke xiv. 26-27) that can even demand heroics, "Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends." (John xv. 13) Not everyone has this demand to "lay down his life" placed on him but everyone must be willing to respond to the demands that God does place on us. If we don't prepare ourselves by sweating in the "practices and scrimmages" of the smaller demands, how well are we going to play in the "Big Game" when the Coach calls on us to, "Get out there"?

This spirit of striving for perfection or holiness is continued throughout the epistles. St. Paul echoes this theme of living for holiness, perfection, mortification, being virtuous, and all the other aspects of doing more than just the bare minimum of following the commandments. He urges us to holiness, "That we should be holy and unspotted in His sight in charity" (Eph i. 4), to mortify ourselves, "And they that are Christ's, have crucified their flesh, with the vices and concupiscences" (Gal v. 24), and to practice virtue, "Put ye on therefore, as the elect of God, holy, and beloved, the bowels of mercy, benignity, humility, modesty, patience: Bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if any have a complaint against another even as the Lord hath forgiven you, so do you also. But above all these things have charity which is the bond of perfection." (Col iii. 12-14) which are all elements of striving for perfection. Remember the audience to whom he is writing. He is not writing to a Timothy or a Titus; he is writing to the entire congregation of Ephesians, Galatians, and Colossians. His advice is for everyone there (and by extension) for all of us as well.

We also have the advice of the Doctors of the Church that we either strive to continuously advance in our progress towards God or we will lose ground. St. Augustine states, "In the way to God, not to advance is to retreat." St. Bernard echoes this with his words, "He turns back who reverts whence he had once departed." (The Spiritual Life, Paragraph 358) What these Pillars of the Faith are saying is that when you think you are at the point where you can stop moving forward in the spiritual life because this is "good enough" is the point where you start sliding backwards and for those who had active hooks, this is to risk re-attaching the line, "As a dog that returneth to his vomit" (Prov xxvi. 11). You cannot stay in one spot in holiness. In this life there is no such thing as "good enough".

### **THE VOICE OF REASON**

I think a simple look around you at the world in which we live will convince everyone that movement is a fundamental part of life. We move and grow, all the animals do too. Even plant life that sets down deep roots has movement. The tree grows from a small seedling; its branches sway in the breeze; it buds into flower and the leaves emerge in springtime; carbon dioxide is consumed and oxygen is created in the process of photosynthesis that produces the food that the tree needs to survive; nutrients and water are taken up by the roots. Life is movement. Everything that lives is either growing or declining towards death. It is a fact of nature. The forces that create life and growth are countered by the forces that cause death. As long as the creative forces that help it grow are stronger than the destructive forces, the tree flourishes. Remove the tree from the soil, stop the rain, cut off the leaf-bearing branches and the tree becomes prey to disease, starvation, and the ravages of weather, animals, and competition from other plants. Not generally immediately but over time. This is true regardless of what type of life we are talking about here in the natural world. It is as true for man as it is for the tree. The same holds true in the supernatural world as well since both worlds mirror one another. Spiritually, we also have both life-giving forces and destructive forces. The tree of your soul will also become prey to disease, starvation, and the ravages of your environment unless you struggle to grow.

Let's speak briefly about some of these destructive forces because it provides us with a second logical reason for us to ever strive for spiritual growth. Most of the time and for most living things, our environment is what I think you might call fairly consistent. There's a fairly constant cycle of temperatures, sunlight, rainfall, soil conditions, and the like for the tree in our example. However, at times it undergoes certain periodic stresses that seriously threaten it. There are wind storms, blizzards, subfreezing temperatures, insects, and droughts for example. They come and they go as God sees fit to vary the weather in times and places of His choosing. If our tree is sickly, damaged, weak, deprived of critical nutrients it is not capable of withstanding these storms, diseases, and severe weather conditions. Limbs blow down; the roots lose their hold and the tree is uprooted; it gets diseased; or maybe even it's killed by the insects. It was strong enough to handle the day-to-day stresses but when the time of trial comes it is incapable of meeting the test. It dies. This occurs to us too, at times - again, as God so wills. True, for most of us in this country there isn't a red persecution but there is a white one. We are confronted by moral issues that sometimes require heroics from us. That's right; even we have times when we are tested by the wind storms, blizzards, sub-freezing temperatures, disease, and droughts that blow through our lives. It is at these times that we must respond heroically or else we spiritually fail. We can only respond heroically when we have the strength of virtue in us to begin with and this requires that those virtues be made habit and it also requires a certain level of mortification so that we can maintain control over our bodies in ways that we would naturally rather not do. Both making a habit of virtue and the practice of mortification are part of striving for perfection. It is not reasonable to assume that we will respond heroically if we have not made habits of the virtues required to meet the trials that it

will please God to send us. Let me finish this second argument based on reason by providing you with three secular quotations that everyone is familiar with: "In time of peace prepare for war" (Geo. Washington), "Practice makes perfect", and "Be prepared" (the Boy Scout motto).

Therefore, based on these two arguments based upon reason, it is not logical to expect that any of us can "maintain" the salvation of our souls without putting any extra effort into the task. This is true for all souls, but this is especially so for those of us who have been slaves to our hooks. If we do only the spiritual minimum of just observing the commandments with no effort at any spiritual growth we are susceptible to more than just the "storms, blizzard, sub-freezing temperatures, insects, and droughts" that affect other people; we have also have the susceptibility to our hooks that ravaged our souls for so long.

#### **MY VOICE**

Having given you my version of Fr Tanquerey's arguments that striving for perfection is the job of every Christian, I will now give you two reasons from my own experience. Actually, these reasons are debts, to be precise. I, like you, have a hook. It took me a long time (along with much ache, pain, and agony) for me to finally cut the line to it. I have been "dry", as they say in Alcoholics Anonymous, for somewhere beyond fifteen years and this is solely through the grace of God and there's no guarantee that I will stay dry for the rest of my life. I need to persevere. The program you will read about in this book I didn't have the opportunity of reading - I had to live it. True, I didn't make out any lists nor did I do it in Step 0, Step 1, Step 2 order... but I did perform every single step starting with my own Act of the Will to Succeed while standing in my garden as my first action. I worked to get back in the state of grace, I worked to obtain more of those graces, I worked to strengthen my soul to accept more of those graces that I did receive. I say this in the past tense but do not kid yourself. This has been and continues to be an ongoing and never ending chore for me. The most important thing that I constantly remind myself of, or am reminded of, is that it is solely through the benevolence of the Good God that I was successful. I know that I owe it all to Him. Therefore, I know that I have a debt of gratitude that I have to pay to Him. I did the work but He gave "the increase" (1 Cor iii. 6) and it was only because He gave me the grace did I want to do (and was capable of doing) the work to begin with. I can never fully pay back this obligation but I do know that what I do accomplish in the time that I have left here on this earth is my way of saying "Thank you!" to a God Who was under no obligation to give me anything over and above the necessary helps for me to save my soul and I had burned through those a heck of a long time ago. What I received was a gift - an undeserved gift, but He gave it to me anyway because He loves me. The least I can do is what I can do to say, "I love You, too!" Anything less than striving to be as united with Him as I can be would make me the most ungrateful wretch on the face of the planet and I wouldn't deserve to be in His presence - either now or later.

The other debt that I need to mention here is answered by a quote that is so important that it's mentioned in both the Old and New Testaments (although the wording is slightly different), "...for Charity covereth a

multitude of sins." (Prov x. 12 & 1 Peter iv. 8) All of us with sinful hooks will have committed a good number of mortal sins, either directly or indirectly as a result of our hooks in addition to other mortal sins that we will have fallen into because of our evil lives. Forgiveness of these sins is easily obtained in the tribunal of the confessional but the temporal punishment for those sins is only partly paid by the penance the priest gives us. We still have to pay restitution, or to make amends, for these forgiven sins. We can do that here on earth or we can do it in purgatory after we die. I, for one, greatly prefer to complete making amends while I am alive. The idea of being in the equivalent of the fires of hell for some unspecified period of time completely unnerves me. I have the choice of how to do this here on earth; I can choose the type of good works that help my neighbor now whereas in purgatory all I can do is sizzle like a steak on a grill. No thank you, pal! This is what Proverbs and St. Peter are talking about. We obtain much in the way of settling our debts with the Almighty by doing for our neighbor what we would do for Him were He here in person. In His wisdom, God hasn't revealed the "value" of any particular act of charity so we never know how much is "enough" and we never know when our time is up so we can never "pace" ourselves. All we can do is follow the advice Gandalf gives to Frodo in J.R.R. Tolkien's Fellowship of the Ring when a frightened Frodo reluctantly hears the news that he is to be the ring bearer and that the Dark Lord's power is ascending, "'So do I,' said Gandalf, 'and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.'" (Book I, Chapter 2, "THE SHADOW OF THE PAST". Page 76, First Ballantine Book Edition: October 1965)

You might conclude that I am driven to strive for perfection. I guess I would accept that conclusion. "Many sins are forgiven her, because she hath loved much." (Luke vii. 47) I do believe that others who have gone before us and won their wars against their own hooks felt the same way, more or less. I also believe that you, too, will come to believe the same way somewhere down the road. Like I said before, if AA's members can boast of "spiritual experiences" and also of "God-consciousness", I see no reason why we Catholics who are under similar circumstances shouldn't react in the same way. There, my friend, I've given you authoritative reasons, logical reasons, and personal reasons why I believe that the Catholic 12-Steps ought to, nay, needs to, require that we strive for perfection as an integral part of the program. It isn't important how far towards perfection you reach; everyone's circumstances are different. What is critical is that you continuously make the effort. The rest is up to God.

#### **CONCLUSION**

That concludes my discussion on our overall strategy. At this point you should have a good understanding of it as well as a good basis for the main terms we use. (If nothing else you should at least understand why the book is called The Hook and I!) Now I want you to proceed to the next chapter where we lay more foundation for our task of defeating our hooks by covering some more preliminary concepts in the chapter, "Before We Get Started". God bless and I'll see you there!