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The Addictive Experience

(Freedom and dependency in Christian theology and practice and its relatedness to addictive behaviour)

No' her withooten shape, wha's name is Daith,
No' Him, unkennable abies to faith

- God whom, gin e'er He saw a man 'ud be
E'en mair dumfooner'd at the sicht than he

- But Him, whom nocht in man or Deity
Or Daith or Dreid or Laneliness can touch

Wha's deed owre often and has seen owre much.

(from 'A Drunk Man looks at the Thistle'
Hugh MacDiarmid : 1926)

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the nature of the relationship between freedom and dependency, both in a theological sense and as part of the human experience.

It uses the pattern of addictive behaviour, as experienced by someone who has a problem of alcohol dependency, to highlight some of the issues facing the contemporary church in the modern culture. It seeks to illustrate that many of the dilemmas facing Christian theology and practice in society are the results of a self-made pathology which finds many parallels in the very topical problem of addiction.

Finally, it looks forward to a more creative, less compulsed theology and practice, more appropriate as a counter to an increasingly achievement driven and materialistic culture.

Introduction

In the last ten years contemporary society has come to identify drug addiction as one of its principal social problems. The abuse of illegal drugs has, it is claimed, led to increased crime, domestic breakdown and early mortality. While these claims are undoubtedly true, in that they are provable, they do not reflect the wider and much more complex picture.

Of the many analyses of 'the drug problem' the most radical would set it within a continuum of drug use by a society which is itself, and in the widest sense, addictive. The **abuse** is only an extreme of the **use**. This is most clearly demonstrated in for example, the abuse of the drug Temazepam, a much publicised and demonised favourite of the young and the poor. Temazepam however, is also a much prescribed (in fact, **the most prescribed**) drug in Britain, widely and commonly used as the simple sleeping pill. One insight therefore is that ours is a society which on the whole requires a 'fix' of some kind. Whether it is in order to sleep, to enjoy, to wake up, to relax or to take courage.

Most of the 'drugs' we use in order to fortify or console ourselves maybe quite harmless in themselves. It may only require the essential cup of coffee to get us going in the morning or the much needed night-cap to help us sleep. But the essence and the need are at the heart of our addictive behaviour, much more than the substance itself. It is the nature of our relationship with it that makes the difference between a harmless indulgence and a debilitating dependency.

The 'drug problem' therefore needs to be seen within the context of our whole culture of behaviour, our understanding of free choice and human need, our experience of powerlessness over against the pressures upon us to succeed, and perhaps most of all, our many traditions of the use and abuse of substances in helping us to cope with reality.

Despite the often over-hyped publicity surrounding the modern 'drug problem' it is still the older and less glamorous abuse of alcohol which causes more deaths, more crime, and more domestic and social unrest than that of any banned substance. With one of the highest alcoholism rates in Europe, Scotland has long lived with the stigma and the humour of the 'drunken Scot'. It remains our single biggest addiction problem. This fact and its historic and

tense relationship with religion in our culture, makes it the best example of addictive behaviour with which to illustrate the object of this thesis.

That object is to demonstrate three things. Firstly, that many of our modern addictions are replacing older out--worn ones, and that among these is the belief in and practice of religious expression. Namely, that as materialistic 'freedom of choice' has increased for the majority of people as government has provided more and more in the way of social welfare and as successive generations have found that freedom lies as much in the rejecting of what has gone before as in the choosing of what will be, the church has found itself increasingly marginalised: the purveyor of a 'substance' - ritualised religious expression - less and less likely to be chosen from among the more interesting and attractive 'fixes' on offer. This is partly the fault of the church itself since it has consistently participated in the very dominations and restrictions which people now feel free to reject. Socially, politically and morally the church has so often aligned itself with the culture of control and oppression that new generations reject it as never being likely to represent freedom, celebration or affirmation, and look elsewhere even for their spiritual 'fix'.

Secondly, that the patterns of behaviour endemic to a problem like that of alcohol abuse have a great deal to teach us about the human need for both freedom and dependency, their inter-related role in keeping us balanced and whole people, and the inevitable destruction when one becomes exaggerated at the expense of the other. Here again the church plays an ambiguous role. On the one hand offering people the ultimate in freedom and on the other often assuring them of their inadequacy or failure. A dual message almost guaranteed to result in pathology of some kind if it is absorbed and encouraged, creating a dependency only it can continue to fill. A classic a addiction problem.

Thirdly, that as with the dependent alcoholic or drug user, there is hope if we
a) recognise the problem
b) seek to return to the appropriate balance of interdependency with one another and with a God who interacts. The Christian church's programme of recovery, like that of the alcoholic, may involve us in some painful disillusions with regard to our importance and centrality, our idealised aspirations and our need for recognition.

Honest self-discovery is often the most difficult step in the move from compulsive addictive behaviour to open, appropriate, positive encounter. In making it, what the church needs to

discover as much as the addicted individual, is a simple sense of self-enjoyment and acceptance, of welcome and a celebratory kind of purposelessness. Thus countering the culture of the useful versus the useless, the employed versus the unemployed, the needed and the needy.

Chapter One

The Theology of Christian Freedom

" If you continue in my word you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

(John 8: 31-32. RSV)

According to the above statement, truth is a revealed meaning discovered through the living out of a particular experience, namely that of the historical and existential teaching of Jesus. The apprehension of this truth has nothing to do with a factual knowledge or a literal comprehension of language but is a perception of the nature of human life which brings with it an experience of liberation. The Church as historical keeper and interpreter of this 'word' understands itself to be the expression, embodiment and proclaimer of Christian freedom, yet there are questions as to whether such an understanding is an accurate reflection of reality or a correct interpretation of the words of St. John's gospel.

Arguably it is neither. There are many, within the Church and without, who would contend that the church is too deeply enmeshed in a web, woven by its own history, which has entwined its structures and attitudes with the very economic, social and political forces which, at least on a world scale, stifle and inhibit the human search for freedom. An argument offered most recently by the former Bishop of Durham, Dr. David Jenkins:

" The preoccupation of the church is, in practice, the church and not visibly either God or the world. Further, church history contains far too many instances of intolerance, cruelty and power mongering. " (1)

Jenkins, among others, goes on to suggest that if people are to be free they must be able critically to confront and to grasp the roots of their alienation, both personal and communal. Far from enabling people in this process, Christian preaching and worship are often simplistic reflections of the same social and moral values which may be contributing to human alienation and oppression. This is most evidently true in those societies where the church is clearly aligned with a political order of repression and domination. The Central American countries of El Salvador and Nicaragua saw, in the early 1980s, just this

kind of polarisation as the institutional Roman Catholic church was increasingly perceived to be the legitimising social arm of oppressive and often violent government. A dissenting rebel movement within the church grew out of this situation to be the popular religious expression of the people's desire for freedom from this domination. Similar movements have taken place historically and globally. This one is notable for becoming the cradle of what we now know as Liberation Theology.

There is much that can be said about such examples but the important point here is to underline the part which the life of the church often plays in consolidating and upholding the norms and values which contribute to internally experienced and externally perceived human alienation and oppression.

Furthermore, such a role is not confined to the extreme political injustices of other cultures. In a liberal democracy like that of the United Kingdom the role of the church may be altogether more subtle and more marginal. Yet it is not difficult to see, as we consider the way in which for example, a conventional view of sexuality is used to limit the self-expression (and therefore self-acceptance) of those who deviate from it, or the way in which the philosophy of the work ethic announces inadequacy to the unemployed, how the expression the church gives to its understanding of the nature of this freedom-giving 'truth' can and often does further contribute to the social and/or political restrictions placed on supposedly free citizens. Not to mention the pastoral, psychological and emotional damage done when freedom to believe in and express one's inherent goodness is denied.

Even, in our Scottish culture, where the theological expression of pastoral care and worship may go some way towards challenging this, the structure and form of worship across the major denominations for the most part affirms it. A great deal may be written and spoken about the ministry of the whole people of God yet our symbolic message to the community is still one of clericalism. Much can be done and is done to overcome the prejudice that church is only for the already respectable and acceptable yet we still lament the absence in our churches of the young, the poor and we are often challenged into asking how comfortable the disabled or the mentally and emotionally disturbed are made to feel. In other words, this argument contends, the church is at least as guilty of masking rather than expressing, frustrating rather than embodying, denying rather than proclaiming human

freedom, both for the individual and the community.

Nevertheless, another Christian and non-Christian view would state that the church is, indeed an, if not 'the' agent of human liberation. The freedom of which the gospel speaks, it would argue, is interior, religious, spiritual and of this freedom the church continues to be both an expression and an embodiment. It is tempting to generalise and to suggest that one of the most fundamental lines of division separating Christian theology is drawn between these two answers. But it is impossible to know whether the original assertion is true or false, and in what sense and within what limits, unless we know what that assertion means. Our initial task therefore, is to attempt to throw some light on what it might mean for the church to express, embody and proclaim human freedom, and what is the nature of that freedom itself.

i) Biblical and Historical Roots

What do we mean by 'human freedom' ? John Robinson remarked some years ago that if we try to 'net' the concept of freedom ...

"... in the categories of discursive knowledge, let alone capture it in a verbal definition, it slips through our fingers and we end up, as deterministic philosophies do, by concluding that it does not exist." (2)

Let us therefore shift the emphasis and ask what we mean by Christian freedom, 'we' being the community of Christian faith and worship, the church. And since that community is made up of women and men, in asking about human freedom, we make it Christian because we seek to interpret its nature and ours in the light of the gospel. In other words there cannot be two kinds of freedom - human and Christian. Rather Christian freedom is a particular route to, interpretation and expression of human freedom. (Some in the church would claim that it is the only way to and expression of human freedom, but that distinction has been already acknowledged and is not directly relevant here.) The question remains however as to what distinctive contribution we can make as Christians to the expression and embodiment of this one human freedom.

When, in our search for the receiving of freedom we turn to the scriptures, we find ourselves caught up in some complex problems. We find, for example, that the words 'free' and 'freedom' are almost always used, in Pauline literature, only in a theological sense quite different from that of the Hebrew scriptures and more closely reflective of secular culture. The standard word for 'freedom' throughout the New Testament is 'eleutheria', appearing mainly in Paul's writing but also in James and in 1 and 2 Peter. Paradoxically however, within Greek thought the primary understanding of freedom was in a political sense. In Aristotle, 'eleutheria' is an essential right granted and protected by the state, and it is important to note that there is a significant discussion both of freedom and law within the New Testament, mainly within the Pauline letters. For Paul however, freedom comes from possession of the spirit, not from the following of the law. Paul took an essentially political idea, the basic right to freedom which a democracy ought to ensure, placed it in a theological context and gave it a spiritual, almost ethereal, interpretation. *(3)*

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that the 'right' to freedom is interpreted in a limited way. Only rarely, for example, did people challenge the received notion that there was a difference in nature between slaves and those born free. The manumission of a slave did not give full rights of citizenship and only those who were born free were considered to be truly free. There was no obligation to ensure the rights of freedom for those who did not possess full citizenship.

This, however, was not an uncontentious issue and an educated slave like Epictetus engages in his discourses in a lengthy discussion about the meaning of freedom and slavery. He expresses the opinion that freedom is an attitude of the mind and not a physical state, though such thinking was clearly not reflected in the legal status of people. *(4)*

This socio-political distinction between slavery and freedom appears in the New Testament mainly, as we have said, in the letters of Paul but there is a significant development of the term 'eleutheria' in John Chapter 8. Here the Jewish antipathy to slavery is taken up as a theme. Freedom was seen by the Jews both as a literal status (ie. not slavery) and as a metaphorical religious term (ie. they were unlike the gentiles in not being enslaved to superstition, sinful practice and the worship of false Gods.) *(5)*

In the synoptic gospels there is very little direct talk of freedom but much more reference is made to themes of 'binding' and 'loosing' of being in subjection and of being released. It is only therefore in the more theologically developed writing of the New Testament that the explicit theme of freedom is discussed and in these discussions the influence of the cultural understandings of the term is in evidence. There is in addition an interesting and distinct difference between the synoptic gospels on the one hand, and John and Paul on the other, in the way in which they treat the theme of captivity and release. The vocabulary of Paul and John centres on notions drawn from Greek influence over the nature of the relationship between slavery and freedom, while Mark and Luke in particular are more at home within a Semitic thought world in which there are literal powers vying for control over human lives and where freedom is a release from the power of these forces. *(6)* We shall return to some of the implications of this difference at a later stage but for the moment it is sufficient to notice a pattern in which John and Paul move towards more figurative speech while the synoptics see the struggle between the binding forces and liberating powers in much more concrete terms.

Among the biblical concepts whose range of meaning most closely corresponds to the modern understanding of 'freedom' and 'liberation', that of 'salvation' is of particular interest. The Hebrew root whose derivations are usually translated as 'salvation' seems to refer to "the possession of space and the freedom and security which is gained by the removal of constriction." *(7)* Hence in the pre-exilic period the concept of salvation is that of military victory and of rescue and liberation from any trouble from foreign domination, from poverty, from illness. After the exile an increasing emphasis on the future and a deepening messianic hope gave a new note to the concept. It now acquired overtones of totally unshakable, ever-lasting victory and liberation for God's people. Thus the concept of salvation approaches the idea of liberation from all evil, collective and personal, and acquisition of complete security and peace.

In exploring the influence of Christian freedom upon human freedom it is of fundamental importance to note in what sense the biblical concepts of salvation and freedom are theological concepts. They are theological not in the sense that they refer to problems and experiences other than those of day to day human historical existence, but in the sense that all liberation from evil, collective or individual, present or future, is ascribed to the activity

of God.

In the New Testament this is as true as it is of the range of the nuance of meaning in the Hebrew scriptures. The range is retained, but here, under the influence of the Greek language chosen to express the concepts, 'salvation' acquires new overtones of liberation, well-being, wholeness. There is, in contrast to the Hebrew sense, a marked concentration, particularly as we have seen with regard to John and Paul, on the individual, interior aspects of salvation. However there is every indication that these are shifts in emphasis rather than a rejection of the broader frame of reference which characterises the Hebrew context. Even in its Johanine and Pauline usage the concept of salvation still retains the resonances acquired over its long history. It is therefore crucial to note that the Christian concept of freedom in salvation is a theological concept in the sense that it embraces the whole of life as created by God.

ii) The Human Search

Given this theological understanding of the nature of freedom in biblical terms, we now come to a question touched on earlier, namely, what distinctive contribution might the church be expected to make to the issue of human freedom.

Peter Berger has argued that the basic concern which animates human beings in their search for life and fulfilment is the quest for emancipation. Human beings seek liberation from everything which limits, constricts and oppresses them. Human history is the history of the search for freedom. This search, according to Berger is expressed in three ways. It finds expression in the quest for control over the environment, in attempts by people to situate themselves within the linguistic, cultural tradition that surrounds them, and in people's search for wholeness, identity, meaning in a world of complexity and insecurity. *(8)*

If, as we have seen, the Christian understanding of freedom is principally historical and theological, then of the three aspects of the human search for freedom outlined by Berger, we ought to be most concerned with the second and third. As an historical and linguistic people, a people constituted by the language and tradition it has inherited, the church seeks

to liberate itself from restrictions which the past has imposed upon the present, by seeking to reinterpret in each generation the message which gave it birth. In so far as it succeeds it may find a voice that can address the experience of each generation in each culture. The Christian community therefore is a community which in its ideal state is constantly endeavouring to find a vocabulary that will liberate it from mere nostalgia and the confines of the past, while continuing to give meaningful expression to a message it believes to be timeless. This corresponds helpfully with Berger's second manifestation of the human search for freedom in as much as the church (and by implication the influence of the Christian tradition on morality, social, political institutions etc.) is both one strand of the 'linguistic, cultural tradition' and one of the means by which it is challenged and reinterpreted. In other words, while the church is naturally and properly concerned with establishing human freedom through work, through economic and political development, through social change it is also concerned with the personal freedom from neurosis, from brutality, from abuse, from domination and harmful dependence, and beyond this, with eschatological freedom in God. As such the church will be critical of attempts to reduce the quest for freedom to one particular dimension. Therefore, on one hand for example, the church proclaims a person's need to work in the pursuit of self-fulfilment, while on the other it will proclaim that we do not live by bread alone. Both statements carry equal value as part of the church's responsibility in the search for and embodiment of the values of human freedom.

Since the social, cultural and political climate in which we find ourselves has a critical bearing, in both historical/biblical and contemporary terms, on our interpretation of the place and meaning of freedom, it is here that we must begin to explore the nature of the church's role in the realisation and proclamation of human freedom. The modern social, political and economic issues of which we find ourselves a part clearly do much to shape our understanding of the meaning of the freedom of society and of the individual.

For example, freedom of the individual is seen as gravely threatened by the interference of the state and by the collective organisation characteristic of socialism. It may also be claimed that unless the individual is set free to maximise profits in a free market, there is no way out of economic depression.

On the other hand, it may be argued that talk of freedom is a bad joke at the expense of the unemployed, the socially marginalised etc. who slip into increased poverty and deprivation, or that freedom of the individual is under increasing threat from the increasingly centralised forces of law and order marshalled in the face of increasing social unrest. In addition the very idea of a free market can be said to be highly questionable in the face of the activities of monopolies and multinational corporations, let alone in relation to those who, because of their poverty, have scarcely any individual purchasing power.

There is force of argument on both sides and certainly recent events make it hard to deny (were it ever possible to deny) that freedom and efficiency are as elusive in socialist societies as are justice and long-term stability in capitalist ones. There is, therefore, necessity for an independent framework in which to examine notions of freedom in modern society. For the purposes of this discussion such a framework is provided by a biblical and Christian critique.

One remarkable feature of the God of the Judeo/Christian tradition is an expectation of responsibility and response. God may be mysterious, inscrutable and 'holy' but the humanity and responsibility of his worshippers are in no way diminished by their relationship with him. In the stories of Abraham and of Moses, a basic note is struck which eventually resonates in the words, for example, of Micah:
" He has showed, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? " (Micah 6:8 R.S.V)

Cultic practices and rites are all part of such a free and personal response of obedience, loyalty and justice to God in covenant relationship. Where this response is lacking and the rules and rituals have become the expression of religion socially observed but not reaching out either into the living reality of God or the living practices of society at large, then they are denounced in the name of God both by the prophets and by Jesus.

It is on this basis that the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel are able to face, explain and find hope through the catastrophes which overcome Israel and Judah. These disasters are seen as punishment for a turning away from God which was manifested not only in the worship of false Gods, but also in the blatant social practice of exploitation and injustice.

Seen in this way it was possible to regard the catastrophes not as the last word on the people of Israel, but as episodes of disaster and disobedience from which they could be eventually saved and restored when they repented and responded to God's presence and grace. Thus the prophets could look forward to a king who would rule justly and the messianic hope was born:

' There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse ... He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked.' (Isaiah 11:1a.3b-4. R.S.V.)

Such words contribute to a vision of a society of freedom, justice and peace. This vision and hope arises from a faith in a God whose purpose is justice and peace, pursued through women and men who have the opportunity of responding to God in freedom and obedience. Despite failure, the hope and vision remain realistic and compelling because God is persistent in pursuing God's purposes in the face of disobedience and disaster.

The Christian/biblical God is thus a God of freedom in that God requires a response from the faithful and that this assumes their ability and responsibility to make a choice in the sense that God's purpose in pursuing the covenant with people is seen more and more in terms of establishing an ideal community of peace and justice, of freedom in both communal and personal terms.

For the Christian church, Jesus is the embodiment, the reinforcement and the redirection of this faith and hope in God, experienced and explored in the service of a community and 'kingdom' of justice and peace, freedom and love. Jesus had proclaimed that the kingdom of God was at hand, he had worked signs and wonders, taught the parables of the kingdom and disturbed his contemporaries with the claims and the powers of that kingdom. When the kingdoms of the world (the civic authorities of Rome and the religious authorities of Judaism) had combined to get rid of him, they had not succeeded. Crucified, dead and buried he was then known to be risen and alive forever and believed in as 'at the right hand of God.' That is to say that He is known to faith as the very expression, evidence and

power of God's kingdom, as God's way of being with us and God's way of working for us. This faith was rapidly universalised. God's kingdom was seen as being open to all nations. Thus although in its various forms Christianity has never succeeded in fully living up to faith in and through Jesus Christ, in actual practice the thrust of this faith has always been that God is at work through the whole earth and the whole of history to enable and evoke the response and responsibility of freed women and men. The divine calling is to contribute to and thus to enjoy God's kingdom and community of justice, love and peace. It is the pattern and purpose and power of God which is held to be persistently at work in history and beyond history.

Much in human history seems to deny or work against this, not least in the history and behaviour of religious people and institutions, including the Christian church. But Christians continue to share the prophetic discernment that God remains persistently and patiently at work, not least through the very disasters and disappointments of history, continuing to evoke from women and men a free response to God's being, a share in God's purpose of love and freedom, and a ready collaboration in the building up of God's community.

Thus there is involved in Christian faith a claim about reality, inherited from the prophets and vindicated in Jesus. This is a claim that history can, must and will be related to the community and the kingdom of God. However, this does not admit or encourage the belief that history has one clear pattern or direction which is discernable, achievable or inevitable. To impose a pattern on history or to claim that we have the knowledge which gives us the vital clue to history is to misunderstand the nature of Christian freedom. Our lives in this sense are not the substance of the kingdom of God, only the material for it.

What is involved here is a profound question about our understanding of God and the way in which God's freedom as creator in relationship to creation is experienced and explained. God is not the mastermind of a vast construction activity, planned in computerised fashion from the beginning and moving on to a pre-determined end. God is much more what David Jenkins describes as the *'persevering artist.' (9)* This mysterious artist is committed to an infinite creative activity. The movement and struggle happen through risk to the fulfilment of a vision and a hope which will establish a community and a kingdom commensurate with

the initial motivation of loving creativity. Nothing is certain but everything is possible. Such committed and constructive openness is the basic condition of freedom and love.

Faith in such a God has an immediate bearing on the urgent practical issues of society, culture and politics. This is because such a faith sets us free from determinism and despair and from the apathy of powerlessness. The issue, therefore of personal freedom to respond and a free relational choice is central to the message and hope of Christian faith. Creating a social and economic climate in which such freedom can be responsibly exercised is largely the task of Christian discipleship. The belief of faith that nothing is certain but everything is possible must be a reality in the individual experience if it is to be at the heart of the community's values, and vice versa.

iii) The Christian Community as Agent of Freedom

We turn now to the question of how such a definition of freedom as it is understood to be the ultimate human search and the central core of Christian theology is experienced by individuals and communities, particularly within the Church as the community of Christian faith and practice.

Here the traditional doctrines of justification by faith and/or works emerge as the most significant influences as in the way in which the Church has interpreted its free response to God.

The experience of being justified and loved by God establishes in a person a new relationship of 'free works', activity and behaviour borne not out of obligation or fear but of free, loving response. As Luther wrote in his tract on 'The Freedom of a Christian Man', such works are,

'... altogether free works, done for the sake of nothing but to please God only and not to attain plenty.' (10)

Free works then are works freed from the purpose and the necessity to justify oneself.

They occur 'for nothing', that is for the sake of pleasing God and out of love for neighbour. Freed from self-assertion and self-searching, free works are done spontaneously and unselfishly, as is playing. They need not be compelled. They are taken for granted. The ethic of faith is love taken for granted and freely given without inner compulsion.

What Christian theology designates as 'salvation' (see above) following justification, as the new kind of obedience, as Christian life or piety, must then be described as a category radically different from that which denotes bondage to the laws of achievement with their compulsions to act, and as we have seen is in biblical terms the closest meaning we have in theological terms to our definition of freedom. This new kind of obedience is new only when it is no longer obedience but free, imaginative, and loving action. The freedom grasped by faith therefore must be more than simply the exchange of one kind of obligation for another. It must be more like replacing the domination of obligation with the freedom of creative love. This fundamental change comes about because of the nature of God revealed in Jesus. When the liberated call Jesus 'Lord' then lordship is not what it once was, for this Lord is the crucified who has become the servant of all. The redeemer's power over the redeemed is derived from his sufferings. As their liberator He is the author of their liberty and thus their authority. Therefore their obedience is not blind, but is free gratitude and the conscious practice of their freedom in creative love. This constitutes the free works.

The person makes her works. This constitutes her freedom. In the biblical image, a good tree bears good fruit. The tree does not have to be forced to do this. It does it all by itself to display its riches and out of the sheer joy of existence. Such trees however may not be taken for granted. Brecht wrote,

' The crippled tree in the yard
Points to the bad soil.
But passers-by call it a cripple
- and are right ...' (11)

The question arises, is the bad soil to blame for the bad fruit. Even the best of trees cannot

blossom in a lightless yard in poor soil. It has no chance because of its environment but a tree, even a weak tree, planted in the park and nourished will grow and develop fully.

With the advent of the industrial revolution in Europe, Geothe amongst many others, recognised the end of a society based on representative nobility and the beginning of the age of the bourgeoisie. Consequently he advised citizens not to ask 'Who are you?' but 'What can you do?' *(12)* He clearly noted the transition from a society of class to an egalitarian society of achievements, from aristocracy to meritocracy. The latter being a society in which the categories of 'having' and 'doing' obscure the category of 'being'. It measures our social value by what we are able to produce, by our labour power, and by what we are able to consume. We derive our self-esteem and identity by what we have and what we can afford to have. So we cease to be existing selves but translate everything into categories of having or not having. Apart from what we do or do not have we are nothing, do not exist and are not known.

'Man is what he produces.' With this Aristotelian principle Karl Marx criticized the capitalistic societies of 'haves' and 'have-nots' *(13)*. Applying this principle Marx demanded an 'humane' society which produces people capable of enjoying the fullness and variety of their senses as a matter of course and enables them to produce themselves to the fullness of their own abilities. If we could translate Marx's critique of the capitalistic society of acquisitiveness back into the language of Luther, we would have to say: The exploiting society of achievement is a form of institutionalised justification by works. Its objective compulsion to worship the idols of its own achievement makes it a slave to collective obligation and bondage.

How can the good tree bring forth good fruit in such surroundings? How can people live in human freedom under inhuman coercion?

In an achievement-centred society any attempt to liberate by faith a person's 'inner-being' from the outward coercion of 'works' leads only to the worst kind of introspection unless it is accompanied by a humanisation of the structures and principles of that society. The liberation of people by faith must go hand in hand with free and liberating works of love, as Luther has said. When conditions are crippling the tree these conditions must be changed

so that the tree has an objective opportunity to develop fully. When social conditions force people to act in an inhuman way, to resort to inappropriate and damaging forms of escape and dependency, the social conditions must be changed as much as the attitude, self-perception, behaviour of the individual. It is, of course, an illusion to believe that a prospective just society will automatically make all its members just and that a prospective free society will liberate all its members. Even the contention that unfree conditions necessarily produce slavish people is false. There are and always have been people in domination and oppression of all kinds who demonstrate independence and freedom. Otherwise no social or political tyranny would ever be overthrown and people would never survive exile or imprisonment. Conversely external liberties do not guarantee inner freedom. Under relatively free and just conditions there are a sufficiently large number of unfree and unjust people who do not grasp the liberating opportunities open to them and even deny them to others. An unfree society does not automatically produce unfree people, but it does put people under such pressures that freedom becomes increasingly elusive. A relatively free society does not automatically produce free people, but it encourages their freedom.

Inner and outward liberation then belong together. One cannot be derived from the other. Marx therefore was right when in his famous third thesis he held against Feuerbach and materialism that the changing of self and of conditions are bound together in revolutionary ie. liberating, practice.

The changing of self and of human personality without changing conditions is an idealistic illusion from which, although finding ground for example in the New Age movement and some contemporary models of spirituality, the church and Christian theology is necessarily distanced. The changing of conditions without seeking inner personal change, on the other hand, is a materialistic illusion which modern communism has already shown is being left behind.

To state it again theologically: following the crucified God liberates people from the laws and powers of a given social, political, economic society and sets them free. In turn the images and rhetoric of liberty, directed against those of an achievement centred society, changes its conditions.

Having largely lost its role as necessary support to the state, the contemporary church finds itself increasingly confined to the sphere of rendering service to society. Our functionally organised society rarely thinks of the church from an externally political viewpoint but is apt to regard the church purely as helpful in specific areas of life. These areas, sociologically speaking, are the service sector. The Church's care and concern are invited in matters of the care of the sick and elderly and the imprisoned, and in the field of personal morality. The care of those who have turned to inappropriate dependencies and addictions would come into these categories and in practical terms much of its pastoral theology in discussing the morality of such behaviour (though discussion tends still to centre on popular disapproval rather than serious assessment of cause and effect).

The church's services are required at certain central and critical moments in life, such as birth, marriage, sickness, and death. The common element in all these is that they concern areas of life which are relatively free from domination and a denial of freedom. Here our society is revealing needs which are popularly recognised as religious needs. Contemporary criticism of the church, on the other hand, is almost exclusively directed against its so-called 'meddling' in politics and economics whenever this is regarded as unwelcome interference. However it is clear from biblical and traditional concepts of Christian/human freedom that the private areas of religious need do not render the church and its services less necessary in the spheres of public order and morality. Indeed there are nowhere more independent areas of service than in the suffering caused by harmful and socially disruptive forms of dependency and addiction in which people's personal struggle for freedom is forced into an inappropriate expression by oppressive social conditions.

Here it must be clearly and critically stated that modern society makes freedom possible exclusively for those who are competent and healthy, who have already succeeded and achieved. Its humanistic ideals of human kind's coming of age and autonomy have paradoxically contributed to a tendency which turns contemporary society into a segregated society. Children are sent to nurseries, the aged to homes for the elderly, the sick to hospitals, criminals to prisons etc. The rest than are left alone to pursue their distorted freedom. Distorted because it ignores the fundamental interdependency of human experience. In such a society, no freedom can be appropriately and fully realised because

too many are denied: the freedom to be old, the freedom to be sick, the freedom to be disabled or poor or guilty and still experience love and community.

What role than does religious belief and practice have in helping people to attain this two-fold freedom, and to what extent does it merely exacerbate and reinforce the restrictions and dominations of an achievement centred society?

Marx considered religion to be, to paraphrase Paul, ' the groaning of the creation in bondage' justified only by actual need and alienation. The revolution, therefore was to become the heir of religion and would abolish the religious notions of 'wish-fulfilment' by meeting actual needs and fulfilling concrete desires. But historians of religion have shown that religion does not in every instance originate in human need but is actually more likely to be an outcome of play, representation and imagination. *(14)* In pagan festivals people did not only magically implore the gods' help in need, they also represented themselves and their lives before the totally-other, the gods, in order to regain a state of conformity with them.

The ancient religions, with their cults and festivals, were a form of playing. Ancient people demonstrated themselves in covenant with the gods. They looked at history as a feast of the gods. Yet they suffered far greater material need than modern, western societies. If this is granted it follows that religion does not belong merely to the realm of necessity as the groaning creature in bondage, but it also and more properly belongs to the realm of freedom as the play of remembrance, as an expression of joy, and as the imaginative hope of people's basic and final humanity before God. Religious myths and images, therefore, are not just ideological tranquilisers which will compensate for unbearable conditions or mitigate suppressed misery. They are the daydreams of human communities in which the totally-other is made manifest, no matter how inappropriately, and where consequently the transformation of the here and now is already celebrating that creative play which humankind desires when it desires liberty. The 'religious communist' Wilhelm Weitling crystallised this argument when he wrote in his 'Gospel of the Poor Sinner' in 1843 that, *' Religion must not be destroyed but used to liberate mankind. Christianity is the religion of liberty.' (15)*

We shall now consider how one manifestation of addictive behaviour can offer some interesting and illuminating insights into the human need for play, even deviant play, and its parallels with religious experience and practice.

Chapter Two

Freedom and Addiction

C. S Lewis's novel 'Perelandra' has a vivid passage in which he describes how the main character, Ransom, wakes up to the intoxicating sights and smells of the imaginary world from which the book takes its name:

" Looking at a fine cluster of the bubbles which hung above his head he thought how easy it would be to get up and plunge oneself through the whole lot of them and to feel all at once that magical refreshment multiplied tenfold. But he was restrained ... he had always disliked the people who encored a favourite air in the opera - 'That just spoils it' - had been his comment. But this now appeared to him as a principle of far wider application and deeper moment. This itch to have things over again as if life were a film that could be unrolled twice or even made to work backwards - was it possibly the root of all evil? No: of course the love of money was called that. But money itself - perhaps one valued it chiefly as a defence against chance, a security for being able to have things over again, a means of arresting the unrolling of the film." (1)

That vignette by Lewis touches a reality that is at the core of human experience. Like Ransom, everyone craves both the security of repetition and the euphoria of intense refreshment. But not everyone succeeds in confronting this twin passion. This itch to 'do it' and 'do it again' seems to come from a piece of forbidden fruit, or the first sexual experience of adolescence, or the first chemical rush from alcohol or 'speed'. It may even happen in response to the passionate invitation of a Billy Graham to 'come to the Lord'.

What is this itch? What is it that pushes us beyond the melancholy routine of duty? St. Paul's description in Romans 7 of the tortured soul on the horns of a dilemma between feeling good and doing good is an analysis of the 'itch' in theological terms. The picture in Romans 7 is of a person caught moving in a southerly direction on a northbound street, simultaneously feeling the push to get out of the way, and the daring rush of excitement to beat the odds. What is that dominant force that keeps people kicking against the standards of conventionality? To call it the weakness of the flesh or 'sinful nature' fails to do justice

to what is in fact powerlessness to resist the urge to fly free of restraint.

Let us see, therefore, how the phenomenon of addiction can be described in terms of yielding to an itch for euphoria.

Dominant among the complex factors that make up this itch is powerlessness. Writing to the Galatians, Paul speaks of someone 'overcome by' a trespass (Gal 6:1). The picture of powerlessness that comes to mind is one of a fly caught in a spider's web. Freedom is lost. What then should cause a person to give up personal freedom, the power to choose between alternatives, and offer him/herself up to an obsession? What are these controlling and devouring 'gods of desire' (Philippians 3:19)?

A walk on the wild side has an attractively alluring aura. St. Augustine recognised this, looking back on his youthful shoplifting as motivated by sheer joy at the theft itself:

" Theft is punished by the law, O Lord, and the law is written in the hearts of men, which iniquity itself effaces not. For what their will abide a thief? Not even a rich thief, one stealing through want. Yet I lusted to thieve and did it compelled by no hunger nor poverty but through a pamperedness of iniquity. For I stole that of which I had enough and much better. Nor cared I to enjoy what I stole, but joyed in the theft and the sin itself. A pear tree there was near our vineyard, laden with fruit tempting neither for colour nor taste ... And this, but to do what we liked only because it was misliked." (2)

Augustine experienced a pulsating high when he stole pears. We understand only too well that what he enjoyed was not the fruit but the act of doing that which was judged to be morally wrong. Sinning, in other words, was fun. The adolescent experience of Augustine is similar to everyone's adolescent storm and stress. Most of us kick against the parental codes that stood in the way of self becoming self. It is somehow part of the youthful task of self-definition and separation from the parental cast. The rub comes in the form of a new dependency - the idolisation of the adolescent experience. One might also observe that the adolescent experience of addiction is more a matter of fixation than full-blown addiction, a dependency easily and quickly remedied because of the malleability and flexibility of the young.

Nevertheless, this does not minimise the seriousness of the dependency. There is what is called in psychological terms an 'object cathexis', in which a person becomes neurotically attached to someone else or to a pattern of behaviour for no other reason than an emotional 'fix' *(3)*. It feels good. Feeling good is the summum bonum of adolescence and many adults remain in emotional adolescence. We will discuss specific manifestations of such addictive behaviour later. For the moment our focus is this process of becoming fixated on an object of fascination, fun and feeling because we perceive it as morally reprehensible. The simple fascination of pursuing a perceived moral wrong becomes intensified, obsessive, even pathological. We become addicted to that which makes us feel guilty. The high is generated in the experiences of doing that for which I will be judged guilty and might accordingly be punished. The extreme case of such addiction is the criminally insane psychopathic person.

Guilt feelings enhance the obsession with the behaviour patterns which induce the guilt. It begins in apparently harmless fashions; a little 'relief' drinking followed by a slight, dimly felt sense of guilt. This feeling of guilt is assuaged by more relief drinking. This is the paradigm of addiction: one feeds the other.

Nowhere do the scriptures command us to **feel** guilty. They only declare that we **are** guilty. This declaration that we have fallen short of God's expectation is a legal description of our relationship with God. A right relationship with God is not restored through a feeling of guilt, nor is habitual behaviour overcome through an heroic and independent effort of willpower as any recovering addict will testify. In this respect Paul Tournier makes a helpful distinction between true guilt and false guilt. True guilt reflects a violation of moral law *(4)*. Awareness of true guilt is the mark of a healthy spirit yearning to be free. It is guilt grounded in grace. False guilt is entangled in the web of the fantasy that restoration with God is the product of self-effort. It is the fine paid for deserting yesterday's sacred cow.

All of this points to a critically important and universally human dynamic of addictions: the paradox of freedom. To understand compulsive addictive behaviour we must take account of personal human freedom. Theologically we begin with a presupposition that human beings are made in the image of God. Because we bear the divine image, we have the

privilege and responsibility of freedom.

Freedom has an inalienable negative aspect: freedom from. This is the freedom of independence, of not being dependent. The freedom of independence allows me to walk on the wild side. I am free to sow, to risk, to scratch, to be guilty, to sin. I am free to feel the ecstasy of experience, to stand as it were outside of my own limitations and look down on what I have created with my experience.

But I am free only to a point. I am not absolutely free. Absolute freedom would mean immunity or exemption from every bondage, restraint, restriction, or consequence. Only God can have this kind of complete freedom from everything external. Human beings created in the divine image have creaturely freedom which is contingent on the creative grace of the creator. It is limited by the restraints of time, space, natural and moral law. Part of the tragedy of human experience is that we do not recognise our dependence and surrender to the reality of contingent freedom but rebel against the limitations that come with it.

There is, of course, a kind of security in being unfree. Erich Fromm makes the political application of this psychological insight in his book 'Escape from Freedom', suggesting that by our failure to live with freedom we will probably submit to totalitarianism. *(5)* But the same point can be illustrated at the personal level; of the human being tortured by bondage to a patterned existence.

Human freedom has a dialectical character. On the one hand, it is a process of growing from strength to strength, a mastery of nature, a growing power of reason, a stepping out in faith, a development of basic trust in other human beings, an increasing conviction that there are authentic choices to be made. John Steinbeck's discussion of the choice Adam and Eve were required to make in the garden is a good illustration of the critical issue confronting the human being coming of age. *(6)* He had to choose and in choosing he became free. Fromm maintains that the choice Adam and Eve made together signalled the beginning of human freedom. But this was negative freedom. They freed themselves from coercion. They experienced the intoxication of being free from.

On the other side of the dialectical dilemma, human freedom comes to expression in fear, in a growing sense of isolation, insecurity, shame, in loss of meaning and purpose in life. The shock of this is often enough to scare people into flight from freedom. Unable to handle the thought of freedom, one willingly submits to another, lesser authority.

The paradox of freedom is critical to our understanding of human addiction. Addiction can be seen as a search for freedom turned in on itself. Disillusioned with the contingent freedom given in creation we opt for absolute freedom. Unhitching ourselves from our strongest ties we step into the empty space created by the fantasy of absolute freedom. In the consequent panic, we grab anything that promises safety, relationship, connections, even if only for a few moments.

In a book published sometime ago, Alan Watts says that as,
' belief in the eternal within becomes impossible, we seek our ultimate happiness in the joys of time.' (7)

When we come to realise that absolute freedom is an illusion and the vagaries of unfreedom offer no solution, we may be attracted to God as another 'fix'. When this fails to offer lasting satisfaction we settle for the brief, intermittent joys of time. Consequently our age is, in Watt's words,
' one of frustration, anxiety, agitation, and addiction to dope'. (8)
The 'dope' to which he refers is our standard of living and modern culture, with its violent stimulation of the senses, which in turn makes them less sensitive and more in need of 'freedom of choice'. As an expression of individual autonomy and the basis of human dignity and responsibilities we have seen how inadequate it is. It cannot be otherwise because it denies dependence on the other as the source of one's personhood and also because it is so compulsively sought. Desperately, often angrily, the alcoholic seeks his or her freedom; but the web of addiction becomes stickier and more possessive in direct proportion to the energy devoted to that pursuit. Sometimes, this pursuit of freedom comes cloaked in the guise of 'perfectionism'. Perfectionistic tendencies in the alcoholic are often interpreted as a psychological defence mechanism - in other words, compensation. More than likely, however, they are symptomatic of an attempt to control and manipulate the environment. The alcoholic compulsively demands perfection of himself or herself in

order to have the sense of being in control. At some level the alcoholic knows this. The freedom to be perfect is an awesome, even impossible responsibility. But the fantasy of perfection, the wish for it, the obsession with it remains. The alcoholic retreats into the unfreedom of the fix and takes a 'hit' in order to escape the frustration of not being absolutely 'free'.

Fromm helps us to penetrate more deeply into this paradox. To the extent that we experience an 'intermezzo' of freedom now and then, and thus become more independent and self-reliant, we also become more isolated, alone and afraid. *(9)* We run to the comfort and security of one god or another to escape the terrible burden of freedom.

Paul Tillich discussed this paradox of freedom in terms of the freedom and destiny that co-exist in 'essential being', that is, in a state of innocence. *(10)* This freedom and destiny live within each other, distinct but not separate from one another, in tension but not in conflict. The source of their polar unity is that both are rooted in the ground of being. In a moment of 'aroused' freedom, Tillich says, a process begins in which freedom becomes arbitrariness and separates itself from the destiny to which it belongs. Wilful (sinful) acts are those in which freedom moves toward separation from its destiny - what Alcoholics Anonymous calls 'self-will-run-riot'. Tillich will not let us forget this ambiguity, this polarity of our existence. The tension that exists between freedom and determinism must simply be allowed to be there. Tragedy results from attempts to resolve the polarity of autonomy and destiny.

Reinhold Niebuhr discussed the paradox of freedom in the light of his treatment of sin as sensuality. The sensual person leads with the body. Decisions are bodily decisions: if the body feels like it, do it. *"Is not sensuality"*, asks Niebuhr, *"just another form of self-love?" (11)* Or is it an expression of the self-lover's feeling of inadequacy ? Mere self-worship in the name of freedom turns out to be wholly unsatisfying, so the person intensifies the worship of self in the sensual world. Sensuality is as good a reinforcement for self-worship as any: it is immediate and giving of pleasure. It can soothingly set free the spirit, as anyone can attest who has experience of sexual love. The extreme, indulgent manifestations of such ideals of sensualism represent an 'I' that lurks within all of us at one level or another. Is this freedom? Or is it, as Niebuhr suspects, another form of escape

from the self? The terrible burden of freedom is too much. The person seeks to gratify the self. Niebuhr, like Fromm, is suggesting that absolute freedom is too hot for us to handle, and in seeking to escape we run into that which we are fleeing: a bondage to the self's gratification of the self. Drunkenness, he maintains, exhibits this ambivalent end. The intoxicated person seeks the abnormal stimulus of a drug in order to experience the sense of powerful freedom denied him in his otherwise sober existence. Instead he finds himself hooked into a cycle of powerlessness and bondage. He becomes less free not more free.

" Drunkenness is merely a vivid form of the logic of sin which every heart reveals. Anxiety tempts the self to sin; the sin increases the insecurity which it was intended to alleviate until some escape from the whole tension of life is sought." (12)

i) The Roots of Unfreedom

The paradox of human freedom therefore is certainly the key to our understanding of human addiction and in exploring it further we must pay some attention to one of its primary elements: that of death and how we deal with it.

We hear much these days about the stress of life. Thielicke holds that much of what generates that stress is our anxiety about death. He quotes the remark by the Roman philosopher Seneca in De Brevitate Vitae that,
" It takes all of our life to learn how to die but we busy ourselves with other things." (13)

Thielicke chides our generation for dealing with death by diversion, stupification, and a closing of the eyes. This closing of the eyes to death becomes a life style. In his book 'The Denial of Death', Ernest Becker helpfully expands this notion and illuminates a significant causative factor in the development of addiction.

" The idea of death, the fear of it haunts the human animal like nothing else; it is a mainspring of human activity - activity designed largely to avoid the fatality of death, to overcome it by denying in some way that it is our final destiny." (14)

Addiction is a response to this profound aversion to being like the grass of the field, here today, gone tomorrow. Our pursuit of excitement and intoxification, of experiences that are immediately gratifying, sensuously stimulating, and spiritually uplifting reflects our urgency to deny the reality of the shadow that hangs over us. Our unconscious and sometimes even conscious hope is that somehow we can side step death.

The addicted self is responding to the shock of finitude that begins to dawn on all of us early in life. Humanity must live with the existential paradox of being free, yet bound, being out of nature yet hopelessly tied to it. To avoid the reality of death we retreat to a patterned existence, an addictive lifestyle, because in the routine of repetition there is that strange security about which C S Lewis writes in the passage quoted at the head of this chapter. Sameness is faithful, true, ready to provide an insulating fix that quickly and quietly mutes our painful awareness that life is terminal.

So there is much more to the alcoholic's story than his or her exceptionally low pain threshold. It is more a matter of an acute awareness, even on a subconscious level, that death is real. The facile assumption is that the alcoholic cannot stand the heat in life's kitchen. But it is just as likely that it is a painful awareness of death's realities that lies at the heart of the addictive behaviour.

These two paradoxes of freedom: its related dependency and its inescapable awareness of the ultimate nature of death go a long way towards explaining, at the deepest level, our addiction proneness. Resolution of this modern sickness unto death is possible only through the profound process of surrender to and acceptance of our necessarily limited freedom and our relational dependence on the absolute other, defined in Christian theology as the God of creation.

The addictive lifestyle that emerges and disrupts our society and culture, as well as so many individual lives and relationships, takes many forms. Whilst most of us are trapped in small ways by specific, though usually mild forms of addictive behaviour, ie. coffee drinking, news watching, smoking, chocolate eating etc., the attentions of society naturally falls on those patterns of behaviour which are seen as threatening to it. Sexual behaviour can, and often does become addictive, and may cause a great deal of disruption not to mention

social instability and disease. The most modern and often distortedly publicised form of addictive behaviour is that of drug addiction. Yet still in our Scottish culture the most widespread, socially destructive, unhealthy and paradoxically, well tolerated form of addictive behaviour is the phenomenon we call 'alcoholism'. It is to this we now turn.

ii) Alcoholism and Addiction

Until the early nineteen eighties it had become common for professionals working in the field of alcohol addiction to view alcoholism as an uncontrollable disease with mysterious chemical or genetic origins. Alcoholics, it was said, are born, not made; there are people who are biochemically predisposed to use alcohol addictively from birth to death. Alcoholics Anonymous still holds to this theory, teaching its members that because they suffer from an uncontrollable illness the only recovery is total abstinence.

Several factors may be identified as helping to make the idea of alcohol addiction as a disease attractive:

1. It is appealing as a description of the experiences of many people who find themselves inexorably drawn toward intoxification from the first drink they took
2. It enables people to relieve false guilt by offering a biological explanation for something that might otherwise be regarded as a moral failure
3. It has been supported by powerful forces within the drug and alcohol establishment, including in the past, the British Medical Association, The World Health Organisation, and still International Alcoholics Anonymous
4. It feeds our hunger for clear-cut and certain solutions to complex problems

By comparison with the older image of alcoholics as despicable degenerates fit only for the soup kitchen until they finally drink themselves to death, the disease theory is certainly more humane. The goal of releasing the addict from an overwhelming sense of guilt while at the same time educating the public to see suffering alcoholics as people who need to be helped, not condemned, is certainly admirable.

Furthermore, the disease theory has had some strong scientific credibility to its name. In

Denmark in the 1970s, Dr. Donald Goodwin conducted genetic studies of some five thousand children of alcoholic parents, who were adopted into non-alcoholic homes. He found the incidence of alcoholism to be four times greater than he expected. *(15)* While it is true that defective chromosomes were never identified there did seem to be overwhelming evidence of a genetic factor. Still now, alcoholism in one's family is almost the only reliable indicator of whether a person could become an alcoholic.

In addition to these hereditary factors are biochemical factors - how the body's chemicals react to alcohol in its system. The main pathway of metabolism of alcohol is the same for alcoholics as non-alcoholics. Alcohol, taken orally, is absorbed from the stomach and carried in the blood throughout the body. It is then broken down by the liver enzymes into acetaldehyde, which in turn is broken down into acetate and then to carbon dioxide and water and excreted from the body. Acetaldehyde is a very toxic substance, causing damage to the liver, heart muscle, and brain cells, when excessive. *(16)*

The fact that this process is clearly the same in all people whether they become alcoholic or not weakens the disease theory which carries with it a further problem. When we emphasise the disease aspect, and define dependency on drugs like heroin and beverage alcohol in terms of a characteristic of the drug ('addictive') rather than the person ('addictable'), we diminish the truth about alcohol addiction. We tend to place responsibility for the addiction on the drug and responsibility for recovery ultimately on health care and medicine rather on the alcoholic him/herself.

Another view of addiction is that it is first of all a lifestyle, a behavioral disorder. Alcohol abuse is a learned behaviour cultivated by an habitual readiness to take a drink whenever a painful situation arises. More modern research confirms this judgement. Addiction is a way of coping with reality. Kessel and Walton document this contention with over eighty studies in which they found that controlled drinking was possible for some alcoholics. *(17)* The Scottish Council on Alcoholism supports this theory and offers alternative counselling and therapy based upon it. There is no question that alcohol, heroin, and other drugs have a powerful debilitating effect on body tissues. But this physical reality does not in itself cause or indicate addiction. Our inclination therefore is to view the notion of 'physical addiction' as incomplete at best, most probably questionable.

To understand any individual case of addiction to a drug, we must ask 'What does this person derive from the drug and from experiencing its effect?' Note the difference between this approach to understanding an addiction problem and the more conventional and traditional procedures of identifying an addiction problem: 'How often does the person drink? How often is he drunk? When does he begin drinking during the day? Does he drink alone? So does he act out anti-socially when he drinks?' These criteria frequently do not detect an addiction problem, until long after the person is readily amenable to an effective recovery.

The former question will inevitably elicit answers like: It fills time; provides a reassuring ritual; grants power; grants sexual potency and/or freedom; facilitates a positive identity; alleviates anxiety; provides the ingredients for successful socialisation. If we begin asking the question 'What does it do for you?' we may pick up an addiction problem much earlier in the cycle. Because, as we have seen earlier, individual accomplishment is cultivated in our society, many people experience failure as evidence of inadequacy. Drinking is one way of responding. In this respect the addiction experience, as we shall see later is not unlike the religious 'high' that characterises some people in evangelical Christian circles. In the protective custody whether of spirits or 'spiritus' all pain and anxiety are relived for a while. The world seems to become manageable. It feels good to be 'high' chemically or religiously.

In an essay called 'Evangelicals and Experience' published in the Expository Times, Arthur Holmes outlines the problem with this:

" Personal, private, feelingful experience is not what life is all about; it is the reality and truth of things that counts. Experience is not what Christianity is primarily about: it too is concerned with the reality and truth of things ... Experiences can be induced by hypnosis, created by fantasy, duplicated by hallucinatory drugs ... Experience is a shifting sand. And to focus only on an experience can be egocentric and hedonistic - and that is not Christian faith." (18)

We have said that addiction is better understood with reference to the person using the chemical rather than the substance itself, because addiction is primarily to an experience.

Addiction is not the exclusive property of a drug, but a personality characteristic, and the boundaries of addiction are not marked off by drugs alone. There are parallels in areas of human behaviour other than compulsive drug use such as gambling, overeating, overwork, television watching or religious 'experience'. All of these can be regarded as and dealt with as addiction.

What is the addicting element that these share with drinking? All offer the chance of an all-consuming sensation that minimises the conscious and painful awareness of life's limitations and freedom's tenuousness. What turns any activity into an addiction is centred in the person who is overcome by it. Personality, life circumstances, motivation -all can work together in producing addictive behaviour in a person. But if addiction can appear in any type of repeatable involvement , with the activity or substance becoming addictive or not according to internal factors in the one using the substance or practising the activity, how do we recognise when addiction exists? The modern 'behavioural' theory of addiction gives us some guidelines:

- Addiction is a continuum. People are more or less addicted depending on how much their habits control their lives
- An addiction can consume a person and distract him or her from all other involvements
- Addiction is not a pleasurable experience. The object of obsession becomes the answer to and then the root of fear, anxiety and guilt
- Addiction is set by an inability to choose not to do something. Can the person sometimes turn away from the involvement in a situation which normally calls for it? If so, he or she is not addicted.

The point that addiction can cover many involvements does not take away the fact that alcoholism remains the primary addiction in terms of lives lost, families destroyed, money wasted, accidents caused, crimes committed and physical, psychological and social problems incurred.

iii) Religion and Addiction

At first glance one might suppose that 'religion' would fit into a study of the addiction experience not as a facet of the problem but as part of the response and solution. As we shall see the ideal of religious activity is a joyful and healthy celebration of life that is congruent and well integrated. But the enjoyment of beverage alcohol can be a healthy experience too. If a healthy expression of religious experience points beyond the dead end of Freud's assumption that religion is simply a universal neurosis, it is nevertheless evident that some religious experience, because of its addictive manifestations can also support Freud's conclusions.

The comparison between alcohol and God is scarcely a new discovery. Long ago in 'The Varieties of Religious Experience', William James noted the similarities of function:

" The sway of alcohol over mankind is unquestionable due to its power to stimulate the mystical faculties of human nature, usually crushed to the earth by the cold facts and dry criticisms of the sober hour. Sobriety diminishes, discriminates, says 'no'; drunkenness expands, unites and says 'yes'. It is in fact the great exciter of the 'yes' function in man. The drunken consciousness is but one bit of the mystical consciousness." (19)

Thomas Wolfe in his novel 'Look Homeward, Angel' described one of the characters like this:
" In all the world there was no other like him. No other like him to be so sublimely and majestically drunken. Why, when it was possible to buy God in a bottle and drink him off and become a God oneself, were men not forever drunken?" (20)

In a letter to Bill W., co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, the Swiss psychologist Carl Jung write:
"Craving for alcohol is the equivalent on a low level of the spiritual thirst of our being for wholeness or union with God ... Alcohol in Latin is 'spiritus' and you use the same word for the highest religious experience as well as the most depraving poison." (21)

In terms of purpose and of the emotion felt 'getting high' on Jesus and 'getting high' on

alcohol are similar experiences. There is the exhilaration, the freedom, the flow of feeling, the escape from reason and the painful obsession of what wearies us with worry. We ask Jesus to do what we ask alcohol or drugs to do: make us feel better fast. The biblical figure of Simon the Magician in Acts 8 reminds us that this kind of religion was not invented by the 'me generation'. But its relevance and growth today lends substance to the claim that religion has addicting qualities, or to put it more precisely, that out addiction-prone selves are drawn to using religion in an addictive manner, because it makes us feel better. There is warrant for describing the dangers of addictive religion in terms similar to those used of alcohol: it can interfere with important life adjustments, interpersonal relationships, and general well-being. Religion can get us high in the same way as romance can put us in the clouds. And like romance (as opposed to love) religion can become an object of obsession that causes serious life problems. Or it can be used appropriately, giving us, particularly during worship, an experience that strengthens our resolution to be wholly directed by the Other and celebrates the reality of life.

The language of addiction, as we have seen again and again, is the language of dependency. So someone might resort to the suggestion that religion is potentially addictive by asking, 'But doesn't God want us to depend on him?', and suggest that the answer is 'Yes', citing many scriptural texts as support. The question of dependency upon God will be further explored in Chapter Three. For the moment it is important that we see that the issue here is not the nature of God but how we understand dependency in relation to God. The choice is not between dependence and independence but between harmful dependence on religious beliefs and practices and a dynamic religious relationship with God which sets us free to incarnate in our setting the love that was incarnated by Jesus.

There is more to escapist religiosity than simply its use as release from situations of stress. Earlier we spoke of Erich Fromm's contention that religion represents an escape from freedom. On the agenda of every addict is a purposeful avoidance of responsibility. The addict secretly abhors the responsibility inherent in power and freedom. The escape from freedom is on the hidden agenda even as an obsession with freedom and power is on the open agenda.

Fromm's point is that religion contends with this paradox. The Protestant reformation

exposes it. Its thrust for freedom and autonomy over against the medieval church produced another kind of bondage within the framework of a doctrine of total depravity. When the reformation released people from the crushing authority of the medieval church, it turned them face to face with their own inadequacy and powerlessness. The medieval church stressed human dignity through the freedom of the will and the effaciousness of human striving toward righteousness. The Reformers took the keys of authority out of the hands of the church and put them into the hands of the individual believer. But this apparent victory for individual autonomy and dignity was erased by a doctrine of human powerlessness over our sinful condition. According to Fromm, the doctrines of ecclesiastical authority in the Middle Ages and of depravity in the Reformation performed the same function of offering escape from freedom. *(22)* Hence they enhanced the possibilities of addiction to a religious 'fix'.

The modern practice of psychotherapy has contributed to the maintenance of this paradox between freedom and dependency, responsibility and powerlessness. David Roberts reminds us of its contribution,

"... toward increasing our capacity to solve our own problems, both by deepening the diagnosis and by tapping hitherto latent resources. And from this standpoint, theology richly deserves criticism whenever it equates human 'goodness' with slavish dependence upon the arbitrary will of a celestial tyrant who treats His creatures in a way that any humane person would regard as abominable." (23)

Theology is equally culpable when it fosters the belief that human persons are wholly incapable of any good. Colourful if well-worn imagery which speaks or sings of the sinful human as a moral worm may, if diligently explained convey an important truth about the human condition - but at a considerable risk to those who are not experienced or equipped or psychologically disposed to hear in such language anything other than divinely sanctioned confirmation of their own sense of worthlessness. Such people tend to give up on themselves and become vulnerable to any religious fantasy that offers to pull them out of the pit of powerlessness. This is a particular attraction of those cults which enable people to live vicariously through powerful leaders. Not the least of the reasons for the success of cults is their aptitude for picking clean the moral bones of the vulnerable who have been

force-fed dogma which explore and deplore human depravity but do not at the same time celebrate the inestimable value God has placed on us in Christ.

Of course, not every declaration of religious faith or commitment to religious truth will degenerate into harmful dependence. We have made no such declaration regarding the use of alcohol either. But there are risk factors in the use of religion just as there are risk factors in the use of other drugs.

We have been discussing harmful dependence, the process of addiction, as something which eventually robs the person of freedom of choice and ultimately causes serious life problems. Addiction to religion may deprive a person of freedom by substituting a mindless dependence on the religious leader, or on religious ritual, or even on religious doctrine. A parallel attraction of religious ritual among heroin addicts emerges in Liz Bryski's book 'Pills, Potions, People: Understanding the Drug Problem'. She discovered that many addicts would rather not see heroin legalised if it meant eliminating the injection procedures. The ritual associated with heroin becomes a crucial part of the drug experience:

" It's not only a question of kicks. The ritual itself, the little ball of cotton, the matches applied, the bubbling liquid drawn up through the cotton filter into the eye dropper, the tie around the arm to make a vein stand out, the fix often slow because a man will stand there with the needle in the vein and allow the level of the eye dropper to waver up and down, up and down .. all this is not for nothing, it is born of a respect for the whole chemistry of alienation." (24)

With these more general comparisons of addiction to religion with addiction to drugs, let us now look more closely at religious preoccupation with dogma, ritual, and God. As we do so, it is important to remember that any activity becomes addictive when the experience erases a person's awareness, when it provides predictable and immediate gratification, when it is used not to gain pleasure but to avoid pain, when it damages self-esteem, when it destroys other involvements and obliterates any or all life integrating principles and perspectives.

According to Karl Barth, the inadequacy of religion must be viewed in the light of God's

revelation of himself. In an extended discussion of the 'Revelation of God as the Abolition of Religion', Barth defines religion as the human attempt to find God. *(25)* If this quest were able to succeed, he says, God's revelation of himself in Jesus Christ would have been unnecessary. Thus religion expresses the godless human effort to make up for our lack of God on our own terms.

This idea will be explored further through the work of other theologians in the next Chapter. For the moment, the point of contact between Barth's discussion and the way we have been characterising addiction is the self-will that insinuates itself on the life of faith. Recovering alcoholics often refer to themselves as victims of the 'self-will-run-riot' syndrome. The addict is fixated on the need to do whatever it takes to be fully human on his or her own terms, in his or her own way, and under his or her own power. Religion as Barth defines it is a similar attempt to justify oneself. It becomes a self-centred way to erect barriers against God, precluding an authentic relationship and producing at the same time frenzied efforts to overcome the gap between oneself and God. More religious fervour. Compulsive religious fervour.

Such religiosity reveals its own inadequacies to itself and produces reactions against itself. One of these reactions is modern charismatic renewal. Another is atheism. These are the extreme responses to the failure to get at God via a religious route. An extreme reaction to a failure is classic addictive behaviour.

The work of Paul Tillich also offers sharp criticism of the religious fix. His phrase ' the ground of being' points to his contrast of authentic religion with idolatrous or addictive religion. Tillich's concern is less with the religious quest itself than with the object of that quest. All religious quests, he says, are concerned with the power of the New Being. When we invest ultimate concern in that which is Ultimate, we experience anxiety and awe in the face of the New Being. This is normal anxiety. It grows out of our realisation that we are finite, mortal beings who encounter meaninglessness in the proximate things of life. *(26)*

Authentic religion reflects a congruency between the quest for ultimate reality and the New Being which is Ultimate Reality. By contrast, when we invest our ultimate concern in that

which is not ultimate but temporal and transitory, we make absolute the finite. We are running after fixes that fix nothing. Absolutised and closed, religious truths become dead dogmas. The search becomes the idol.

Idolatry and addiction have a lot in common. Tillich describes idolatry as elevating a preliminary concern to ultimacy. Something essentially conditional is taken as unconditional; something essentially particular is boosted to universality; something essentially finite is given infinite significance. We may not carve idols from wood or stone anymore but often our mechanism is the projection of our wishes and fears on an external person who hears us, speaks to us and acts for us. Understood in this way, idolatry has less to do with religion than with getting what we want as quickly as possible.

Under such idolatry religious beliefs become a moralistic system of rewards and punishments. It is a structured manipulation which rules out faith in the face of the risks of the unknown and the uncontrollable. Some have worked out how to market such a 'substance' for substantial profit. Their consumers are victims of religious addiction.

It is important here to note that it is no more practical or rational to define religion as the problem than it is to abolish alcohol as treatment for alcohol addiction. The substance, as we have said before, is not the problem; people and their behaviour are. As far as religion is concerned Jung points to the permanence of religious belief:

"... man has always stood in need of the spiritual help which his particular religion held out to him. Man is never helped in his suffering by what he thinks of for himself; only suprahuman, revealed truth lifts him out of his distress." (27)

Earlier in this chapter, we asked whether we should depend on God. We conclude that this question is not an issue. Our Christian faith and existence presupposes dependence on God. The real issue then is this: How do we manifest our dependence on God without being neurotically or addictively dependent? What is the shape of an appropriate dependent relationship with God? Religion is sick if it is purely escapist; or a flight from responsibility; or if it is a magical means to manipulate God for our own ends; or if it is a dominance engendered by fear and guilt; or is it an escape from liberation and

responsibility.

What is therefore, a healthy religious profile? This question may be precluded by a prior one: What is the real danger involved in religious addiction? Few people ever die of it or go to prison for it. Religious addicts do not have to be 'cured' or lifted from the streets. So what is the problem? If religious addiction's most serious debilitating effects cannot be compared with what alcohol or drug abuse can do, it is nevertheless tragic in that it distorts to a degree which may be psychologically and emotionally destructive, the life-giving and liberating power of authentic faith in its pursuit of personal freedom, social, political and economic justice, and celebratory and affirming worship.

It is to the nature and discovery of the antitheses of this addictive behaviour in its application to religion that we now turn: the search for a healthy, interdependent, conditionally free relationship with God and its expression for individual and church.

Chapter Three

Freedom from ... Freedom for

A crucial element in the nature of a God who above all things seeks the completeness of human nature and its liberating self-discovery is God's availability and accessibility to human beings. The direct availability and presence of God, who is as well as will be, seems to be an essential part of the pattern of the biblical experience and of a theistic experience which is not necessarily confined to Christians. In some sense such a presence and availability must be partnered by absence and mystery if it is to retain the essential sense of 'otherness'. God's mystery, in other words, both contains this paradox and goes beyond it. God is available to us and absent from us. God is accessible and forever beyond. God, as Thomas Merton said, is being. *(1)* Both something we cannot help but do and something we are always becoming. Interdependency therefore is an ever-present aspect of the relationship between God and human beings, in fact all of creation. We cannot be without God and without our being God is not. Merton and other mystics called this definition of the God-creation relationship 'aseity'. God is being or to borrow a Buddhist term as Merton often did, God is 'is-ness'.

It is not that God is as dependent on us as we are on God. It is rather that we cannot be human beings without God because God will not be God without us. The final and ultimate fact is God and dependence upon God. But this dependence embraces the unreserved commitment of God to humankind. God does not love us because God needs us but simply out of a desire to love us. This is to restate and perhaps recreate an orthodox Christian belief that the ultimate hope of fulfilment and freedom for human beings lies in their total dependence. This is a total dependence upon God and upon everyone else and upon everything that can be taken up out of the creative process. Dependence is the one great hope of humankind and the only promise with a real hope of fulfilment. Independence is not a reality now, nor is it a viable possibility for the future. It is an illusion that we can exist on our own. It is moreover, an illusion which if persisted in and acted upon can bring only destruction and domination rather than liberation and freedom.

The question remains however as to what the mode of dependence which paradoxically sets is free is. For so much of what we experience now as dependence is in fact part of a

structure of dominance/dependence relationships which we are discerning more and more to be humanly crippling, at the psychological, the social and the political level. Thus the identity of God is the identity of a totally dependent relationship which acts as the source for the only true liberation of human beings. Within this definition and central to it is the characteristic of love which is the energy of relationships in which mutual dependence grows stronger than the unrelated activities of independence through which the lovers threaten rather than contribute to the growth and freedom of one another. Growth and freedom go with the dependence and the dependability of maturing love. Of course in human relationships love, like dependence, often goes wrong and becomes distorted and we may have many pathological expressions of love and dependence, which are often interconnected. So if we connect love, dependence and freedom we are faced with the question whether there are any sources and resources of redeeming and liberating dependence and love. It has been Christian faith and Christian tradition that this is precisely the concern and scope of the activity of God in Jesus Christ.

However, we must critically ask to what extent the record of the church, which claims to worship God through Jesus Christ supports this claim or hope. This is where we return to the distortions of post-industrial Western culture and its theology. 'Dependence' in such a climate becomes a problematic word because dominance has been practised and exacted in so many ways which are now coming increasingly to be recognised as dehumanising. In the course of its history the church has inevitably become permeated by the structures and society of which it is a part. The church has of course also contributed to that society but this process of contribution and interaction has always been symbiotic and two-way. A 'pure' church in the sense of a body and institution which keeps itself unmarked by the world and draws the hope of its existence and the direction of its actions only from God in Christ, does not exist and has never existed. It could not exist if it had to be part of and play a part in human society. Theologically speaking also such a 'pure' church **should** not exist for God did not choose to remain untouched by the human condition in Jesus. If then a socially conditioned and necessarily human church is to play its role as the people of God it must be dependent on always being open to judgement and reform (semper reformanda). This involves being made aware over and over again of those points where conformity to and conditioning by the society and culture to which we belong has reduced the church to false representations of God, betrayal of Christ like service, and denials of and mis-

identifications of the work of the Spirit.

Where pathological situations and conditions of this nature exist, or even become prevalent, then it is easy to see that the death of the 'God', who is obeyed in such demeaning ways, believed in in such restrictive forms and represented by such dominating institutions, becomes a necessity for human liberation. The actual pathology of belief, of act and of institution produces the exact opposite of the salvation which the believers in their actions and through their institutions claim to be both receiving and presenting. The way is open then not only for a Nietzschean proclamation of the death of God, but also for a Freudian analysis of the rejection of the father figure as an unhealthy symbol of pathological dependence.

i) The Religion of Unfreedom

It is crucial therefore that we expose, as Jurgen Moltmann seeks to do, the pathology of the western Protestant tradition. That is, that we see that this western Christian tradition is not a necessary expression of Christian faith and biblical understanding. Rather it has to do with distortions and reactions to distortions. If we begin to understand those, then we also begin to open up new and renewing prospects for Christian beliefs and practice, particularly with regard to the freedom/dependency relationship.

Moltmann claims to,

'reassert the value of aesthetic joy against the absolute claims of ethics.' (2)

In doing so he challenges a whole cultural value system which may by now have outlived its human usefulness. That system is the western understanding of human beings as doers and achievers, originally under a God who both dominated them and yet urged them to exercise domination themselves. That is to say that it is the self-understanding of human beings which grew up and became the driving force as European civilisation developed and pushed its influence around the world, while its commonly accepted way of understanding the world was some form of Christianity. It was God, the father of Jesus Christ, who provided us with a mission which embraced the world and who has the source both of ultimate sanction and ultimate reward. God was thus the absolute of duty and responded to through

it, just as it was God who was the author of the command and, as Creator, the provider of tools to achieve domination.

Whatever the appropriateness, ambiguity or distortedness of the original faith, insights and responses which were developed in the earlier stages of European expansion, we are now living with its pathological aspects and effects. We have the ecological problems of the uncontrolled exploitation of resources, the political problems of race and white domination, originally of empires and now of trade and development. We also have the acute problems of faith. For the Christian church and Christian believers have been very much part of the history which now has these pathological effects. 'God' is therefore very much involved. Consequently we are faced with the question whether what the word 'God' stands for is part of the pathology and nothing more, and therefore necessarily to be rejected as we seek healthier and more human states of affairs.

Such a rethink causes us to diagnose pathological features in western Protestant theology which are related to pathological features in western society. Theological re-examination such as that of Moltmann provides us with an example of the way in which the church needs the highlighting of sickness in society to be alerted to its own sickness and through this to discover what is available in its own resources to overcome them and thus be freed for the more effective service of God and engagement in the struggles of humanity. In this case the human struggles for freedom occasion a re-examination of the ways in which the Christian faith has understood and represented the relationship of human beings to God. This re-examination enables a rediscovery and a reassertion of insights about God which promise to triumph over the pathology both in Christian believing and in society at large. The way in to this re-examination lies through an evaluation of the human importance of aesthetics and joy over against the 'absolute claims of ethics'. *(3)*

In accordance with his approach as theologian, Moltmann develops this as part of his critique of theology as thus far practised in his tradition.

' Theology does not have much use for aesthetic categories. Faith has lost its joy, since it has felt constrained to exorcise the law of the old world with a law of the new. Where

everything must be useful and used, faith tends to regard its own freedom as good for nothing. It tries to make itself useful and in so doing often gambles away its freedom. Ethics is supposed to be everything. ' (4)

To suppose ethics to be everything is to make a fundamental and dangerous mistake about both God and human beings. People are trapped in 'usefulness' and God becomes either an oppressor or an irrelevance. This line of understanding is expressed particularly clearly by Moltmann.

' In our society the training of children already involves such threatening questions of existence according to which the meaning of life allegedly lies in rendering service, being useful and having purposes ' ... be good for something or you are good for nothing ...' the beneficiaries of society are saying. When a man sees the meaning of life only in being useful and being used, he necessarily gets caught in a crisis of living, when illness or sorrow makes everything, including himself, seem useless. The catechism question of the 'chief end' of man's life is already a temptation to confuse the enjoyment of God and our existence with goals and purposes. Anyone who lays hold of the joy which embraces the creator and his own existence also gets rid of the dreadful question of existence - 'For what?'. He becomes immune to prevailing ideologies that promise man meaning of life only to abuse him for their own purposes. He becomes immune to a society which values and rewards men only in terms of their practical usefulness and their suitability as labourers and consumers. It is not self-evident that we should glorify God and rejoice in him, if the world seems to us like a desert. The notion that enjoying God implies enjoying our own existence has been obscured by our puritan training in self-control.' (5)

Karl Barth was the only theologian in the continental Protestant tradition who has dared to call God 'beautiful'. Another corresponding term is 'love', a love which does not merely manifest itself ethically in love to neighbour but also aesthetically in festive play before God. *(6)* The one sided emphasis on the dominion of God in the Western church, especially in Protestantism, has subjected Christian experience to judicial and moral categories. Theology describes Christ as prophet, priest and king but of the 'transfiguration of Christ', which is of central importance to the Eastern church, little has remained. The aesthetic categories of a new freedom have given way to the moral categories of a new law.

The reference here to the Eastern church is of particular importance. In the Old Testament tradition the term 'glory of God' has a specific meaning. It describes an awareness both of the fear of Yahweh and the glory of Yahweh. Hence the 'kabod' of Yahweh has definite mystic traits. *(7)* This re-introduction into theological consideration of the notion of an awareness of God's glory in association with a recognition of a positive approach to 'mystical traits' is of great significance with regard to the liberation of 'God' from the limiting distortions of Western theology, in so far as its traditions have developed with a suspicion, and sometimes a hatred, of both mysticism and mystery. A God who is useful as the great purpose and upholder of the law and order of the universe in a Christianity robbed of mystery can only become an oppressor whom it is a relief and a liberation to discover to be an irrelevance. But a concern with the glory rather than the purpose of God points the way to many liberating possibilities. Particularly in a society and culture in which 'purpose' has become an increasingly problematic concept in reference to human existence and in which alternative forms of self-enjoyment, play, mystery, creation and recreation are sought. In such a climate where religion traditionally and consistently supports the 'purposeful' ideology, then it becomes easier to see the perceived benefits and indeed necessary alternative provided by the variously relaxing, inspiring, abandoning and communing effects of for example alcohol and drugs.

Human beings have a need for self-affirmation and self-enjoyment which does not depend on their abilities to produce or to serve. To this extent, once again, the Eastern tradition provides a helpful insight. The Eastern understanding of human beings as being destined for 'theopoiesis' ie, to be made able to share the life of God, has always tended to produce the fear in Western tradition that this means an 'apotheosis of man, where man puts himself into God's place'. *(8)* But in its suspicion and misunderstanding of this doctrine the West has, on the whole, manifested its pathological tendency to defend the dominion of God by denigrating the possibilities of human beings, possibilities which are offered by God and stem from the very existence of God in glory and love.

Thus our attention is redirected to the Christian tradition concerning the glory of God and humankind's enjoyment of that glory. This is a tradition which has always had more emphasis in the Eastern church than in the West, but it comes now as antidote to those pathological developments in Western theology (as in Western society) which have

magnified God by diminishing human beings. The end of this has been to encourage the dismissal of 'God' and a tendency to leave humankind enslaved to history and to production in a world which is suspected of being without purpose and therefore subjected to meaninglessness. It is at least possible, therefore, that a liberation from a false theology of 'God' goes hand in hand with the discovering of new possibilities and hopes about the freeing of people, and especially about the freedom from the domination of ethics and purpose into the liberty of perception and joy. In a surprising and curious way, therefore, we may find in those who overthrow the ethics of culture and society in the pursuit of perceived joy and liberation through the disinhibiting effects of alcohol and drug abuse, a search however misguided, for the very experience of self and God which Western theology and practise has helped to deny.

The exploration of this assertion can only serve to demonstrate that at heart of any manifestation of the human condition is our perception and image of 'God' as symbol of life and existence, its nature and its meaning. The dominant and controlling nature of the God of Western theology has had the effect of according value to people only according to what they do or produce. At the end of the twentieth century with technology and communications developments calling into question the need for and usefulness of human labour and productivity we can see that such a God image quickly becomes equally redundant. Inevitably, therefore people seek alternative ways of investing life with meaning, of celebrating existence and of finding affirmation for themselves.

What emerges here is a new twist in our understanding of dependency and need in the human experience of God. With the God of purpose and service struggling for identity in a culture which values less and less the place and contribution of the individual in terms of productive labour and non-profit making service, the temptation, as we have seen, is to throw God out with this false theology. But this leaves an obvious gap in the manifest human desire and need for creative dependency, the need not to be isolated, to feel and experience connection with another if not THE other.

Such a need is expressly demonstrated in the growth of interest in counselling and psychotherapy. As the traditional mode of dependency expression and manifestation of spiritual and emotional search, the church, has found itself struggling with an outworn and

irrelevant God-image, people have created other outlets for this necessary human expression. For those who can afford it the offering of 'unconditional positive regard' *(9)* and complete attention from another individual for however limited a period and in however specific a context may at least indicate and at most demonstrate a reality of acceptance, of met needs, of connectedness and even of love. In a society and culture which highlights the importance of individual achievement and denigrates the importance of corporate responsibility and accountability to a degree which creates an almost intolerable sense of isolation in an increasing number of people, the growth in this new fascination with human relationships, self-awareness and 'personal growth' is hardly surprising. What is more interesting is the exploration of the question of what need is really being met by it, is it being met appropriately, and what of those who, for reasons of economy, education or culture are excluded from its pursuit.

ii) The Liberated Church

At this point, it becomes appropriate for us to examine the role of the church, both as the context in which people express their relationship with the Christian God, and as a modern institution which also seeks to respond to these issues of dependency, self-awareness and inter-relationship.

What we may ask, is the purpose of the church? It is the question being asked with increasing regularity and concern in our modern culture. For some the question is a matter of 'leave-taking'. They have been raised in a Christian environment, have received confirmation, have been baptised and married in the church, pay their offering to the work of the church regularly, yet rarely take part in the 'life of the congregation'. They identify with the church only sporadically, for example, when attending a Christmas service or a particular family event. Like all large organisations the established churches suffer from a growing apathy of their members. This apathy no longer manifests itself primarily as partial identification with the church but increasingly as complete non-identification. Many functions in the lives of people, which the church used to exercise, have now been taken over by people themselves or by other cultural and social institutions. When people come to believe that the church has no function, they begin to question its customary presence in their lives. What is the purpose of the church? Shall they continue to support it in spite of

the fact that it has little to say or give to them?

For some people this becomes a question of dread. They identify fully with the Church and in view of its growing meaninglessness they get caught in an inner crisis of identity. Those who experience such a crisis tend to divide into two groups.

One group would like to see the church become more modern, involved, contemporary, relevant. Since politics determines our destiny they are demanding the church's radical political involvement in the vital contemporary problems confronting society. They look at the church as a political avant-garde on the road to justice and freedom in a world of conflicting interest and struggles for power. For them the ideal church is the moral vanguard of a better world.

The other group maintains that a church which is socially oriented, politically up to date and relevant is bound to lose its proper identity. They are at a loss to recognise the church of their tradition in, for example, a church which sees itself as a sociotherapeutic institution. They are too aware that the number of those who still hold to the church is steadily declining. But they do not blame themselves or the church; rather they extol their small number as the remnant of the faithful. They retreat inwards into themselves and other like-minded circles where they can support each other.

The question of the church's purpose elicits a confusing variety of answers depending on the respective needs, but there is no longer a single, clear and necessary answer.

In former times the church used to be regarded as essential to society. State and social classes existed for the sake of the church, and the church existed for the sake of God and his worship. But then the state and classes moved away from their religiously conceived end of worshipping God and began to take religion and the churches into their service.

" The heads of a free state or an empire must uphold the supporting pillars of religion. They will then find it easier to maintain their state religiously, hence beneficially and in unity ... for religion greatly contributes to keeping the army obedient, the nation unified

and the people virtuous." (10) Machiavelli counselled in the 'Prince'.

Here religion is no longer regarded in terms of its own goals, but it is judged and valued only on the basis of its usefulness for some other purpose. Religion may be used to maintain respect for the authority of princes, judges, teachers and parents. Religion may be used to confront conflicting groups and parties with a higher point of view to establish harmony. Religion is necessary to support order, custom and morality in society. Thus religion ceases to be an end in itself and becomes a means to an end; its ends are determined by morality and politics.

When religion and faith are considered only from the standpoint of their expediency and usefulness for society, they are bound to vanish as soon as the purposes of society can be served by other means. Faith in God is no longer necessary to explain the riddles of nature or the turmoil of history. Nature and history can be explained as if there were no God. Faith is no longer necessary to lead a decent life. Morality and ethical responsibility are an outcome of group behaviour. The church is no longer necessary to maintain authority in the various areas of living. Either the responsibilities have been democratised or the authorities maintain themselves without the support of religion.

Bourgeois society has emancipated itself from the guardianship of the church. Its members demand that they be considered of age in the use of their minds and wills. The movement towards emancipation in our society and the desire for each of its members for self-determination make it increasingly difficult to answer such questions as 'Why do we need the church?' and 'What good does faith do?'. This may explain why some people bemoan the development towards emancipation while others frantically look for human needs and problems still unsolved which may be used to demonstrate that the church and its faith are necessary after all.

As we have already seen, the central role of the modern church is perceived to be that of service in specific areas of life and even in our so-called emancipated society there remains sufficient need and misery urgently calling for the church's practice of freedom of faith and love. Further, since our enlightened society produces a frightening amount of new suffering and new displacements, it is bound to be upset by the practice of the Christian

freedom of love in its marginalised places. If Christians and ecclesiastical institutions, therefore, are serious about practising the liberty of Christ which is the hope of the hopeless, they will have no trouble keeping busy in our society.

At the same time we note an expansion of the realm characterised by the absence of purpose and usefulness. This is the realm of 'leisure', of relaxation, entertainment and culture; the realm of purpose free sociability. Over all the church appears to be at a loss to know what to do in this area. Our tendency is to fulfill it with charitable and social activities and in view of the make-up of contemporary society this is not necessarily inappropriate. However, Schleiermacher looked at this area of life in another way. In his 'Theory of Social Behaviour' he found that *'all cultured human beings - as one of their first and most noble desires - are seeking free fellowship bound and determined by no external purpose'. (11)*

He already envisioned the goal of emancipation to be the free and unlimited communication between free people. In such a purpose free fellowship he saw the goals of the French Revolution on the religious and artistic levels, namely 'brotherhood' in the spirit of 'liberty' on the grounds of 'equality'. He considered fellowship as the free play of the human spirit in celebration of people with each other. In this sphere he saw the realisation of democracy, which had not been realised politically, since here the reversing effect of free give and take was already setting aside the strict order of rank in the political world of his time. But he admitted that this social democracy existed only within the free circles of the educated and wealthy. He did hope that science would one day liberate people from the slavery of mechanical labour but as things were free fellowship was available only to the lucky few. Schleiermacher's critique, unlike that of Marx, did not lead to an aggressive critique of the world of labour. Nevertheless, it contains something we should not discard.

If we look closely at the expanding scope of the new leisure society, we note first of all that it does not necessarily imply open space and free humanity at all. As a rule, the free play of relaxation and recreation offers no real alternatives to the world of labour. The determining factors in our relaxation and recreation are the very tensions which make them necessary. In our leisure we replay the very same things we have endured in our work and business, only without coercion and necessity. Workers who use machines all day

frequently relax with cars and engines. Teachers and other professionals who work with others in one form or another will usually enjoy reading in leisure time. In fact, most of our compensating and relaxing sociability reflects our work in society and occurs in conjunction with it. Why else do we talk so much about our business, school, household? Because we find it hard to 'turn off' after all and are usually unable to transfer our attentions to something entirely different. Free sociability is not free but is governed by reproductive imagination, which we employ in an attempt to free ourselves from our problems by talking them, over again. If it were otherwise mechanics would read more books, professors would ride motor cycles and we could not immediately be able to guess the occupations of people sitting around a table by the topics of their conversation.

The steps leading from a reproduction of the working world during leisure to the production of new conditions in leisure are difficult but must be attempted if we are to live our freedoms actually and if deviant and destructive addictive behaviours are not to go on increasing as alternatives for people forced into a shapeless and a-historical life of 'leisure'. For this reason, it is important that the Christian church does not use its allotted portion of time free of labour and domination entirely for educational and socio-ethical activities. These activities may be necessary but they are not yet free. The church needs to experiment with the possibilities of creative freedom. This does not mean the kinds of conversation, fellowship and games which only serve to provide necessary relaxation from the tensions caused by the excessive demands of everyday living. This is also important but it is not yet free. What it does mean is that at these points we try to play out models of creative freedom. It means to encourage a kind of productive imagination which looks towards the future and to bring back to light our repressed spontaneity. It means to support a culture which does not merely offer social compensations but prepares for social change. Worship itself may become a source of this new spontaneity; it no longer has to be a place of inhibitions embarrassments and polite efforts. Christian congregations may then become testing ground of the realm of freedom.

It is of course, only natural to ask for examples and prescriptions of how this can be done. Examples and prescriptions can only inhibit spontaneity which, after all, cannot be done but only released or set free. One theoretical clue (though there are many practical ones) lies in Dietrich Bonhoeffer's notion of 'being for others'. *(12)* Bonhoeffer used this formula to

illuminate the mystery of Christ's vicarious living and dying for us. Being for others is the fundamental structure of Christ's church which vicariously speaks up for people and particularly represents those who have no voice of their own. Being for others is essential for the liberation and redemption of human life. These basic insights have led to the now generally accepted formulas of 'the church for the world' and the 'church for others' and are manifest in many forms of Christian outreach, movements for justice and peace and pastoral ministries.

Still, 'being for others' cannot be the final answer, nor is it an end or freedom in itself. It is the way which leads to the much more liberated and interdependent place of being **with** others. Christ's death for us has its end and future in what he is with us and what we shall be with him. Being for others in vicarious love has its end to be with others in liberty. Giving bread to the world's hungry has as its end to break our bread with all of human kind. If this is not our end, our care for others merely becomes a new kind of domination. 'Church for others' may easily lead us back to the old paternalism, unless its ultimate end is that kingdom where no one needs to speak up for the other any more but where each person rejoices with her neighbour. Being for others is the way to the redemption of this life and is the form which redeemed and liberated life itself has taken. The church therefore, must not regard itself as a means to an end, but it must demonstrate already in its present existence this free and redeemed being with others which it seeks to serve. In this sense the church's function reaches beyond rendering assistance to a troubled world; it does already possess its own demonstrative value of being. In the remembered and hoped for liberty of Christ the church serves the liberation of people by demonstrating human freedom in its own life and by manifesting its rejoicing in that freedom.

The burden of 'usefulness' and productivity have become great obstacles in the ways of the theological and worshipping expression of this human freedom. The reactions that follow lead, as we have seen, to much of the addictive and compulsive behaviour that characterises both our modern society and its church. If we are to find the appropriate expression of liberated faith, then these notions of worship as play, of dependency as co-creative, of religious belief and practice as existing for enjoyment rather than self-control, then the experiences of people who have known the entrapments of severe addiction, and the joy of release are perhaps our best teachers. The ultimate addiction of course is to life itself - that

which we are most reluctant to give up and to which we cling most desperately. The experience of dying, therefore can sometimes offer the most perceptive and profound insights into the secret of how best to live.

A collection of writings by people who have spent their last weeks and months of their lives in Hospice care includes a piece by an eighty year old woman, written several days before her death:

" I'd dare to make more mistakes next time. I'd relax. I would limber up. I would be sillier than I have been. I would take fewer things seriously. I would take more chances. I'd climb more mountains and swim more rivers. I'd eat more ice cream.. I would perhaps have more actual troubles but I'd have fewer imaginary ones.
I'm one of those people who lived sensibly and sanely, day after day. I've had my moments, and if I had it to do again, I'd have more of them. In fact I'd try to have nothing else, just moments one after another instead of living so far ahead of myself. I've been one of those people who never went anywhere without a watch, a coat or a hankie. If I could do it again I would travel lighter.
If I had my life to live over, I'd go barefoot more often. I'd go to more dances; I'd pick more flowers." (13)

As a way of being for others in a less compulsed and addictive church, and as a theology for living in an increasingly profit and production motivated culture, and most of all, as a new kind of relationship with 'the persevering artist' creator that demands the worship of play and the religion of liberation, this is a radical description. One that allows people the freedom healthily and safely to discover the lightness of being that is its ground and the enjoyment that makes for responsible and creative choice without resorting to harmful deviance and compulsive addictions as an escape or a protest.

Conclusion

The Way to Recovery and Freedom

We have seen that addiction, both in terms of a substance addiction to alcohol, for example, and as a defining characteristic in an over-dependent relationship with God, is a circuitous route from pain to pleasure to pain. Recovery begins when the addicts' experience of pain is no longer covered by the experience of relief delivered by the chosen drug or obsession. Hence the first step on the road to recovery for the alcoholic is often the lowest point of experience at which he/she discovers that the substance can no longer alleviate the pain it creates. Similarly, the first step on the road to a new, liberated religious expression in which both people and God are freed, may be the abandonment of the dominant God-image who demands more than loves and who judges more than forgives and creates.

Human nature is prone to addiction as we have said, and this truth about an addict's resistance to recovery is a law of human nature. People frequently do not grow, develop, mature, convert or extricate themselves from destructive dominations unless and until an intervening confluence of events stops them in their tracks. It may be sobering up to the realisation that I have been violent or it may be a shattering life experience which begs the question of the simplistic theology of omnipotence on which I have always depended.

The experience of pain can be seen as a gift, in the sense of telling us that something is wrong. Protect an addict from pain and we prolong the addiction process. Paul Brand, a missionary doctor in North Africa, talks about how leprosy causes its greatest harm by numbing the extremities and the warning system of pain. *(1)* The tragedy of leprosy may seem like a remote reality in the Western World, but there are millions of people in the developed world who suffer because they are numbed in another way - by the addictive experience.

Alcoholism and the use of other drugs is only the most obvious form addiction takes. People have numbed themselves, inoculated themselves against their painful experience of pain that could warn them to move in a new direction; but in their numbness they condemn

themselves to perpetuate the addictive cycle. So in our religious experience we are tempted to the quick 'fix' of covering up the painful contradictions of living with the 'drug' of the all-powerful, all-mysterious, all-knowing God. The theology of 'ours not to question why'.

The relation of pain to recovery is illuminated by some insightful remarks of C.S Lewis. Human beings, he reminds us, are not merely imperfect creatures who have to be improved upon:

" We are, as Newman said, rebels who must lay down our arms ... To render back the will which we have so often claimed for our own, is in itself, whenever and however it is done, a grievous pain ... To surrender a self-will inflamed and swollen with years of usurpation is a kind of death." (2)

As long as the addiction process is working, the addict will reason, there is little reason to change it. But pain is different as Lewis, points out,

" Pain is unmasked, unmistakable ... pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasure, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain." (3)

In the same way we can see in the so-called 'crisis of faith' endemic to our society and in the marginalisation of our religious structures a reflection of the same pain. While many arguments surround these complex issues, moral, sociological, historical and theological, it seems reasonable to deduce that at least part of what is taking place is the expression of pain by a culture for whom the religious drug no longer relieves but only adds to the sense of dominance and worthlessness. The paradox is, as Lewis points out, that a real and healthy dependence on a loving God by a liberated people is essential to recovery.

It would be simplistic however to suppose that all addicts reach the point of unbearable pain or that all who do reach that point recover. It is clear that an intervention process which is inappropriate for the alcohol addict will not ordinarily be suitable to the person addicted, in a more extreme form, to religion or to relationships. The nature of these latter addictions limits the opportunity for the caring community to intervene. It is often simply none of their business, particularly if the problem lies within a personal relationship.

The most the caring community can do to help victims of addictive relationships or religious experience is to provide a ministry of presence and availability, particularly when their experience of pain has become so acute as to set in motion the recovery cycle. It is essential for us to share our observations of addictive behaviour with them; but we have no ethical or ecclesiastical right to intervene in a situation that is not life-threatening. Pastoral care and church discipline must observe all the rules of love here, including patient compassion, tolerance, understanding, unconditional positive regard, and acceptance. In some respects the issues may be more complex in cases of specific religious addiction, and certainly in the case of a whole cultures' relationship with its own theology and practice, than in cases of alcoholism or drug addiction. But there is a fine line here which must be carefully and deliberately drawn. The greater physical danger for too many people in allowing an alcoholic to hit bottom at his or her own speed does not in any way imply that the risks which non-chemically dependent addicts incur to themselves or others are insignificant. The emotional and spiritual damage may be even more severe but they are also more readily within reach of recovery.

If pain is the atmosphere necessary for recovery then the following indicators that a recovery process may be underway offer some interesting parallels with the experience of the culture as it rejects a dominant religious practice and seeks a more appropriate expression of a free God/creation relationship. Little is said here of the recovering alcoholic that may not also be said of a society recovering from the imposition of oppressive theology and destructive religious expression. These are dynamic qualities experienced by fifty recovering alcohol addicts (sober for at least two years) observed over a six year period.

1. Humility

Humility in a recovering person is the ability to accept his/her own limits and to acknowledge these as gifts not liabilities. The person who manifests authentic humility has no need to apologise for weakness or to explain strength.

2. Gratitude

An often repeated phrase in meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous is 'My name is X and I am

a grateful alcoholic'. Gratitude is the expression of thanks for the lessons in living learned over the course of a lifetime of addiction. That person dynamically understands the providence of a creator whose desire for him/her is not helpless dependence or dominance, but creative acknowledgement of healthy, creaturely, human needs.

3. Acceptance

The recovering person accepts him/her self in full: temperament, history, weaknesses, strengths, desires and limitations with a measure of celebration and renewed creativity. There is an important difference here between submission and surrender in acceptance as a necessary quality in a recovering person. In submission an individual accepts reality consciously but not unconsciously. Though the practical fact that one cannot at the moment defeat reality is accepted, there is a feeling lurking in the unconscious that a day will come when one will be able to drink again. On the other hand in surrender the ability to accept reality functions at the unconscious level. There is no remaining battle. Relaxation and freedom from strain and conflict ensue. When a society accepts that God is not over against creation and reality but the source and lover of it then the same freedom to celebrate with God rather than to appease, defend or to resist God is realised.

4. Diversity

The recovering person is an eclectic. With versatility he/she is willing to build a life on several pillars, to love many things. Many addicts get lost in a recovery programme, confusing the blue-print for recovery with recovery. They are able to do little more than discover the virtue of Alcoholics Anonymous; or they become God-obsessed, talking of little else than what the 'Lord' is doing in their lives. *(4)*

The truly recovering person has come to terms not only with personal limitations but also with the anxiety always to do something about them. Alan Watts uses a picturesque image to illustrate that we cannot understand or control life's mysteries by trying to grasp them, a lesson also learned by the church in modern society, any more than we can walk off with a river in a bucket.

"If you try to capture running water in a bucket, it is clear that you do not understand it and that you will always be disappointed, for in the bucket, the water does not run. To

'have' running water you must let go of it and let it run." (5)

Part of the challenge facing theology in our modern culture may be very similar to that facing the recovering alcoholic. Instead of using theology to define mystery (a contradiction in terms) or to persuade people that their only meaning lies in conformity to a code of ethics or dedication to a life of 'usefulness', Christian theology and practice may need to discover a new way of accepting its limitations, of allowing life to be life, of celebrating it despite its contradictions, of affirming individuals in their weaknesses and not in spite of them. Thus, paradoxically, it may find its dependency on grace brings a new reality of freedom.

Kierkegaard describes the paradox in terms of the individual whom he names 'the knight of faith':

" I examine him from head to foot, hoping to discover a chink through which the infinite can peer. But no! he is completely solid. How does he walk? Firmly. He belongs wholly to the finite; he belongs altogether to the earth. No trace of exquisite exclusiveness. He takes pleasure in all things. He does his job thoroughly. He goes to church but you could not distinguish him from the rest of the congregation. His heart rejoices over everything he sees. He is free from cares as any ne'er do well, but every moment of his life he purchases his leisure at the highest price. This man is making at every moment, the moment of infinity; he has known the pain of forsaking everything in the world that was not dear to him; and yet the task of finite is as pleasing to him as if he had never known anything higher for he remains in the finite." (6)

'The knight of faith' has one foot in the finite and the other in the infinite. The perspective from that vantage point is to see things as they are and to find in the ordinary the potential of the possible. Such now may be the task of prophetic theology in an increasingly materialistic and utilitarian culture.

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