

Chapter 33: The Cure



Figure 1: St. Benedict performs an exorcism

*Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages
And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes
To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes;
And specially from every shires ende
Of Engelond, to Caunterbury they wende,
The hooly blisful martir for to seke
That hem hath holpen, whan that they were seeke. (—Geoffrey Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*)*

We believe we can do better than we now do in healing anxiety and depression. Because we used to; and in some parts of the world, still do.

And this is an urgent concern: some are suffering the torments of hell. People are killing themselves.

Unfortunately, the reader, if galvanized to act, cannot put down this book and easily proceed on their own.

“Now go find a good professional.”

None use the approach outlined here. The current psychiatric and psychological professions are evidently, with their scientific model, not accomplishing the job.

“Now go find a self-help group.”

Group therapy can devolve into bullying; the previously abused are vulnerable to this. There can be dysfunctional groups as there can be dysfunctional families. Any group can include narcissists: the chickens have been lined up neatly in a row, and all the foxes need do is make the lunge.

“Now go and read the fairy tales for yourself.”

We discover that fairy tales are indeed designed to prevent anxiety and depression. Yet millions are, in their Disney versions, and are not getting much out of it.

“Now go to your local church or read the Bible.”

Recall that the traditional term for what we now call “mental illness” was spirit possession or spirit obsession.

And what is one of the traditional signs of spirit possession? According to a Catholic exorcism manual:

Vehement aversion to God, the Most Holy Name of Jesus, the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Saints, the Church, the Word of God, sacred things and rites, especially sacramental ones, and from sacred images.ⁱ

Narcissists are often drawn to a superficial commitment to religion, for the sake of self-justification and camouflage. And they can then use a falsified version of religion as a weapon against their victims. This is a central issue in the New Testament: these are the hypocrites, the Pharisees.

For they bind heavy burdens that are grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not lift a finger to help them. (*Matthew 23:4*, WEB).

As a result, self-help groups have found that many melancholics have a fear of any reference to religion. Because they have been scapegoats, they are weighted down with false guilt. This puts them in a double bind. Not being themselves actually guilty of anything, they can never expiate that guilt or make amends. You cannot make amends for what you did not do. Guilt becomes part of their identity, like Ourson’s furred skin. They are likely to believe God hates them.

One adult child of alcoholics testifies, in ACA’s “Big Red Book”:

I struggled a lot with the Third Step because I had confused my violent and shaming father with God. I thought God was a super powerful being living in the far reaches of outer space, keeping score of all my bad thoughts and actions. I had a “getcha God” who I believed would “get me” for my imperfect behavior. I gave up on God and told people I was an agnostic because it sounded cool. I lived my life in an endless cycle of harmful relationships, lost jobs, and lost friends. I could never be a friend, actually. I stopped getting into relationships to stop the pain. I had no choice. I was compulsive and getting more out of control with each passing year.

When I came to ACA I saw the Third Step and wanted no part of God. I worked Step One and attended meetings. I tried to keep an open mind, but I was angry at God....ⁱⁱ

The Book of Consolation

And this is probably in large part what the hero legends and fairy tales exist to overcome. The tales approach spiritual matters circumspectly, provisionally; in a context of “just suppose.” It all happened long ago, in a land far away ...

“Fairy godmothers” appear at times of need, not God or angels. Ogres and dragons and sinister little men appear, not the Devil. Spiritual matters are thus handled delicately.

What we need, however, is a selection of such texts that has, as much as possible, not been altered to eliminate the harsh elements—as they all invariably have been, first by the Victorians, and more recently by Disney.

Then, we need to read them carefully; like parables, they are designed so that the true significance is not on the surface. They are designed to live in memory, so that, over time, new meanings can emerge.

They must also, as parables, be read carefully, without preconceptions: mindfully.

This, then, is the traditional path.

For these purposes, we need a key text, an annotated version of the original tales, with exercises pointing to issues raised. This is *The Book of Consolation*. At the same time, the language of the stories has been modernized and simplified so that older terms and phrasings are not a distraction.

The hero legends and fairy tales are consistent in suggesting that the first element of a cure is to move. This is Dymphna’s escape from the kingdom of Oriel, or the departure of the knight errant. This is the traditional pilgrimage to Gheel. This is the hero quest.

This makes sense given that “mental illness” is always at base transpersonal: it is groups, families, or societies that are ill, not individuals in solitude. So symptoms of depression and anxiety are probably tied to one’s current living situation. They are likely to get better if you escape; and escaping brings the clarity that allows you to sort it all out.

This is often, however, not possible.

The fairy tales are also designed for this contingency. They are mental escapes into the “green world,” the literary landscape, in which one’s present troubles are suspended for a time. As Scheherazade shows us, so long as a tale is being told, the axe blade cannot fall. And, through listening carefully to the tales, a final resolution can be found.

The Chivalric Order of the Knights and Demoiselles of St. Gerebernus and St. Dymphna

In their original setting, the fairy tales and hero legends were always group, not solitary, activities. They are listened to, not read. That naturally requires at least two people. There is Mother Goose, or the troubadour, or bard, and there is a surrounding audience. Some stories obviously expect audience participation.

This social element is likely to be critical. Depression and anxiety come from a diseased social experience, most often the family. This aspect, love, relationship, needs to be healed.

This explains the success, and the popularity, of the self-help movement.

Nevertheless, there is the aforementioned critical problem with AA or Adult Children of Alcoholics, or any group: how to prevent them from becoming just another diseased social environment, with members bullying others?

The website *Flying Monkeys Denied*, for survivors of narcissistic abuse, warns against self-help groups in these terms:

We seldom (if ever) suggest that people with C-PTSD [conditioned post-traumatic stress disorder; their term for what we are calling melancholia resulting from abuse] seek to join any form of peer support group or religious organization other than some place like Unity Church for a serious, mob and cult avoiding reason.

We highly advise avoiding group counseling sessions until you self-educate about Narcissistic Abuse and people with Cluster B personality disorders, as most people and therapists who are not trained to deal with advocating for victims tend to give victim shaming advice likely to endanger your psychology further.ⁱⁱⁱ

They go on:

Talking with people in closed forums online can be a help only — and we do mean ONLY — if the people you are taking advice from are SURVIVORS who understand C-PTSD and how to actually survive being targeted.^{iv}

ACA (Adult Children of Alcoholics and Dysfunctional Families) seems aware of the problem. They recommend members avoid forming romantic attachments within the group. “We suggest that newcomers to ACA stay out of romantic relationships since we need time to focus on ourselves. We are highly susceptible to unhealthy attachments which can divert us from focusing on ourselves.”^v

ACA, which seemed so promising as of the 1990s, has been steadily losing members in recent years, just as anxiety and depression have become more common. This suggests a fatal flaw—their model cannot overcome this problem. Sooner or later, every ACA group attracts at least one narcissistic abuser, and falls apart. We need a different approach, on different principles.

Accordingly, rather than relying on existing groups, we launch the Chivalric Order of the Knights and Demoiselles of St. Gerebernus and St. Dymphna.

There are several reasons for the fanciful name. One is to reflect our emphasis on fairy tales and hero legends. One is to present the experience of depression and anxiety in a properly heroic light, instead of seeing it as a crippling “illness.”

And one is triage: to attract only the true melancholics, and not the narcissists.

Triage

To summarize, there are two main conditions that can produce symptoms we call depression. We see them paralleled as Damon and Dymphna in the legend of the saint. Dymphna is suffering from an emotional betrayal: we may call her experience melancholia. Damon is someone for whom life is not living up to his inflated desires: a narcissist. Both are sorrowful. Yet these are opposite causes, and different treatments are required. For example, while anti-depressants may be a valuable relief for a melancholic, they may worsen narcissism, making it more virulent and malicious.

Similarly, both melancholics and narcissists are naturally drawn to alcoholism. But a melancholic, drunk, becomes friendlier. A narcissist, drunk, becomes more abusive.

And the one is dangerous to the other.

Because ACA addresses Adult Children of Alcoholics and Dysfunctional Families without distinguishing between these two conditions, it finds itself working with two openly contradictory “laundry lists” of personality traits needing to be addressed. For example, its original “Laundry List” says “We have an overdeveloped sense of responsibility and it is easier for us to be concerned with others rather than ourselves.” Its “Other Laundry List” says “We are irresponsible and self-centered. Our inflated sense of self-worth and self-importance prevents us from seeing our deficiencies and shortcomings.”

The first fits a melancholic. The second fits a narcissist. These are not the same person.

Objective symptoms are often the same. Nor can self-reported subjective symptoms be relied upon: narcissists are not good at telling the truth, including to themselves.

The emphasis on fairy tales and hero legends helps here too.

Fairy tales and hero legends appeal to melancholics; they do not appeal to narcissists.

The abused, as Ferenczi found, are empathic; they find it easy to put themselves in the glass slippers of an imaginary hero or heroine, and become engaged by the tales.

Narcissists will generally lack interest in the troubles of theoretical others. “People with NPD [narcissistic personality disorder] are totally lacking in the capacity to accurately recognize or empathize with other people’s feelings or needs.”^{vi} They will see it all as frivolous. What, after all, do other people have to do with them?

Based on her own experience of dealing with narcissists, a *Quora* participant writes: “Ask the prospect what kind of movies they like. If they say movies which involve empathy to understand, then that’s a negative to narcissism. If they say horror movies, action movies, or others that don’t involve empathy to understand, they’re still in the hunt.” Another *Quora* informant independently suggests, “Are they [the suspected narcissist] completely off-base when interpreting a painting, a movie, a novel, or some other work of art? Do they even have an interest in such things?”

Narcissists, therefore, will not be inclined to stick around in a group discussing and analyzing fairy tales or hero legends. If they do stick around, their inability to interpret or identify or live in the story should make them highly visible.

Jesus spoke in parables for the same reason.

He answered them, “To you it is given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, but it is not given to them. For whoever has, to him will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever doesn’t have, from him will be taken away even that which he has. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they don’t see, and hearing, they don’t hear, neither do they understand. (*Matthew* 13:10-13 WEB).

Narcissists are also vitally concerned with how they appear to others. They are likely to sneer at any group that calls itself something like “The Chivalric Order of the Knights and Demoiselles of St. Gerebernus and St. Dymphna.” It sounds childish.

The melancholic, by contrast, are characterized by retaining a child-like sense of wonder. They are “adult children.”

A fast food restaurant once found itself a preferred hangout for bikers, driving other customers away. What could they do?

They solved the problem by putting a more child-friendly music selection on their p.a. system.

Pilgrimage

If possible, physically leaving one’s current situation is still preferable.

This is the pilgrimage from which the pilgrims often do not return, the key to the remarkable success of the Gheel treatment.

Nor was the pilgrimage to Gheel unique. Burton, in *Anatomy of Melancholy*, lists a number of such pilgrimage sites for melancholics, known in his day:

The papists ... stiffly maintain how many melancholy, mad, demoniacal persons are daily cured at St. Anthony’s Church in Padua, at St. Vitus’ in Germany, by our Lady of Loretto in Italy, our Lady of Sichem in the Low Countries... They now do post to St. Anthony’s in Padua, or to St. Hilary’s at Poitiers in France. In a closet of that church, there is at this day St. Hilary’s bed to be seen, to which they bring all the madmen in the country, and after some prayers and other ceremonies, they lay them down there to sleep, and so they recover. They say the like of St. Tubery in another place. Giraldus Cambrensis ... tells strange stories of St. Ciricius’ staff, that would cure this and all other diseases. Read Lippomanus, or that golden legend of Jacobus de Voragine, you shall have infinite stories, or those new relations of our

Jesuits in Japan and China... Jasper Belga, a Jesuit, cured a mad woman by hanging St. John's gospel about her neck, and many such. Holy water did as much in Japan, &c. Nothing so familiar in their works, as such examples.^{vii}

Burton's list is not complete; for it does not include Gheel, just across the Channel, and in the 17th century still the best-known site in Europe specific to "mental illness."

Burton notes these reported cures, and moves on; as a Protestant in England, the option was closed to him. Protestants, he advises, should rely on Jesus Christ alone.

But to whom the shrine was dedicated may not have been the crucial factor. English Protestants had no pilgrimage sites to Jesus either. When the monasteries were closed, the traditional pilgrimages in England, most famously that to Canterbury, ceased. The age of melancholy as "mental illness" had begun.

Archaeological excavations sketch the picture. In medieval times, if you experienced symptoms we would today call mental illness, or chronic physical illness, you would make a pilgrimage to one of the shrines. Religious houses, and pious laity, would accommodate you as needed on your way.

This from a study of the old monasteries of Ireland:

Some penitents and those with chronic diseases were accommodated on a permanent basis, and it has been argued that a number of extant churches, such as Temple Ciarán, Clonmacnoise, and St Columba's, Kells, were originally foci for complexes associated with the care of the poor and the sick as well as with relics and ascetics.^{viii}

Virtually the same system of pilgrimage and retreat operated in South, East, and Southeast Asia, as ashrams at Hindu shrines and as Buddhist monasteries. In Muslim lands, Sufi monasteries and pilgrimages performed the same function.

If much depression is caused by present environment, a reconstructed system of retreat centres like these monasteries would be ideal. The change of venue is likely to cause an improvement.

Get Thee to a Nunnery

When, in the early 3rd century *Acts of Thomas*, the apostle to India conquers a dragon, "in the place where his venom was shed there came a great gulf, and that serpent was swallowed up therein. And the apostle said unto the king and his brother: take workmen and fill up that place, and lay foundations and build houses upon them, that it may be a dwelling-place for strangers."^{ix}

The famous French monastery of Mont St. Michel was founded in the 8th century, as the name memorializes, on the spot where St. Michael fought with a dragon. King Arthur also defeated a giant at the site.

Across the Channel in Cornwall, there is a second "St. Michael's Mount." Here too, St. Michael fought a dragon. And it is also here, according to tradition, that Jack the Giant Killer defeated the giant Cormoran. Here too a monastery was founded, and became a pilgrimage site.

Mount Athos, most famous monastery in Eastern Orthodoxy, is built on the burial site, according to legend, of a giant killed by Poseidon.

Monasteries sprang up in places where, by legend, there once had been a dragon battle.

Monasteries are places one goes to battle demons.

Dymphna and Gerebernus seek a monastic life in the woods near Gheel; a life of prayer and contemplation, away from the world. In the anchoress's cell, Dymphna's sister saints Juliana and Margaret defeat and chain their dragons. It is in a monastery that King Arthur's knights locate the Holy Grail.^x

One remembers Hamlet's advice to Ophelia: "Get thee to a nunnery."

Aside from ministering to afflicted adults, these monasteries might have been an escape for the abused child or adolescent—preventing the development of “mental illness” in the first place. The abused or abandoned adolescent could turn up at the monastery door and be taken in as a novice, escaping the dysfunctional family. The family itself might deposit an unwanted child at the monastery. After a spiritual education, perhaps also after learning a trade, they could choose to go.

Northern Europe lost this system in the Reformation. Even within Catholicism, it has mostly been abandoned.

Michel Foucault posits that this is because of the influence of the Reformation in Catholic as well as Protestant lands. It’s the “Protestant work ethic.” The original idea, Foucault suggests, that prompted the great secular asylums like Bedlam, was not to confine the insane for their own benefit, but a punishment for the poor.

“After Calvin and Luther,” Foucault writes, “poverty bore the marks of an immemorial punishment, and became, in the world of state-assisted charity, self-complacency and crime against the good order of the state. From being the object of a religious experience and sanctified, poverty became the object of a moral conception that condemned it. The great houses of confinement were a clear result of that evolution. They were indeed the secularisation of charity, but in obscure fashion they were also the moral punishment of poverty. By different paths, and not without considerable difficulty, Catholicism too arrived at analogous results.”^{xi}

Monasteries in general, with their vow of poverty and commitment to a life of prayer, naturally fell under this criticism. And so the monasteries went into decline.

Bedlam was itself a converted monastery; seized from the monastic Order of Knighthood of the Blessed Mary of Bethlehem, whose original mandate was to accommodate pilgrims.

And so, across Europe, if monasteries persisted, they grew irrelevant to the abused. Modern Catholic monasteries now actually test for and reject novices who show signs of “mental illness.” They no doubt fear having the secular world assert that monks are “mentally ill,” or loafers, or that religion is keeping people from getting “proper medical care,” or that they are “rejecting science.” The monastic vocation as orphanage, hospital and school has also been gradually shut down.

In losing their therapeutic function, the monasteries have also lost a feeder structure for novices. Few hear or think of them any more.

We might do well to re-create something like this structure.

If the system were in operation, sufferers might be back to being productive in good time, and be net contributors, instead of an ongoing burden, to society.

The old monasteries, after all, were self-sustaining. They became, over time, the largest landowners of Europe, wealthier than kings. And they did well at producing much of what is now European culture, including philosophy, science and technology—even military prowess, in orders like the Templars. Their residents, if they were largely abused children, would probably have been among the best and brightest in society, now free to do their best. They were, in fact, shut down largely because they were too successful. Their success generated envy and fear; others wanted their land and riches. Or owed them money.

Consider the possibilities of the North American wilderness. Canada is not short of solitude for spiritual retreats. With her dramatic change of seasons, Canada is not short of wilderness retreats that now go unused for most of the year, when tourists depart. Why not, then, scoop up the urban melancholics, and put them there during off-season, in rooms and cabins otherwise empty? Set these up as temporary monasteries. Proprietors might be glad of the deal, and host off-season residents for no more than welfare might cover, for six or even eight months at a time. For them, it would be a new revenue stream. Conceivably, the full year could be covered by shifting between summer and winter ski resorts. Even the travel between might be therapeutic—it is traditional for Buddhist monks to travel for a season of every year. Travel, Hamlet and Foucault remind us, clears the mind.

And for most, a few months might be sufficient.

The matter might be more difficult in other countries—but even the United Kingdom has relatively remote areas, like the Caledonian Forest to which Merlin retreated in legend when mad.

The development of such a system of retreats might be one core task of the Chivalric Order of St. Gerebernus and St. Dymphna.

The Rule

No doubt bad things happen in such places. It is almost considered criminal in Canada now to say anything good about the old religious Indian residential schools. There has been a similar rash of scandals in Southeast Asia involving Buddhist monasteries. Because such places attract the abused, they will naturally attract abusers—the same problem we have with self-help groups.

Readers may recall the “cult” scares of the Seventies and Eighties. Society became alarmed about the “Moonies,” the “Hare Krishnas,” the “Children of God,” and so on. These groups, the gener commonly warned, were kidnapping teenagers and brainwashing them.

The wide popularity of these groups among the young actually revealed a real need that they were meeting. Like the old monasteries, these “new religions” were a refuge for abused or rejected teenagers.

However, they were pretty effectively shut down by this concern about “brainwashing.”

And the social fear was reasonable. It is an obvious gambit for a narcissist to set up a pseudo-monastic community for the abused and suffering, and then control and manipulate them as badly as or worse than the families they have fled. The abused are especially vulnerable to being further victimized. This was certainly true of some groups at the time: Charlie Manson’s “family”; The People’s Temple; Heaven’s Gate.

Even if they are sometimes worse, “monasteries” of some sort would offer an advantage that families do not: if there are such places of retreat, and things go wrong in a family, the victim can escape to the monastery. If things go wrong in a monastery, the victim can escape to another monastery or back to the family. If there are only families, and no monasteries, the victim cannot escape.

However, there are also procedures that can be set in place, as with the self-help groups, that could prevent narcissists from becoming involved. Perhaps the problems come with the loss of the old feeder system.

To begin with, any new system should be staffed by those who have themselves come through the system—those who have themselves experienced depression and anxiety, and been helped by these techniques. Fellow melancholics best understand what melancholics are experiencing. They are natural empaths, expert at helping others. More importantly, contrary to some current psychology, those who have themselves been abused are less likely to abuse others.

“Monastery” literally means solitude. In the 13th century Rule of St. Albert, silence was enjoined from 9 pm (or 6 pm) to 6 am each day. Usually each monk has their individual cell. The Rule of St. Albert requires, “each one of you is to have a separate cell, situated as the lie of the land you propose to occupy may dictate, and allotted by disposition of the Prior with the agreement of the other brothers.”^{xiii}

One essential feature of truly abusive groups like the People’s Temple, often noted, is their fiercely communal nature. Invariably, solitude is forbidden. Everyone has to be in the company of at least one other group member at all times.

This is the opposite of the monastic practice.

This is the same way an abusive family operates. It forces the group consensus, the group delusion, on participants, never letting them think things through.

Regrettably, the rule of solitude was not followed at the Canadian Indian residential schools.

And there is another vital consideration. Enforced silence will keep narcissists out of the retreats.

It is the nature of a narcissist that he or she must be fed with the attention of those around them; they have “a constant need for admiration and attention.”^{xiii} This is sometimes called “narcissistic supply.”

Bryan Jamieson, psychologist, writes on *Quora*: “Narcissists need support 24/7. Emotionally, physically and financially. They simply cannot function without people being at their beck and call.”

Narcissists need people. Period. The worst punishment for them, far greater than being belittled and embarrassed in front of a whole lot of people or publicly or on TV (and they hate that like no one else) is for a narcissist to be locked in solitary confinement and given enough food for a year with 0% human contact and no cameras monitoring them. ... Without human beings to feed off of— through abuse or/and admiration— a narcissist will physically die or kill themselves. Without people to serve them or to use and abuse or to get recognition and some kind of admiration from, a narcissist is scientifically unable to survive.^{xiv}

Narcissists therefore cannot tolerate peace and quiet: “They’re agitated, or happy, or sad, always something, but not calm.” Isaiah is perhaps referring to this when he says:

*But the wicked are like the troubled sea;
for it can't rest and its waters cast up mire and mud.
“There is no peace,” says my God,
“for the wicked.”* (Isaiah 57: 20-21, WEB)

This is the passage usually quoted as “no rest for the wicked.”

The narcissist will therefore fear solitude. He will fear “abandonment.” That leaves him alone with his conscience. He needs an Echo.

A craving for solitude, conversely, marks the melancholic.

To find out which is which, require them each to spend some time alone.

Lessons from the Cloister

A Catholic or a Buddhist monastery follows a similar pattern, and this gives us warrant to see here a tried and tested treatment.

A portion of each day is spent in solitary study, meditation, and prayer.

There are regular sessions of chanting and group recitation.

There is listening to scripture, often during a shared meal.

Participants give their personal reflections—like an AA or ACA meeting with their readings.

Evening ends with *compline*, which includes an examination of conscience.

There is also work to be done. There are firstly the daily chores required in any household.

While many monasteries had large land holdings, the land was generally farmed by laypeople, not monks. The labour of monks tended instead to be either some form of scholarship, craftsmanship or the making of art: painting icons, illuminating manuscripts, mixing medicines, brewing, distilling, baking.

Learning to develop such a daily routine sounds therapeutic for the depressed, who often struggle to look after themselves. *Grow International*, the Australia-based self-help group, gives their Seventh Step as: “We took care and control of our bodies.” Joe Di Lillo, a “survivor” of depression, urges on *Quora* the importance of establishing a daily routine. The regularity is soothing, and it frees the mind for contemplation.

This can serve as our guide for eventual retreats; and, in the meantime, as a guide for the elements of a self-help meeting.

1. The reading, generally a hero legend or fairy tale, should be available for private study in advance of the meeting.
2. The passage should be read aloud at the meeting.
3. This should be followed by personal sharing.
4. Each meeting should include some communal singing or recitation.
5. Each evening, in privacy, participants should perform an examination of conscience.

Unsurprisingly, this seems to follow in large part what has worked for the various Twelve-Step groups.

Useful additions, if possible, seem to be the sharing of some food or drink in silence, and some work with hands. These may be difficult to fit into the framework of a meeting, but better suited to a retreat.

Art Therapy

In *King Lear*, Gloucester's depression is lifted by acting out a little drama, in which he thinks he is jumping off the Cliffs of Dover. Acting also seems to keep his son Edgar sane: acting the part of Tom o'Bedlam. Australia's Wawalag sisters, the Iroquois False Face Society, and many other shamanic societies, similarly use performance to drive away evil spirits—what we call “mental illness.”

In either local groups or retreat centres, art therapy should therefore be part of the mix. Hence, at least, communal singing.

There is not a great deal of support from modern medicine for the therapeutic effects of art therapy. In a 2010 survey of the literature, Heather Stuckey and Jeremy Nobel conclude that “although there is evidence that art-based interventions are effective in reducing adverse physiological and psychological outcomes, the extent to which these interventions enhance health status is largely unknown.”^{xv} It is not that studies have been done and have not found benefits: every study Stuckey and Nobel examine seems to show benefits. It is that few such studies have been conducted, fewer with the rigour and discrimination that is required. Art therapy does not fit the medical model. It is not something that doctors are qualified to do.

But Carl Jung, the celebrated psychotherapist, found art essential to his own mental health.

In 1918-19 I was in Chateau d'Oex as Commandant de la Région Anglaise des Internés de Guerre. While I was there I sketched every morning in a notebook a small circular drawing, a mandala, which seemed to correspond to my inner situation at the time. With the help of these drawings I could observe my psychic transformations from day to day.^{xvi}

This got him through a period in which he thought he was going mad.

Art was part of the life of a monastery: not just statues, paintings, architecture, sacred music, and stained glass, but making icons, illuminating manuscripts, choral chanting.

The common modern notion is that art is “self-expression.” The patient is supposedly able, through art, to express repressed emotions, or remember painful experiences, which she can then discuss with the therapist.

This fits the Freudian theory.

But it seems on the model of the monastery to be wrong. It is also wrong on Keat's theory of “negative capability.” As Keats sees it, the essential trick of art is to make the self disappear.

A Korean Buddhist temple artist once explained to me the training required: first one traces an image a thousand times; then one draws it freehand a thousand times, to the satisfaction of a mentor; then one reproduces it a thousand

times without the model. Then one is permitted to draw it publicly. Colours and lines are all prescribed. Self-expression is prohibited.

So too with Gregorian chant, or choral recitation.

Art is not self-expression. Much if not most art is the opposite of self-expression: when an actor takes on a role, he must forget himself, and become someone else. When an author tells a story, he must think not as himself, but as his character.

Even improvisational art like jazz is not self-expression. Michelangelo saw his task as to liberate the image already present in the block of marble. One is not expressing oneself through the music, but expressing the music through oneself.

And the art either found or generated in monasteries is pretty emphatically not self-expression.

The same is true of hero legends and fairy tales. Both are highly formulaic forms, so that the same elements can be found in virtually every story and virtually world-wide.

Art that is therapeutic is not “free expression,” but directed meditation. It is not self-expression, but the expression of transcendent Beauty. It is an attempt to establish contact with what is eternal and true.

The Vow

What, in detail, is the spiritual task?

It is important for the depressive to keep in view a set of specific goals. Direction is essential to escaping this maze.

Hence the familiar tradition of the “Twelve Steps,” inherited from Alcoholics Anonymous and common to most self-help programs.

Accordingly, we propose this adaptation of a twelve-step vow:

1. We recognize that there is something clearly wrong in our lives.

This may involve a diagnosis of depression or anxiety disorder or the like. But psychiatric diagnoses are not reliable, come with a social stigma, and there is no reason to need a diagnosis. Self-evaluation is most meaningful.

This is the equivalent of assent to the Buddha’s first Noble Truth: existence is *dukkha*, “ill-being.” Or to Jesus’s summons in Matthew: “Come to me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened” (*Matthew 11: 28*).

2. We come to an appreciation that this may not be our fault, but the influence of our childhood or present environment.

This is the opposite of the AA approach, and more relevant for depressives. The usual problem for abused melancholics is not that they have done wrong and refuse to admit it, as AA assumes is commonly true for alcoholics, but that they believe themselves guilty of more than they are.

Tony A., co-founder of Adult Children of Alcoholics/Dysfunctional Families, recommended as their step 5: “We admitted to our Higher Power, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our childhood abandonment.” His suggestions for the Twelve Steps were not accepted by that group; they stayed with something closer to the original Alcoholics Anonymous Steps. This is, I think, an example of how trying to serve both narcissists and victims in the same group leaves it working at cross purposes.

3. We dedicate ourselves to fearlessly seek the Truth and the Right.

This is equivalent to AA’s step 3: “Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.”

By referring to transcendental values, rather than a personal God, we hope to avoid both being unnecessarily specific and triggering the fear of God felt initially by so many melancholics. We also ideally prevent anyone substituting idolatries like “the group” or “normalcy” or “the social consensus” as their “Higher Power.” We feel such substitutes are counter-productive over the longer term.

For any Christian or monotheist, the Truth and the Right will equate to God. But that need not be our concern.

For the abused and depressive, AA, ACA, and the fairy tales all advise, this step is essential. The narcissist parent will have done everything to obscure these things. And they are the grounding the melancholic needs in order to re-establish their life and their sense of self.

4. We humbly appeal to all existing entities who share these values, including those here present, to help us in this quest.

This is intended as a tactfully ambiguous appeal to spiritual as well as other human beings, without forcing any participant to accept the existence of the former. But without leaving the cosmos impassive and impersonal, as the appeal to transcendent values alone might.

We have the testimony of the hero legends and the various “Twelve Step” groups that the hero or heroine never does it on their own; they always have assistance in some way either from other humans, or from the spirit realm. You cannot pull yourself up by your bootstraps.

It also seems also important to show humility. One must not make demands of either your fellows or the spirit world. Others must never be a means, but an end.

Tony A.’s proposed step 11 for Adult Children of Alcoholics/Dysfunctional Families is similar but more clearly religious:

“We seek through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with our Higher Power, praying only for knowledge of its will for us and the power to carry it out.”

Some groups might prefer to insert it here. Others may find that its explicitly religious character upsets some members.

5. We resolve to stay alert and mindful, here and in the rest of our lives.

This is the call for true mindfulness. “And in the rest of our lives” will, one hopes, counter any misunderstanding that this mindfulness is simply close attention to the present moment and to immediate sense perceptions.

Such true mindfulness seems to be largely what the legends and fairy tales are meant to teach: we must develop the habit to look and listen carefully, not taking things at face value. We must be, to use the New Testament phrase, “wise as serpents, but innocent as doves.”

Most immediately, we must fully engage with the story; for according to the stories themselves, this imaginary exercise, in as much vivid detail as possible, itself dispels the demons.

At the same time, we must strive to see beneath the surface of things; in observing details, we are able to question details. This is an essential skill in parrying the lunges of a dragon, one’s oppressive inner voice, or the habitual lies of a narcissist. It is almost impossible to lie seamlessly.

Using the powers of analysis developed from this close reading of the hero legends and fairy tales, as well as the specific insights gained, and applying them to one’s relationships or childhood memories or negative thoughts, one can reveal the patterns of abuse and the lies on which they are based.

The approach of an abuser will always be devious. What is really being said? What is intended? What is the reality being obscured? Does all this make sense?

The depressive must examine and come to understand the mechanisms of abuse that have been used against him or her. She must, as *Flying Monkeys Denied* advises, seek to understand in detail how narcissism works.

If s/he can, s/he will be proof against the attack when the dragon next attacks.

6. We resolve never to give up the fight for Truth and Right, for the sake of any brief or transitory pleasure.

Grow International's step 6 is similar: "We endured until cured." This is to remind us of the danger of acedia. If we can keep our resolve, victory is assured.

St. Athanasius reports this passage from a sermon of St. Anthony of the Desert to novice monks:

Doubtless they [demons] appear; but in a moment disappear again, hurting none of the faithful, but bringing with them the likeness of that fire which is about to receive themselves. Wherefore it is unfitting that we should fear them on account of these things; for through the grace of Christ all their practices are in vain. ... Let us not be deceived by them who do all things in deceit, even though they threaten death. For they are weak and can do nought but threaten.^{xvii}

This vow also reminds us that we must stay on our guard against false community and false love. We must avoid with special care new abusive or purely physical relationships.

7. We daily take moral inventory, assigning blame where it belongs. We will not blame others for our sins, and will not blame ourselves for theirs.

This is AA step 4: "Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves." But the AA steps end with the personal, with repentance and making amends. The melancholic, already overburdened with guilt, can be caught by this in an endless cycle. They repent, they make amends. They feel no better. They repent again, they make more amends. They feel no better. They may even feel worse; because now they feel guilt for lying about their guilt when they were not guilty. They are locked in their assigned role as scapegoat forever.

They must instead assign the blame where it belongs. They must face the lion, which is their personal conscience, and face the dragon, objective evil; and see that the dragon is from without, and not a part of them.

Tony A. proposed this 10th step for Adult Children of Alcoholics/Dysfunctional Families: "We continued to take personal inventory and to love and approve of ourselves."

This seems less than ideal, because we must also feel such love is deserved.

8. If we become aware that we have done wrong, we admit the fault, and seek to make amends.

This covers five of the Twelve Steps of Adult Children of Alcoholics. Although reasonable for alcoholics, this places too much emphasis on repentance for melancholics. The typical depressive is far more sinned against than sinning. Still, getting his or her own moral household in good order is essential. Unless the abused can assure himself that he is on solid ethical ground, the abuser or inner voice can always counterattack, convincing him once again that he is the one in the wrong. Or seducing him to further wrong.

The Catholic protocol for exorcism seems to confirm this by specifying that the exorcist must be of good moral character. The 1964 edition of the *Rituale Romanum* says the exorcist:

"must be properly distinguished for his piety, prudence, and integrity of life. He should fulfill this devout undertaking in all constancy and humility, being utterly immune to any striving for human aggrandizement, and relying, not on his own, but on the divine power. Moreover, he ought to be of mature years, and revered not alone for his office but for his moral qualities."^{xviii}

The *Code of Canon Law* says the exorcist must be “endowed with piety, knowledge, prudence and integrity of life.”^{xxix}

This is striking, because it is not a requirement for any of the Catholic sacraments; the moral character of a celebrant is never relevant.

Muslim manuals for exorcism assert the same: anyone seeking to cast out demons must be “aware and pious, outwardly and inwardly righteous.”^{xxx} If the exorcist is aware of any sin in himself, “the evil Jinn may gain control over him.”^{xxxi}

Shamanic traditions suggest the same. Truman Michelson explains that, for the Ojibwa, “The way to the spirit-world is beset with obstacles of various sorts. The ease or the difficulty of overcoming them depends on the character of the past life of the individual. If he has been careful in all religious observances, the passage of his soul will be easier than the soul of one who has not been so careful.”^{xxxi}

9. We renounce revenge.

Anger is a danger here. It would give the dragon his final weapon with which to defeat us: he will blame us for that anger. And enjoy the attention we are giving him.

10. Neither do we excuse wrong. We condemn the wrong and call it out by name.

The Scylla to that Charybdis is a demand to unconditionally forgive. This cannot work. This leaves the abusive relationship, or the inversion of values that leads to depression, intact. If a relationship with a narcissist continues, it is cruel to the narcissist: it is like handing an alcoholic another drink. It leaves him or her in thrall to the narcissism.

There is a fable from Aesop that captures the problem of dealing with such a reptile spirit.

One winter a Farmer found a Snake stiff and frozen with cold. He had compassion on it, and taking it up, placed it in his bosom. The snake was quickly revived by the warmth, and resuming its natural instincts, bit its benefactor, inflicting on him a mortal wound. “Oh,” cried the Farmer with his last breath, “I am rightly served for pitying a scoundrel.”

Julia Hall writes, at the *Narcissist Family Files*, “feeling sorry for the narcissist is an invitation to being abused and victimized—idealized, devalued, and rejected; or, worse, agonizingly anchored.”^{xxxi}

This explains once again why it is important to believe in dragons. The abuser must be seen as a human soul; we cannot succumb to hate. But we must allow the sin no quarter. Accordingly, it is most useful to think of the person as possessed by an evil spirit, more or less as an alcoholic is captive to the bottle. It is the serpent vice you are fighting.

A famous passage from *Ephesians* strikes the same note:

For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world’s rulers of the darkness of this age, and against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. (*Ephesians* 6:11-12; WEB)

Put another way, it is not enough for the depressive melancholic to believe in some “Higher Power.” They must believe in the Devil too.

11. We vow to show authentic love of others.

Show, not feel; love is not just a feeling, and must not be confused with an involuntary emotion. It is a discipline. It is under our conscious control. “And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands” (2 *John* 5-6, NIV).

“Authentic” is specified, because there are false loves. Authentic love is not a narcissistic desire to own another; nor lust masquerading as love. Authentic love must not pamper, improperly favour, or ignore sin. Selfless or true love means treating the other as is in their best interests; which also means, as their actions merit.

A lack of authentic love is the original cause of depression and melancholy. Depressives need this to find their footing.

12. Whatever we discover of the Truth and Right, we bring to others in love.

This is similar to ACA’s step 12, which reads in part “we tried to carry this message to others who still suffer.”

This might sound like no more than a group seeking to perpetuate itself, to increase its membership. But there is something deeper here. No one can love in isolation, and therefore no one can love without such loving acts.

We see in the legends too, it is such loving acts that ultimately bring the cure. Each of us must rescue one another.

ⁱ *De Exorcismis*, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004, No. 16.

ⁱⁱ Adult Children of Alcoholics, *Big Red Book*, p. 141.

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://flyingmonkeysdenied.com/2017/02/10/a-letter-to-every-narcissistic-abuse-victim-seeking-to-join-support-groups/>, retrieved May 22, 018.

^{iv} *Ibid.*

^v Adult Children of Alcoholics, *Big Red Book*, p. 51.

^{vi} Ginger Blume, *Beware of a Narcissist in Your Midst*, 2007, p. 3.

^{vii} Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Part 2, Section 1, Member 3, Question 1.

^{viii} Tomás Ó’Carragáin, “Is there an archaeology of lay people at early Irish monasteries?” *Bucema* 8 : 2015

^{ix} *Acts of Thomas*, Act 3, verse 33.

^x Some say the grail was kept at Glastonbury Abbey; some suggest a monastery in the Pyrenees; some say Montserrat Abbey.

^{xi} Michel Foucault, *History of Madness*, London: Routledge, 2006, p. 57.

^{xii} *Rule of St. Albert*, article 6.

^{xiii} Ginger Blume, *Beware of a Narcissist in Your Midst*, 2007, p. 2.

^{xiv} Asher Arendale, on *Quora*.

^{xv} Heather Stuckey, Jeremy Nobel. “The Connection between Art, Healing, and Public Health: A Review of Current Literature.” *American Journal of Public Health* 100:2, 2010: pp. 254–263.

^{xvi} Carl Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, NY: Vintage, 1955, p. 28.

^{xvii} St. Athanasius, *Life of St. Anthony*, Chs. 24, 27.

^{xviii} *The Roman Ritual*, 1964, Weller, trans.

^{xix} *The Code of Canon Law*, Pasay City, Philippines: Paulines Publishing House, 1983, Canon 1172.2.

^{xx} Abu’l-Mundhir Khaleel Ameen, *The Jinn and Human Sickness*, Riyadh: Darussalam, 2005, p. 90.

^{xxi} Ibn Taymiyah, *The Jinn*, Abu Ameenah Philips, trans., Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House, 2007, p. 80.

^{xxii} William Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 514.

^{xxiii} Julie L. Hall, *The Narcissist Family Files*, <http://www.juliahall.com/category/the-narcissist-family-files/>, Retrieved July 8, 2018.