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In Search of a Miracle: A Journey Through Religious Addiction in America

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**IN SEARCH OF A MIRACLE;
A JOURNEY THROUGH RELIGIOUS ADDICTION IN AMERICA**

William R. Leonard, B.A.



**An Abstract Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
Lindenwood College in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Science**

1993

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ABSTRACT

This project examines the power of religious addiction and addiction in general. Statistics show that addiction, in some form, effects over 95% of the population and has silently become one of the largest and most pressing social dilemmas of our time.

The research of modern behavioral specialists like Diane Fassel and Sharon Wegscheider-Cruse supports this conclusion. Anne Wilson Schaef, a leading researcher into addiction and author of When Society Becomes An Addict, argues that the context of our society is the fact that the entire system in which we live is an "Addictive System." Schaef describes this deadly system as a living organism possessing all the characteristics of an individual alcoholic or drug addict. Only by letting go of this system and moving into what Schaef calls the Living Process System can society rebound and recover. Schaef's Addictive System and Living Process System are stepping stones into the study of the world of addiction and serve as reference points throughout the project.

Fully understanding religious addiction and the addictive process requires a knowledge of human motivation. Human motivation equates to the "why's" of human behavior. This is a logical starting point into the study of addiction and subsequently precedes the chapters on addiction in this project.

Religious addiction is a disease. Like any disease, it evolves through numerous stages. These stages are outlined in an attempt to differentiate between healthy and unhealthy spirituality.

Fortunately, addiction offers the option of recovery. Recovery is a difficult process and requires a daily commitment from the addict. The steps to recovery represent the final section of the project. Identifying the attitudes and behaviors that comprise these steps will be the true value to the reader and the most important message of this paper.

**IN SEARCH OF A MIRACLE;
A JOURNEY THROUGH RELIGIOUS ADDICTION IN AMERICA**

William R. Leonard, B.A.

**A Culminating Project Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate
School of Lindenwood College in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science**

1993

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CHAPTER 1: IN THE BEGINNING. . .

The Start of the Journey

In 1991, while attending a family function, I overheard a discussion between several family members on a new service offered by the Catholic Church. The service was a "900 number" to the pope. People could call (at their expense) and receive a blessing from Pope John Paul II. The benefits for the caller were twofold. Not only could he call and receive the Pope's daily message, but he was also helping the Church reduce its accrued tax debt.

At first I found this hard to believe. Having grown up in a Catholic family, attended Catholic schools, and read a great deal of literature about the Catholic Church, I knew that it was one of the wealthiest churches in the world. So why would the Pope need a 900 number?

I wrestled with this topic for the next few days. I laughed every time I thought about calling the Pope. I knew that athletes like Jose Canseco and rock bands like Bon Jovi had their own 900 number - but the Pope! I had visions of the TIME/LIFE operator standing by to

take my call. The more I thought about it, the more preposterous the idea seemed.

Eventually those feelings of humor turned to feelings of concern and anger. Having absorbed many years of catechism during my parochial education, I knew what my ideas of religion and the Catholic faith were and that somehow they did not include a 900 service to the Pope. This seemed to contradict everything I had learned. What was the Catholic Church coming to? I became cynical, and began to view the Vatican more as a corporate headquarters and less as the residence of the Pope, the spiritual leader of millions.

Time passed and I filed the experience in my mind under the department of "That's Incredible." I had enough things to worry about in my own life without taking on the financial problems of the Catholic Church.

These feelings remained dormant until the spring of 1992. At that time I was attending graduate school and was enrolled in a course entitled "Fundamentals of Organizational Communications." It was here that I read Anne Wilson Schaef and Diane Fassel's book The Addictive Organization. This book spoke of a relatively new theory in the applied behavioral science arena. The premise of the theory, in short, was that the behavior patterns of large organizations, and even society itself, mirrored the behavior patterns of individual alcoholics and drug

addicts. Their theory went on to say that modern society was being controlled and regulated by a deadly system; what Schaef and Fassel labeled "The Addictive System." According to Schaef and Fassel, this Addictive System had silently taken over our world and set it on a course for unavoidable self-destruction. I found the topic fascinating to say the least.

It was here that I recalled the story of the Pope's 900 number and what I had considered unusual if not unethical conduct by the Catholic Church. I wondered if the theories advanced in The Addictive Organization text were applicable to the actions of the Church? Was it possible that the Catholic Church was operating under the guidelines of Schaef and Fassel's "Addictive System?" The answer, unfortunately, was yes.

The Schaef and Fassel text spurred me to continue my research into addiction; specifically religious addiction. To my surprise, I discovered that much had been written on the subject and that the phenomenon was not as uncommon as I had originally believed. So began my journey into the world of addiction.

Plotting a Course - Defining Religious Addiction

It is the purpose of this culminating project, then, to use Schaef's Addictive System as a means to address

religious addiction. Religious addiction is defined in the Addictive System as the process of using God, a religion, or a belief system as a means both to escape or avoid painful feelings and to seek self-esteem. It involves adopting a rigid belief system that specifies only one right way, which the addict feels he must force onto others by means of guilt, shame, fear, brainwashing, and elitism. Religious addiction is a complex, multi-faceted addiction that manifests itself in many ways. It can be the ultimate form of codependency - making the addict feel worthless in and of himself and looking outside for something or someone to tell him he is worthwhile. Thus it is an unhealthy relationship with God. It is using God, religion, or a belief system as a weapon against the self or others.

Like all addictions, religious addiction possesses some basic characteristics. The addict uses the addictive substance (i.e., alcohol, drugs, or religion) as a source of power, as the ability to control or be controlled; the addict uses the addictive substance as the "fix", the means to escape pain and avoid feelings; the addict is trapped in a world which eventually leads to death.

This paper is NOT intended to denounce religion in any way; like healthy spirituality, it should enlighten, not condemn. This paper provides ONE way of looking at

the problems of modern society and modern religion. The hope is to explain, and ultimately alter, their demise.

None of the topics discussed in this paper are inherently evil and addictive in and of themselves. Rather, it is HOW these items are perceived, manipulated, and used by the individual and by the various belief systems within the framework of the Addictive System that determines if and when they become unhealthy. For example, there is nothing innately sinful or addictive in the Catholic Church's establishing a 900 number to the Pope. If the Church is using the number as a means to foster spiritual growth and ensure the spiritual well-being of each caller then it is indeed a healthy action. However, if the Catholic Church is using its' position of authority (consciously or unconsciously) to play on the fears and guilt of the individual and send the message of, "You must help the Vatican, or else!" then the Church is operating addictively and playing by the rules of the Addictive System.

The difference between healthy and unhealthy spirituality ultimately lies with the individual; his PERCEPTION of himself, his religion, and how he sees his relationship with God and the Church. Does the individual perceive himself as good or bad? Has the individual been taught to perceive God as angry, judgmental, and obsessed with revenge or as kind,

compassionate, and forgiving? What is the message sent by religion and, more importantly, how is that person receiving the message?

How a person perceives himself and his relationship with God will ultimately determine his views on all matters concerning religion, including the Pope's 900 number, and determine if his actions are healthy or unhealthy, creative or addictive.

Establishing the fine line that separates healthy and unhealthy spirituality and describing behaviors and attitudes inherent in each is the intent of the paper. The goal is to illustrate the benefits of a positive relationship with God and show that healthy religion is possible, and when achieved, is a powerful and satisfying gift that fills a person's life. Ultimately, this will be the true value of the project and the message intended for the reader.

The negative aspects of religious addiction are not the end product. Rather, they serve as a starting point, a measuring stick on the road to understanding addiction. Religious addicts HAVE a disease, they are not a disease. Religious addiction, like alcoholism and drug abuse, is a treatable disease and recovery is possible. The secret of recovery lies in throwing away unhealthy behaviors that enslave the soul and replacing them with healthy behaviors that free it.

Again, it is critical to mention that there is nothing inherently wrong or addictive in actively practicing and teaching Christianity or any type of religion; or in believing in the existence of Jesus and that in his teachings are to be found all that we need for spiritual growth. However, a literal, absolute, dogmatic interpretation of scripture oftentimes opens the door to dysfunctional religious messages and behaviors.

While it is alright to accept the historical Jesus, we must remember that much of the teachings about him, the dogma and doctrine central to Christianity - came from people who were interpreting what the messages in the Gospels meant to them. These interpretations are centuries old and often the source of today's dysfunctional messages. In contrast, a healthy religiosity permits us to distinguish the religious teachings from the spiritual message and apply the message in a healthy manner to life in today's world. Unhealthy, rigid religiosity limits Jesus, the Church, and us, for it only serves to alienate us from God.

Supplies for the Journey - Understanding Human Behavior

Primary Source:

The Ego and The Id by Sigmund Freud

In order to grasp the complexities and illusions that surround and engulf the religious addict's world, it is

logical to begin the journey into addiction with a discussion of the fundamentals of human behavior. Addiction is a multi-layered disease. Each layer must be addressed if the addict is to fully recover. Understanding human behavior helps peel away each layer of addiction. In doing so the real problem is exposed. An exterminator does not remove the problem of termites by simply spraying the outside of a wall. The exterminator knows that the real problem is located inside the wall and it is INSIDE that he must begin if he is to remove the problem.

And so it is with addiction. To fully appreciate the outside world of the addict, there must first be an understanding of the inner layers where the problem takes root and eventually flowers into the deadly disease of addiction. A basic knowledge of why we behave the way we do, what motivates us to behave a certain way, why we react and behave one way and not another are key to understanding and appreciating the multiple layers of religious abuse and addiction.

It is an understatement to say that the human being is complex. There are infinite numbers of internal and external variables that effect the way we think and act. These variables, consistent in their own right, effect each of us differently. And each of us, based on our own collection of UNIQUE past experiences, will react

uniquely to every situation. The fact that these past experiences are in a state of constant evolution and reevaluation, ever-changing in terms of how we look at them, make the study of human behavior all the more challenging and difficult.

Human "behavior" is primarily goal oriented; generally motivated by a desire to attain some goal. Sigmund Freud, in The Ego and The Id, was one of the first to suggest that much of this behavior is affected by subconscious motives or needs. He believed that people are not always aware of everything they want; hence much of their behavior is affected by subconscious motives or needs. Freud argued that an analogy could be drawn between the motivation of most people and the structure of an iceberg. A major portion of human motivation appears below the surface, where it is not always evident to the individual. Therefore, many times only a small portion of one's motivation is visible or conscious to oneself. Freud's theory explains why addicts are often unaware of their addictive behaviors.

Freud defined the basic unit of human behavior as an ACTIVITY. All behavior, in fact, is a series of activities. We are always engaged in some type of activity: working, eating, sleeping. At any moment a person may change from one activity to another. Why? Why do people engage in one activity and not another?

Why do they change activities? Knowing why a person chooses to perform a certain activity over another is the key to understanding the addictive process.

More Supplies - Human Motivation, Goal Satisfaction, and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Primary Source:

Management of Organizational Behavior by Paul Hersey & Kenneth H. Blanchard

Paul Hersey and Kenneth H. Blanchard, in Management of Organizational Behavior, explain the process of human behavior as the satisfaction of needs. Understanding behavior is realizing which MOTIVES or NEEDS evoke a certain action at a particular time from an individual and why. Each person is different and each possesses different MOTIVATIONS for his activities. Motives are the needs, drives, or wants within an individual that propel him or her into a certain activity. These activities are directed toward achieving goals which may be conscious or subconscious.

Motives are the "whys" of behavior. They arouse and maintain activity and determine the general direction of the behavior of an individual. In essence, a person's motives and needs are the creators of his or her actions. For example, if a person is tired (motive/need) he will probably go to sleep (activity).

GOALS are outside of an individual. They are the "hoped for" rewards toward which a person's motives are directed. For example, status in the local church may be a person's goal (albeit an unhealthy goal) and joining every social group in the church is the activity used to reach that goal.

Primary Sources:

Motivation and Personality by Abraham Maslow
Social Interest by Alfred Adler

Each individual has hundreds of needs. These needs compete for that person's behavior at any given moment. For example, Bob can be hungry, tired, and thirsty all at the same time. What, then, determines which of these motives Bob will attempt to satisfy through activity? Will Bob eat something, get a drink, or sleep first? The need with the GREATEST STRENGTH at that particular moment will lead to activity. In the case of Bob, then, if hunger is his strongest need, he will probably get something to eat before taking a drink or going to sleep. After eating, the need of hunger is satisfied and Bob will move on and perform a behavior which satisfies his next greatest need.

The behavior of individuals at a particular moment is usually determined by their strongest need; or rather what they PERCEIVE as their strongest need. According to Abraham Maslow there is a hierarchy into which human

needs arrange themselves. This hierarchy of needs is illustrated on the following page.

Once the physiological needs (the bottom layer) begin to be fulfilled, other levels of needs become important, and these motivate and dominate the behavior of the individual. When these needs become somewhat satisfied, other needs emerge, and so on through the hierarchy. A brief outline of the hierarchy follows.

1. The PHYSIOLOGICAL needs are shown at the top of the hierarchy because they tend to have the highest strength until they are somewhat satisfied. These are the basic human needs to sustain life itself - food, clothing, shelter. Until these basic needs are satisfied, the majority of a person's activity will probably be at this level, and the other needs will provide little motivation.

2. After the physiological needs become satisfied, the SAFETY, or SECURITY, needs become predominant. These needs are essentially the desire to be free of the fear of physical danger and deprivation of the basic physiological needs. In other words, this is a concern for self-preservation. In addition to the here and now, there is a concern for the future. Will people be able to maintain

MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

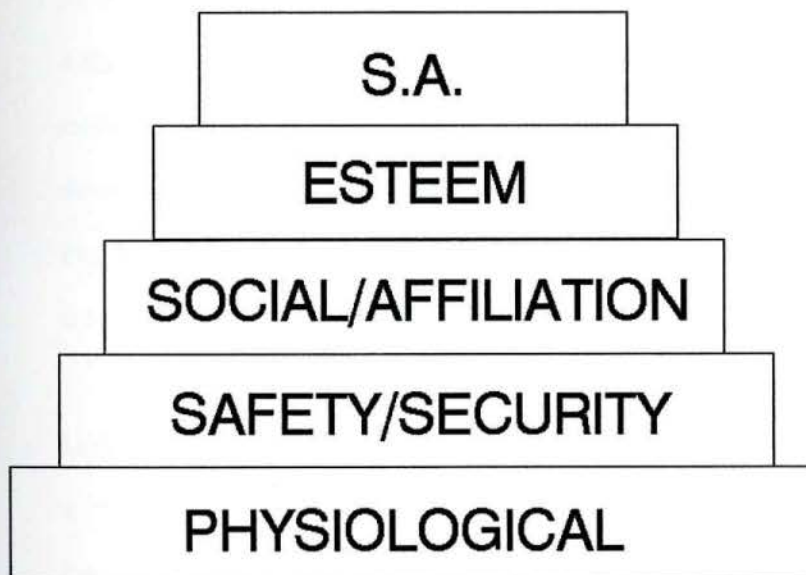


Figure 1: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

their job so they can provide food and shelter tomorrow and the next day? If a person's safety or security is in danger, other things seem unimportant. Safety and security needs, like the rest of a person's needs, exist on conscious and subconscious levels.

3. Once physiological and safety needs are fairly satisfied, SOCIAL, or AFFILIATION needs will emerge as dominant in the need structure. Since people are social beings, they have a need to belong to and be accepted by various groups. When social needs become dominant, a person will strive for meaningful relations with others. This area of relationships, both healthy and unhealthy, is where most addicts flounder and fail.

Since people are social animals, most individuals like to interact and be with others in situations where they feel they belong. While this is a common need, it tends to be stronger for some people than for others and stronger in certain situations. Even such a commonplace social need as belonging is, upon examination, quite complex.

Sociologist Stanley Schachter of the University of Minnesota has made a significant contribution in better understanding our need to belong. Schachter

found that it was not always good fellowship that motivated affiliation. People also seek affiliation because they desire to have their beliefs confirmed. People who have similar beliefs tend to seek each other out, especially if a strongly held belief has been shattered.

The need for affiliation is vital in our society and is not addictive in and of itself. In the world of addiction, however, affiliation becomes an individual's desire to make life SEEM a little more under control. When alone, the world seems "out of whack", but if one can find an environment in which others hold the same beliefs, it somehow makes order out of chaos. This attempt to control lies at the core of addiction.

4. After individuals begin to satisfy their need to belong, they generally want to be more than just a member of their group. They then feel the need for ESTEEM - both self-esteem and recognition from others. Most people have a need for a high evaluation of themselves firmly based in reality - recognition and respect from others. Satisfaction of these esteem needs produces feelings of self-confidence, prestige, power, and control.

The need for esteem or recognition appears in numerous forms. The two motives most related to esteem are prestige and power. The PRESTIGE motive is becoming more prevalent in our society today, especially as we move toward a middle-class society. People with a concern for prestige want to "keep up with the Joneses"; in fact they would like to stay ahead of the Joneses.

POWER is the resource that enables a person to induce compliance from or to influence others. Alfred Adler, a one-time colleague of Freud, defined power as the ability to manipulate or control the activities of others to suit one's own purpose. He found that this ability starts at an early age when babies realize that if they cry they influence their parents' behavior.

After childhood, the power motive becomes very potent in individuals who feel somehow inadequate in winning the respect and recognition of others. These people go out of their way to seek attention and overcome this weakness. In this connection, Adler introduced the concept of the inferiority complex. A person with an inferiority complex has underlying fears of inadequacy, which may or may not have some basis in reality. Religious addicts who have been told since birth that they are

inherently bad perceive themselves as not worthy of God and are strapped with the burden of an inferiority complex on a daily basis.

5. After the esteem needs begin to be satisfied, the SELF-ACTUALIZATION needs become more important. Self-actualization is the need to maximize one's potential, whatever it may be. A musician must play music, a poet must write, and a professor must teach. As Maslow expressed it, "What a man can be, he must be." Thus, self-actualization is the desire to become what one is capable of becoming. Individuals satisfy this need in different ways. It is what is important to an individual.

It was not Maslow's intent to say his hierarchy applies universally. Maslow felt that the hierarchy was a typical pattern that operates most of the time and that there are numerous exceptions to this general tendency.

When discussing Maslow's hierarchy it is important to remember that one level of needs does not have to be completely satisfied before the next level emerges as the most important. In reality, most people in our society tend to be partially satisfied at each level and partially unsatisfied. Religious addicts might be characterized by strong social or affiliation needs,

relatively strong esteem and safety needs, with self-actualization and physiological needs somewhat less important. Remember, though, that each person is different, and will operate at different satisfaction levels for each layer of needs.

The Journey Started

The study of human behavior is a logical starting point to begin the journey into the world of addiction. Understanding human behavior provides insight into the forces that motivate an addict to behave the way he does.

A person's need for self-esteem and control and his unhealthy attempts to satisfy these needs are the catalysts of addictive behavior. These behaviors are masked by the Addictive System and presented as normal to persons living within the system.

Schaef's concept of the Addictive System, shows that addiction is alive and well and thriving in modern society. The ideas discussed in chapter two describe how frightening the addictive experience can be and how most addicts, engulfed with feelings of isolation and hopelessness, are unaware of what is happening to them. The good news is that there exists a healthy alternative to the Addictive System and recovery is possible.

CHAPTER 2: AN UPHILL JOURNEY - SOCIOLOGY, SOCIAL THOUGHT, & THE ADDICTIVE SYSTEM

Our society is deteriorating at an alarming rate. As we watch the news and read the newspapers, we are increasingly made aware of corruption in high places, financial collapse, and a lack of morality. We fear that our children will be stolen by child pornography rings, and we hear of our "healers" taking sexual advantage of their clients. Our planet is being destroyed by acid rain and pollution, and nuclear holocaust is a very real possibility. Hunger and wars rage all over the planet.

When Society Becomes An Addict Anne Wilson Schaefer

Man faces a world of complex social problems. As a result he is perplexed beyond description; his thinking often ends in confusion.

The Development of Social Thought Emory S. Bogardus

Such is the plight of modern man. The world crumbles around him at an alarming rate, yet he does nothing to stop it. Man responds not with action but with growing indifference. Terms such as acceptance and depression become synonymous with adjustment. Rather than look for ways to change, to alter the present destructive course, society becomes more conservative, more complacent, more defensive of the status quo. Those few individuals who notice and draw attention to these growing problems are met with massive denial. When they confront society with

what they know, they are ignored, dismissed, or discredited. Why has this happened? What are the reasons, the forces working to extinguish society while man sits idly by? And what can be done to redirect the present course?

Heading in the Right Direction

Primary Source:

The Development of Social Thought by Emory S. Bogardus

Sociology, the study of the development of human society, and the philosophies of modern social scientists help explain why society is in such a mess. They show why man refuses to change (or rather is not capable of changing) a world in obvious need of restructuring. They also provide a hint at the real reason behind man's refusal to act.

Until modern times the majority of the study and analyses of social questions has been academic. Insofar as social theories have been correct they have been reserved for members of the academic world. Unfortunately, this represents a minute percentage of the world community. A large share of the population does not receive or understand the nature of social thought; neither do they benefit. Hence, the tendency is for the common man to hold social thought in contempt. This pattern must change! In order to be effective, social

thought needs to be democratized, that is, MADE AVAILABLE FOR ALL PEOPLE. Up until recent times this has not been the case.

The good news is that for the first time in modern history the average person is attacking social problems. The rank and file members have begun to take social matters into their own hands. This is a crucial first step. Our civilization depends upon the success of the individual mastering the intricacies of social thinking. Each person must get involved and take responsibility for the resurrection of society. Social thought, or thinking about the nature and solution of the problems of any society needs to become widespread if not universal.

The massive roadblock to this plan lies in the assumption that the average person is intellectually equipped to handle the new found responsibility of social thinking. The truth, and the subsequent difficulty in the pathway to sound social thinking by the average individual, is that he lacks proper intellectual background. People are prone to offer solutions for social questions without first equipping themselves with a knowledge of social processes and laws. Moreover, they are often UNWILLING to acquaint themselves with this necessary knowledge. Current social problems, in most cases, are perceived only by accident. A historical knowledge of social processes is essential to sound

thinking and understanding about present-day evils. Unfortunately, most of society lacks this knowledge.

A second roadblock lies in the nature of social thought. In his book The Development of Social Thought, psychiatrist and sociologist Emory S. Bogardus states that "Social thought is abstract. It is complementary to practical thought about social matters, and at times CONTRASTS sharply with popular thinking" (3). Bogardus points out that practical thinking rarely goes deep. It asks few basic questions, raises few underlying doubts, and perceives few far-reaching connections. Conversely, social thinking seeks causal explanations, classifies concreteness, penetrates into relationships, and leads to well-balanced procedures.

Practical thinking is characteristic of every normal person, but SOCIAL THINKING IS UNCOMMON and normally reserved for the academic world. The ability of the common man to do social thinking, to grasp the deeper meanings of things, and to penetrate the mysteries of life is rare. Practical thinking, based on a few experiences, constitutes the major sector of the thought life of every person, nearly all of their time. The key, then, is to somehow teach the common man to think and act on a social level.

And while social action is greatly needed, that action which emerges from shallow social thinking is

dangerous. Social action that springs from blind desire or irritated convictions is as likely to do harm as it is to do good. A knowledge of the history of social experiences and of the social thought which grows out of these experiences is basic to wise social action. Too many individuals enter the fight for social reformation inadequately prepared. Their intentions are honorable but the results are often deadly. Modern society is a testament to this phenomenon.

The dilemma facing society is that it desperately needs the constructive participation of everyone to correct its' problems. But as Bogardus points out, the majority of the common man lacks not only the knowledge but also the desire to do this. He is being asked to join in a thought process which is foreign to him, TO CHANGE! The few who become involved oftentimes generate more harm than good to an already dire situation. The end result is growing resentment, stubbornness and a refusal to listen or change.

The situation seems hopeless and apparently there is nothing that can be done to change it. These feelings of pride, anger, frustration, helplessness and failure are the work of a system, an Addictive System, which has silently assumed control of our society.

An Ongoing Journey - Moving Closer To the Problem.

Primary Source:

The Socio-Theology of Letting Go by Marie A. Neal

Over the past twenty years Marie A. Neal has written extensively about the problems of modern society and the role of religion within that society. Neal provides a another perspective on social thought and how we look at the world. She contends that society and religion are corrupt, immoral, and in danger of self-extinction. Social and religious reformation, according to Neal, can only be achieved by "letting go" of our current belief structure and our obsessive, materialistic value system. In her opinion, those in power (a.k.a., those with the money) have reduced religion to a modern convenience. And like any convenience, when it no longer fits into the framework of our lives, it is modified or removed. With modern innovations like "drive-thru churches" and faxing confessions, Neal seems to be correct in her assessment.

She states that social thought is based largely on an individual's definition of the world. This differs from Emory Bogardus in that Neal argues that social thought is not necessarily an abstract concept seldom used by the common man but rather a process found at DIFFERENT LEVELS in each person. According to Neal, how an individual defines the world and where he places himself within those boundaries determines the strategy

for making choices. Every choice that person makes is based on his perception of his social situation. In A Sociology of Letting Go, Neal states that:

If we perceive it (the world) to be alright the way it is - non-threatening to our interests - we act to preserve it. This attitude dominates the majority of current social thought. If we perceive the world as needing reform, we will strive through educational models to change the consciousness of the people that the system will work differently. If we perceive that the world's systems have outlived their usefulness we will direct our energies to social change. We will relinquish our hold on the system because in this system people are suffering... (18)

According to Neal, man's refusal to act is not based on rebellion or contempt of social thought but rather on a perceived satisfaction with the status quo. Only those individuals who feel the need for reform will act. Based on the lack of activity towards social reform it is obvious that the majority of the population is content and secure with the world as it is. Those individuals who feel the need for change (about 2/3 of the world population according to Neal) lack the social, intellectual, or financial status to do so.

Like most theories, Bogardus and Neal's ideas illustrate the common error in arguments concerning social thought; both are correct but their research stops short of the real problem.

Identifying the Real Problem

Primary Sources:

When Society Becomes An Addict by Anne Wilson Schaef
Alcohol & Substance Abuse: A Clergy Handbook by Stephen P. Apthorp
Creating A Future for Religious Life: A Sociological Perspective for Religious Life by Patricia Wittberg

The concerns of Bogardus and Neal are small pieces of a larger problem facing society. Their research reveals only a portion of a bigger picture. Like most research Neal and Bogardus provide answers without really addressing the problem. In her book When Society Becomes An Addict, Anne Wilson Schaef describes why the theories of Bogardus and Neal (and most other theories) fail:

First, most, if not all, theories concerning social thought stop at analysis and go no further. The thinking behind them is almost exclusively "left-brain" - rational and logical. To paraphrase Morris Berman in the "The Reenchantment of the World," they come out of a nonparticipatory, scientific approach that is based upon empiricism and logical positivism. This approach is quite limited; it views the world through a very narrow set of lenses. Second, most, if not all, deal with only one piece of the problem. No one as yet has put together and treated the problem as a whole. In fact, I suspect that no one has yet perceived the problem as a whole - or, at least, seen it for what it is...(4-5)

So what is the major social problem that no one has perceived up to this time. The answer explains why all other research falls short and why our world in such bad

shape? Schaef explains in When Society Becomes An Addict that:

The context of our society is the fact that the system in which we live is an addictive system. It has all the characteristics and exhibits all the processes of the individual alcoholic or addict. It functions in precisely the same ways...(4)

An understanding and awareness that society has an addictive disease is the missing piece from other explanations about current social problems. Most other concerned writers focus only on their specific area of interest or expertise. This is the norm within a fragmented society such as ours. It is also characteristic of the tunnel vision of the addict.

Stephen P. Apthorp, a celebrated researcher into alcoholism and drug addiction, echoes Schaef's ideas concerning life in an addictive society. Apthorp in Alcohol & Substance Abuse: A Clergy Handbook, offers the following statistics from a 1985 Gallup poll to support his argument:

- 1 out of 8 adults in America is an alcoholic.
- In 2 out of 5 families across America drinking was causing trouble.
- 47% of adults have no guidelines for their use of alcohol.
- 51% of adults have no guidelines for their children's use of alcohol.
- Behind cancer, alcohol and drug abuse is the number two killer in America...(3)

Apthorp's book also reveals that according to the National Conference of Alcoholism alcohol and drugs are responsible for:

- 80% of all fire deaths
- 65% of all drownings
- 70% of all murders
- 60% of all teenage highway fatalities
- 60% of all child-abuse cases
- 55% of all physical fights in the home
- 55% of all arrests
- 50% of all fatal car accidents
- 46% of all divorces
- 50% of all medical admissions
- 40% of all problems brought before probate courts
- 40% of all assaults
- 40% of all rapes
- 30% of all suicides (8)

Finally, Apthorp says that:

The motto of today is "Better living through chemistry." No matter what the feeling, no matter what the emotion, no matter what the physical condition - pain or boredom, tension, fatigue, too much pressure or loneliness, or the discomfort of a headache - there is a prescription or nonprescription drug to bring relief. No one need suffer any pain from anything ever again. This is the feel good mentality of modern society. The alcoholic-beverage industry agrees. It spent \$1,049.9 billion on its 1982 advertising to offer escape from all personal and social problems, to coax the common man and woman into drinking like the elite...(11)

We have become increasingly dependent on various addictive substances to the point where nearly the entire nation is affected. The bad news is that society continues to encourage their use!

Foundations of Addiction & the Addictive System

Primary Source:

Women's Reality by Anne Wilson Schaeff

Schaeff's concept of society as an addict builds upon ideas introduced in her book Women's Reality. In it, Schaeff identifies and describes three systems upon which addiction is built: the White Male System, the Emerging Female System, and the Reactive Female System. Schaeff defines a "system" as a series of contents and processes that is larger than the sum of its parts. It has a life of its own, distinct from the lives of the individuals within it, and it calls forth certain characteristic behaviors and processes in those individuals.

The White Male System:

Schaeff describes the system in which we live as the White Male System because the power and influence in it are held by white males, and, with the help of everyone, is perpetuated by white males. As the prevailing system in our culture, it runs our government, our courts, our churches, our schools, our economy, and our society. This system is not focused on the individual; it is the system, the worldview that ALL of us have learned and in

which we all participate. It includes as many women as men.

The White Male System is supported by four myths:

1. THE WHITE MALE SYSTEM IS THE ONLY THING THAT EXISTS.

The White Male System defines itself as reality, and when someone lives out of another system, that person is said not to understand "reality" or not know "how things are." The beliefs of other systems - including the female system, the Black System, and the Chicano system - are foreign to the White Male System and dismissed as crazy.

2. THE WHITE MALE SYSTEM IS INNATELY SUPERIOR.

Anyone who operates outside the system is by definition innately inferior. This is a confusing myth, because if the White Male System is the only system that exists, what is it superior to? This shows that since the system generates its own rules, it need not be logically consistent and often it is not.

3. THE WHITE MALE SYSTEM KNOWS AND UNDERSTANDS ALL.

This myth means that anything unknown by the White Male System theoretically doesn't exist. It defines what

knowledge is and what is worth learning. It also defines large areas of knowledge out of existence.

4. THE WHITE MALE SYSTEM IS GOD

If the White Male System is the only system that exists, if it is superior to any other system, if it knows and understands everything, and if it values only the rational and objective, then it can be God as that system defines God. This God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. The major role of this God is that of ultimate controller.

Schaef's description of the White Male System surrounds and envelops us, but Schaef says that it does not feel like "home." In order to survive within this system, a person must adjust his language, values, thinking, and the way he views the world. He denies his own reality and surrenders personal power in order to gain acceptance. This is the power that the Addictive System has over the victim.

The Reactive Female System:

Schaef describes this system as the female companion to the White Male System. This is a stereotypic, externally

defined system that tells women what they should think, feel, and do. It defines women in such a way that they consciously and unconsciously support the White Male System and its myths. The basic concept of this system is the "Original Sin of Being Female." In the Reactive Female System, women are taught that, by birth, they are innately inferior and that there is no absolution except through the intervention of an outside mediator, which is always a man. If women can attach themselves to a male and obtain approval, they can absolve themselves of the Original Sin of Being Born Female. In real life this never works but women continue trying.

The Emerging Female System:

The third system identified by Schaeff is the Emerging Female System. This system describes what happens as a person begins to trust her own perceptions and feelings. It is a variable and changing system that can be described as an open system. It is a system IN process, a system OF process. It is not a new system that we do not know. Schaeff states that many people, both men and women, describe their move into this system as a "coming home" to something they have always known but never been able to articulate.

The White Male System and the Reactive Female System are not two separate systems; instead they are two aspects of the same system, the Addictive System. These systems are the ultimate co-dependents. These systems live by the motto "My way or the Highway!" Within these systems, individuals are not allowed to think or feel. Maintenance of the status quo is the only thing relevant to these systems. They support and perpetuate each other and one cannot exist without the other.

The Emerging Female System, in contrast, is utterly distinct. It has no relation to the other systems. It exists independently, and functioning within it requires what Schaefer calls a "paradigm shift." A person must move out of, must shift from the White Male System and into the Emerging Female System to be truly alive. This is the "letting go" that Marie A. Neal refers to.

The Emerging Female System is life-supporting and life-producing; the White Male System and the Reactive Female System are non-living and unable to change. The White Male System is destructive to all things and has a nonliving orientation. The Emerging Female System is pro-living. It is an open system that allows people to feel and think for themselves; it allows an individual the freedom to achieve his greatest creative potential. It embodies the state of being fully alive in the broadest sense of the word. In contrast, the more

authoritarian Addictive System calls forth addictive behaviors. The individuals inside it operate out of an addictive process. An addictive system is a closed system that presents few choices to individuals in terms of roles they may take and directions they may pursue.

For a variety of reasons, Schaefer has renamed these systems. The new names will be used for the remainder of this paper. The White Male System - Reactive Female System become the "Addictive System." The Emerging Female System becomes the "Living Process System".

Personality Traits of the Addictive System

Primary Sources:

When Society Becomes An Addict by Anne Wilson Schaefer
Co-Dependency: A Therapeutic Void by Sharon Wegscheider-Cruse

Addiction is any process over which we are powerless. It takes control and causes individuals to do and think things that are inconsistent with their personal values and leads them to become progressively more compulsive and obsessive. A sure sign of an addiction is the sudden need to deceive ourselves and others - to lie, deny, and cover up. An addiction is anything we feel tempted to lie about. An addiction is anything we are not willing to give up. Like any serious disease, addiction is

progressive, and it will lead to death unless a person actively recovers from it.

Addictions can be divided into two major categories: substance addictions and process addictions. Both function the same way and produce similar results.

Substance addictions are addictions to substances that are deliberately taken into the body. These substances are almost always mood-altering and lead to increased physical dependence. Alcohol, drugs, caffeine, and food are examples of substance addictions.

Process addictions are addictions to a process - a specific series of actions or interactions. Almost any process can be an addictive agent. Gambling, sex, work, religion, and worry are examples of process addiction.

In any type of process or substance addiction, the victims are kept unaware of what is going on inside them. Addicts do not have to deal with their anger, pain, depression, confusion, or even their joy, because they do not feel them. Addicts cease to rely on their knowledge and their senses and start relying on their confused perceptions to tell them what they know and sense. In time, this lack of internal awareness deadens the internal processes, which in turn allows the addict to remain addicted. And at some point, the addict dies.

As the addict loses touch with himself, he also loses contact with other people and the world around him.

Addiction dulls the sensory inputs. The addict is aware that something is wrong, but the addictive thinking tells him that it could not possibly be his fault. This thinking also tells the addict that he cannot make things right, that someone else will have to do it for him.

When someone else fails, the addict blames them for what is happening. An addiction absolves a person from having to take responsibility for his own life. The addict assumes that someone or something (God for example) will miraculously swoop down to make things better or help deal with the problems at hand. Since addicts feel increasingly powerless and bad about themselves, the notion that they can take responsibility for their lives is inconceivable to them.

The longer they wait to be rescued, the worse the addiction becomes. Regardless of the addiction, it takes more and more to create the desired effect, and no amount is ever enough.

Any addictive system is contagious, and those who live within it become infected with the disease sooner or later. It is rare for a person to have only one addiction. The addictive person, or the individual operating within the addictive system, usually has multiple addictions. These work to further trap the person in the Addictive System.

Individuals functioning within an addictive system exhibit addictive characteristics even when they are not personally abusing drink or drugs. These co-dependents are major components to the Addictive System and are just as sick and in need of help as the addict themselves. Co-dependents are defined by Schaef as persons currently involved in a love or marriage relationship with an addict, had at least one alcoholic parent or grandparent, and/or grew up in an emotionally repressive family. The Addictive System views co-dependence as normal and a vital part of the system. The Addictive System could not survive without its co-dependents. They are the people who keep it going, they are its advocates and its protectors.

The horror of the Addictive System is that it has infiltrated and contaminated every part of our society. Addiction and co-dependency affects not only individuals, but families, communities, businesses, and other institutions. Research by Sharon Wegscheider-Cruse, a certified chemical-dependency specialist, family therapist, and pioneer in the study of addiction and co-dependence, shows that approximately 96% of the population are addicts or co-dependents. In Co-Dependency: A Therapeutic Void, she discusses in detail just how far the addiction has spread in our society.

Characteristics of the Addictive System - Using the Concept of the Hologram

Primary Source:

The Addictive Organization by Diane Fassel & Anne Wilson Schaeff

The Addictive System has set our society on the path toward nonliving. In The Addictive Organization Schaeff uses the concept of the hologram to further explain the Addictive System phenomenon (35-37). The essential feature of a hologram is that each piece contains the entire structure of the entire hologram; each piece is not just a part of the whole, it has the entire pattern and way of functioning embedded in it. This is a useful way to look at the Addictive System. The system is like the individual, and the individual is like the system. The Addictive System has all the characteristics of the individual addict. And because we live in this system, every one of us exhibits many of these same characteristics. These addictive characteristics are outlined in The Addictive Organization, by Diane Fassel and Anne Wilson Schaeff (37-72) and include the following:

Self-Centeredness

Addicts are notoriously self-centered. They possess a total lack of consideration for others. Concern over

their next fix overshadows everything else. The food addict thinks only of the next meal, the alcoholic thinks only of the next drink. The Addictive System considers self-centeredness a virtue.

In the Living Process System relationships are central. A Living Process System person is in a constant state of transcending the self. Each new encounter holds the promise of equality. People who perceive each other as equals form the habit of seeing and respecting each other's points of views. Their relationships are not built on fear and control but on honesty and respect. Each person is allowed the opportunity to think, feel, and question; something unheard of in the Addictive System.

The Illusion of Control

In an addictive system everyone tries to control everyone else. The worse the addiction becomes, the more desperate the need for control. The belief that anyone can get a handle on it is an illusion. Addictive relationships are founded on the illusion of control. Many people are convinced that they are not loved unless the loved one is trying to control them. They define love as either controlling or being controlled.

In the Addictive System control is often confused with responsibility. Responsibility in a relationship often means taking control over all of the decisions made about it.

In the Addictive System responsibility involves accountability and blame. In the Living Process System responsibility is the ability to respond. The Addictive System professes that responsible people are "in charge" and should be able to control everything. It therefore follows that they should be held accountable and blamed if something does not go as planned.

The illusion of control in the Addictive System begins with an attempt to control the self with a substance or a process. Taking drugs, drinking, and working late are perceived as ways to stay in control. This control is simply a means to avoid dealing with what one is thinking, feeling, and doing. They quickly expand into attempts to control what others are thinking, feeling, and doing.

Dishonesty

The Addictive System is fundamentally dishonest. Frequent and habitual lying is one of the more evident signs of alcohol or drug abuse. Dishonesty is always destructive. The Addictive System is built on

dishonesty. It is a system in which we are expected to cheat and get away with as much as we can (Americans are expected to cheat on their taxes).

Denial

This is the addict's major defense mechanism. Denial allows the addict to avoid coming to terms with what is really going on inside him and in front of his eyes. Seeing what is truly going on in and around the world poses a threat to the Addictive System. The addict who refuses to see what is really happening around him is participating in a dishonest system and helping to perpetuate it. Denial is a normal way of being in the addictive world.

Confusion

Confusion is a way of life in the Addictive System. Much time is spent trying to figure out what is going on. When we are confused, we tend to believe that the world is confused.

Confusion keeps the addict powerless and controllable. It also keeps the addict ignorant to what is really going on around him. Confusion keeps the addict from taking responsibility for his own actions.

No one expects confused people to own up to the things they think, say, or do, or face the truth about who they are. Confusion also keeps the addict busy. When a person spends all his energy trying to figure out what is going on, he has none left over for reflecting on the system, challenging it, or seeking alternatives to it.

Keeping the addict within the Addictive System is the primary goal of confusion. A confused person will stay within the system because the thought of moving out is too frightening. It takes a certain amount of clarity to try new things and confusion makes clarity and risk taking impossible.

Frozen Feelings

Understanding this concept is essential to understanding the entire Addictive System and the addictive process. Addicts tend to be totally out of touch with their feelings. They function to shut off, block out, and push down those feelings that they think they can't handle: fear, anger, anxiety, rage, panic, joy, excitement, and pleasure. Even though addicts may possess intense feelings, they stifle them because they are incapable of dealing with them in a healthy way. Furthermore, addicts have no ability to differentiate among their feelings.

Rage, anxiety, and fear seem to feel the same, if, in fact, they are felt at all.

Frozen, controlled feelings are at a premium in this society. The movies, television programs, and newspapers, convey the message that we must never show our feelings. Men in particular are taught not to show their feelings from a very early age. Feelings, whether positive or negative, must be kept inside. People who feel are a threat to the system, whether they feel angry, happy, hateful, contented, or joyful.

People use the various addictions to block and suppress their feelings without ever understanding why. Addicts who find themselves craving a drink, a cigarette, or a snack when they begin to feel anxious do not equate the craving with anxiety. They feel something that they can't comprehend, and they immediately head for the fix.

Fear

Fear is the foundation of the Addictive System. All of the characteristics of the Addictive System discussed in this section are rooted in fear. Fear permeates the Addictive System. It is the glue that holds the Addictive System together. Without it the system could not survive. Fear makes each of us dependent upon our addictions. Addictions become our strength, a refuge

where we are free from all that is bad. Fear refuses to allow us to experience what is going on inside us because this may contradict what the system has told us is the truth. How many times have we not spoken out against something simply because it conflicts with the ideas of the majority? We know it is wrong yet we say nothing. Why? Fear of becoming unaccepted; fear of losing status; fear of becoming a social outcast? Our excuses may vary but the reason remains the same; fear.

Responsibility and Blame

Addicts rarely take responsibility for themselves and their lives. This is due to the fact that the addict equates responsibility with blame. If addicts take responsibility for their lives, then they must be to blame for all the bad things that have happened to them, and everything that has befallen them is their fault. The Addictive System places great emphasis on this cause-and-effect relationship, which of course is closely related to the illusion of control.

The Living Process System takes the addict away from this perception. In this system, taking responsibility for one's own life means owning it, not controlling it. It is only when a person owns his life, his feelings, and

his experiences that he is able to learn from them and embark on the road to recovery.

Perfectionism

Addicts are convinced that nothing they do is ever good enough, that they are never good enough, that they don't do as much as they should, and that they can be perfect if only they figure out how. Those who treat addicts consider perfectionism to be a major stumbling block to recovery. It is difficult to help addicts forgive themselves for not being perfect and perceive themselves as good people anyway. Addicts persist in viewing themselves as bad people trying to become good, not as sick people trying to get well.

Being perfect means always knowing the answers, always having the correct information, never making mistakes, and constantly reprimanding and beating yourself for falling short.

The Addictive System assumes that it is possible to be perfect and places the burden of perfectionism on all participants. Mistakes are simply unacceptable in the Addictive System. People cannot learn from their mistakes because they must pretend that they never make any. Mistakes are hidden or covered up.

The Addictive System achieves perfectionism by defining all things for its' members. Something that is not defined by the system cannot exist, and if something does not exist one does not have to deal with it. Addicts can deal only with those things that protect their perfect, all-knowing image. As a result large areas of knowledge remain unavailable or unexplored.

Dependency

In this state the addict assumes that someone or something outside him will take care of him because he cannot take of himself. In the Addictive System, dependence means relying on others to meet our emotional, psychological, intellectual, and spiritual needs. This is the role of the co-dependent. These types of relationships are the norm in the Addictive System.

An addict, to recover, must recognize the need to rely on and take care of himself. Recovery is the realization that one has the ability to do this and the ability to stay close to others without being dependent.

Naturally, this realization contradicts everything taught by the Addictive System. From an early age people are told that dependency is the road to intimacy, and that two people cannot get close to each other unless they become mutually dependent.

This is exactly what the Addictive System wants. There is no place for intimacy within this system. True intimacy requires people to be fully alive and whole in and of themselves. True intimacy threatens the Addictive System. The system prefers people to have relationships in which neither person feels secure enough to function independently and to stay in those relationships even after they are long since dead.

Roads to Nowhere - Choices & Illusions Within the Addictive System

According to Schaefer, all participants of the Addictive System have three combinations of choices to make. The first is the simplest. One can (1) choose not to live and (2) choose to die. The result is usually either suicide or eventual death from addiction.

The second choice is rare in the Addictive System. One can (1) choose not to die and (2) choose to live. The result would be a system change, a paradigm shift, letting go of the Addictive System and moving to the Living Process System.

The third choice is the most common in current society. One can (1) choose not to die and (2) choose not to live. The result is total adjustment and acceptance of the Addictive System. These are the "zombies" who find false security in the useless jobs of

the system. They choose not to die because the system needs them to perpetuate itself and they can therefore fit in and feel accepted.

The Addictive System asks the individual to become comfortable with the third choice, with actively participating in their own nonaliveness. Addictions take the edge off, block awareness that could threaten our equilibrium and allow us to grow, and keep us too busy to challenge the system. They are essential to the system.

For most addicts the second choice, the desire to be truly alive, is far more frightening than the thought of dying or being only partially alive. Since addicts have high control needs, being addicted gives them the illusion of having control (they are in control of being not alive and not dead). Living fully seems the same as having no control, and that feeling is experienced by the addict as unbearable.

The Addictive System is an illusionary system; a system based on the illusion of control, the illusion of perfectionism, and thinking processes that twist reality into left-brain constructs, dishonesty, and denial. To maintain the illusions permeated by this system, a person must shut off reality in as many ways as possible. This is why addictions are essential to the survival of the Addictive System. Addictions keep us from seeing what we

see and knowing what we know. Addictions allow us to fit comfortably into a system that is nonliving.

The individual reflects the system and the system reflects the individual. The same characteristics operating in the individual are operating in the system. In order to understand the system in which we live and move it to recovery, ALL the participants must admit that it is addictive and functions the same as any drunk . Only then can we see the system for what it truly is.

Processes Within the Addictive System

The Process of the Promise

The Addictive System is built on the process of the promise. The system wants people to look to the future and not recognize or deal with the present. Religion, with the promise of eternal life, tends to use this process to control its members. Members begin to ignore the present in order to cash in on a brighter future promised them by eternal salvation. The tragedy is not in looking forward to the next life but rather in failing to discover and enjoy the experiences in this life.

The promise of the Addictive System is that it is possible to have everything in this life we want and need as long as we accept and conform to the system. "Trust the system, and you'll be taken care of" is the message.

The Addictive System promises us that things are going to get better. The system encourages us not to act, not to correct anything. Just sit back and let the system worry about everything and things will improve. "Someday the addict will quit drinking or taking drugs" is the ultimate promise and the ultimate lie of the Addictive System.

The promise is what keeps the Addictive System going. Focusing on the future keeps everyone static and mired where they are. No one can escape the system and no one can heal. In order to continue to believe in the process of the promise, one must develop an increasingly elaborate denial system and continue to deny their DAILY experiences.

The Process of Illusion



The Addictive System as an illusionary system has been mentioned. We have seen how the Addictive System uses itself as the criterion and defines everything else as illusion. At best, this is confusing; at worst, it is paralyzing. Our questioning, feeling, and exploring brains are being held captive by our rational minds.

The Addictive System is founded on the belief that it is possible to control ourselves, other people, other systems, other countries, even the universe. The

majority of our energy, time, and money is spent pursuing this illusion. Equal amounts are spent cleaning up the resulting mess. The physical body suffers so much stress when we try to control our own feelings and emotions that it erupts in high blood pressure, ulcers, heart attacks, and strokes. Relationships fail because we try to control everyone with whom we come in contact. Our planet is on the brink of disaster because of the elaborate and lethal defense systems we have created in attempting to control other nations.

The Process of Dualism

This process is basic to all aspects of the Addictive System. All the characteristics and processes inherent with this system emerge out of dualistic thinking. Most of us are trained in dualistic, left-brain thinking. Education prepares us to think this way - either this or that, either right or wrong, either black or white.

Dualistic thinking oversimplifies a very complex world, thereby giving us the illusion of control over a universe in process. The perception of being able to reduce something that has many complex facets into two clear dimensions, feeds our illusion of control.

The process of dualistic thinking sets up a situation in which, if one part of the dualism is

affirmed, the opposite is automatically assumed to be false. If something is right, then the assumption is that the opposite must be wrong. The world is perceived as pairs of opposites. We readily accept this perception because the process of dualism prevents us from generating or considering alternatives. To do so would be to go outside the system and our fear prevents this from happening. Dualism keeps us confused and indecisive, believing that we must choose between two undesirable opposites - the rock and the hard place or the frying pan and the fire.

These are the processes of the Addictive System. These are the secret strengths of the system. They are far more powerful than either its contents or its roles. Since we live in a system that is static and focuses almost exclusively on contents, we have little knowledge of or skill with processes. Schaefer says that "This is one reason they (the addictive processes) exercise such a profound influence over us. We are not trained to recognize them; we do not know what to do about them; and we do not know how to live with them." (14) This supports what Bogardus says earlier concerning the knowledge, or lack of knowledge, of the common man in regard to social process.

The processes and characteristics we described are the WHYS of the Addictive System. Knowledge of these processes and characteristics gives us an advantage because we can now explore the HOW of addiction. How have we ended up in a system whose primary emphases are powerlessness and nonliving? How have we been reduced to denying our very life force? How has this come about?

Realizing where the power lies in the Addictive System gives us the power to recover and the power to aid others in their recovery. With that insight we can begin healing ourselves and function as healers in the world. We can and must see that we live in an Addictive System that is sustained by an addictive process that has many offshoots and permutations. As we see this truth, we can forgive ourselves and see that the entire system is diseased and desperately needs to recover.

Nearing the Summit - Summary of the Addictive System

Letting go of the Addictive System and moving into the Living Process System requires that we are willing to see what we see and know what we know; that is acknowledge the truth and take responsibility for that truth. Failure to do this will eventually lead to personal death and, on a larger scale, to the death of our world. This

is the one of the few guarantees of the Addictive System. The addict is also guaranteed that:

1. The Addictive System will lead to total destruction.

The Addictive System has a nonliving orientation. It requires us to relinquish our personal identity, power, awareness, and knowledge in order to be accepted.

The Addictive System perceives all people who are truly alive as direct threats to it. People are brought into the system and forced to fit into it. The goal is to preserve the nonliving system and the status quo. Schaeff states in When Society Becomes An Addict that:

When we realize that this nonliving attitude is the orientation of the system in which we live, it is almost too much to bear. When we see and know that our major policy decisions are made by people who do not understand or admit to their own addictive processes, and these decisions are made by persons whose thinking processes are the same as the distorted thinking of the addict, we rightfully fear for our lives and those of our children. Must we placidly await the destruction that is the promise of the Addictive System...(132)

2. The Addictive System is morally & spiritually bankrupt.

The seven deadly sins are inherent to the Addictive System and actively work to perpetuate it. Pride, covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony, envy, and sloth -

the sins that are traditionally deemed fatal to spiritual progress - are woven into the systems very fabric.

Our world has been literally turned upside down by moral deterioration. The system has redefined morality to fit its behavior. It has made its behavior the norm and defined it as morality. Schaef sites numerous examples of this behavior:

What besides covetousness and gluttony pushes companies to manufacture drugs of questionable healing value and then sell them to the public? What causes these same companies to remove them from our stores' shelves when they are past the expiration date, repackage them, and market them to Third-World countries where they have caused illness and death?

...We have become so accustomed to the flagrant lying of our public officials that we no longer have the skills we need to discern dishonesty from truth.

...We live in a system in which it is no longer safe to leave our children in the care of "nice old ladies" because some "nice old ladies" use them as the objects of their own and other's lust.

We live in a system that exploits the bodies of women, children, and men to sell products. We live in a system that sets up increasingly elaborate and complex agencies to control and regulate dishonesty - agencies that time and again prove dishonest themselves. We live in a system in which we find excuses to overlook and explain the lies of our political leaders - just as any co-dependent in an addictive family would do...(133)

The Addictive System is so insidious, and dishonesty and denial are so integral to it, that it is difficult to see and know that our system is morally and spiritually bankrupt. The system itself is its own disguise. Add to this fact that living in it robs us of the clarity to

recognize it for what it is, and things become even more confusing. Emory Bogardus sums it up at the start of the chapter; "Man is perplexed beyond description; his thinking often ends in confusion."

System Recovery - The Hologram In Action

Primary Source:

Twelve Step Program of Alcoholics Anonymous

96% of the population of the United States is influenced by the Addictive System. The question facing our society then is "Can the whole system recover from its addictions?" The idea is staggering; especially when it takes two to five years for the individual addict to function in any consistently clear way, and the co-dependent at least that long. This is the minimum time required when people are genuinely working and wanting to get well and actively doing the things that are necessary to move along in that process. And what if that system doesn't even know it is addictive and lacks a collective desire to get well?

Schaef says that the key to understanding the Addictive System and beginning the process of recovery for the whole system is in "naming" the disease. This is what we've tried to do in this chapter.

Recovery from an addiction cannot begin unless the addict first admits that he is sick. Naming his reality, his disease, is essential to recovery. The same is true for society as a whole. Unless our society admits that it is indeed functioning in an addictive process in an Addictive System, it will never have the option of recovery. Once we as a society own it, it becomes ours, as does the power we formerly relinquished to it. Once we reclaim that personal power, we can begin to recover and not until then. To name the system as addict is not to condemn it - it is to offer it the possibility of recovery.

Paradoxically, the only way to reclaim our personal power is by admitting our powerlessness. This is the first part of Step One of the Alcoholics Anonymous Twelve-Step Program. Schaef suggests we use some form of the AA Twelve-Step Program as an aid in making a system shift (A copy of the AA Twelve-Step Program is provided in Appendix A). It is important to recognize that admitting to powerlessness over an addiction is not the same as admitting powerlessness as a person. In fact, it can be very power-full to recognize the futility of the illusion of control.

The second part of AA's Step One is an admission "that our lives had become unmanageable". If the addict fails to see this unmanageability, he continues to try to

control the addiction, a goal impossible to achieve. Schaeff says that only when the addict NAMES his situation that he is ready and able to do something about it.

The concept of the hologram says that the individual is like the system and the system is like the individual. As people start shifting into a living process system that is free of addictions and addictive behaviors, the system itself is making a similar shift. As the system changes to support that shift, individuals have still more options for change.

Schaeff closes When Society Becomes An Addict by suggesting that:

I imagine the universe as an enormous puzzle. Each of us is a unique and vital piece of that puzzle. No one else has our genes, our life experience; no one is US. We are unique! When we are fully ourselves we are that piece.

In an Addictive System, we are trained NOT to be ourselves. We lose touch with ourselves. We reference ourselves externally. We deny who we are. This leaves a hole in the puzzle and a hole in the universe that no one can else can fill.

Because we have been living in a system that is an addictive system, we are living in a universe that has many holes. As we begin to claim our lives, our pasts, and our selves, that hole in the universe is filled.

It is living our own process that we take our place in the universe and the whole system can then heal...(150)

CHAPTER 3: REFUSING TO QUIT - RELIGIOUS ADDICTION IN MODERN SOCIETY

Recent reports have been numerous in the area of TV evangelist and religious scandals: David Koresh and the tragedy in Waco, Texas; Sheik Omar Abdel-Rahman of New Jersey whose follower was arrested for bombing the World Trade Center; financial embezzlements by Jim and Tammy Bakker at PTL; Jimmy Swaggart's sexual escapades; Oral Roberts's outright blackmail of his flock in demanding millions of dollars or else God would call him home. Further media reports of the infighting revealed the magnitude of the tragedy of religious and addiction and abuse. These supposed men of God had betrayed people's trust; they had taken people's sacred belief in God and made a mockery of it. Yet many of those who had been abused, betrayed, and bankrupted NEVER seemed to question what was happening. They remained faithful. How could that be? Why? How could they not see the abuse?

These religious addicts echoed sentiments of addicts of other substances:

1. God will keep me from drinking again.
2. Jesus helped me get thin.
3. I don't need anyone to help me with my addiction. I just have to follow the teachings of the Bible.

In these sentiments one can see refusal to think, doubt, or question; one can see obsessive thinking. In short, the signs of addiction. These examples confirm not only the existence but also the power of the Addictive System. Taking away the prayer, the scripture, the sacrifice, the rigid devotion to rules, and looking solely at the attitudes and behaviors behind them reveal the same kind of attitudes and behavioral patterns long identified as those of alcoholics and addicts, and of codependents. For many, the family of God has become as dysfunctional as any family of an alcoholic or drug addict.

Continuing the Journey - Defining Religious Addiction Part 2

Primary Source:

When God Becomes A Drug by Father Leo Booth

Religious addiction has been defined as using God, a religion, or a belief system as a means to escape or avoid painful feelings and to seek self-esteem. It involves adopting a rigid belief system that specifies only one right way (dualistic thinking), which you feel you must force onto others by means of guilt, shame, fear, brain-washing, and elitism. Thus religious addiction nearly always results in the abuse of someone else in the name of your beliefs.

Father Leo Booth, in When God Becomes A Drug, says that: "No addiction is more toxically shaming and soul-murdering than the religious abuse that flows from the actions of religious addict. There is no addiction that covers up the addict's core of toxic shame better than religious addiction. (1-2)"

Like any addiction, religious addiction has nothing to do with being religious or being spiritual. The religious addict is not interested in spiritual growth and is only concerned with the "quick fix" that religion provides for his addiction. Religion is not the problem and has very little to do with the addiction. Rather, it is the unhealthy use of religion to satisfy unmet needs and provide a false sense of security that make it addictive (i.e., joining the church to satisfy a need to belong).

All religious addicts, no matter what denomination or belief structure, share a common experience. In the name of God, they have emotionally, physically, or sexually abused themselves or others. In the name of God, they have judged and condemned themselves or others as worthless and inherently bad.

Many addicts struggle to reconcile the concepts of sin, pain, and suffering with the concept of a loving and forgiving God. It is hard to imagine someone who loves us allowing us to endure pain and tribulation. The

Addictive System tells us that we must have done something wrong to deserve punishment, only we're not sure what we did. The Addictive System tells us to look for someone else to blame for our pain. We want to blame God but he is not physically present. The result is deeper frustration and many times, the abuse of a family member.

In religious abuse, the highest source of love is used to create guilt, shame, and ultimately, self-hate. Religion, like all addictions, becomes a tool for avoiding real pain and an excuse for the addict to not take responsibility for his own life. What many people see as a relationship with God is really a relationship with the dogma and rituals of religiosity. The drama of church ritual becomes a drug of choice, the fix. It provides a safe place where people can escape to. The need for self-esteem is satisfied by becoming part of an authentic remnant within the Church, solemnly observing the strict ceremonial of the Mass. Purity is attained not through action, but through participation in ceremony and sacramental confession.

This is not to say that Church ritual is inherently addictive. Nothing could be further from the truth. When used in a healthy manner, Church rituals provide the opportunity to come into contact with our feelings, examine our relationship with God, and find the courage to assume responsibility for our own life. It is only

when a person uses the rituals and rules to hide from his feelings and escape from reality that they become addictive. It is the addict's assumption that a blind obedience to the rules will guarantee him a safe and pain-free existence in this life and ultimately eternal salvation in the next.

A large number of people who become religious addicts or have been religiously abused, grew up in a dysfunctional family environment. They were abandoned, neglected, or abused physically, mentally, emotionally, or sexually. Growing up in the chaos and pain of such a home would naturally create the need to escape - and more than a few people escaped into religion. They escaped to a God who would take them out of this painful world. They escaped to a God who was gentle, kind, and nonphysical. They escaped to a God who condemned their abusers to hell. Like other addicts, they did not set out to become addicted. They only wanted to feel better.

Repeatedly the point needs to be stressed, that turning to God is a vital part of a healthy religiosity and is not an addictive action in and of itself. God SHOULD be someone to turn to, someone who consoles, someone who IS gentle and kind. God SHOULD be considered a source to which we can turn to help us through the tough times. However, turning to God in order to AVOID

the problems in our life and expect him to magically heal and fix us while we sit idly by is addictive.

An addict's unhealthy beliefs about himself and God poison his life. He uses religion as a means to acquire power and control. His only means of gaining self-respect and self-control is to lock himself into rigid, intolerant perfectionism, harshly judgmental of others who don't follow his rules. He uses God, religion, or his beliefs not to liberate himself spiritually but to escape emotional pain. Eventually, however, his relationships sickens; his self-esteem withers and dies. Desperate to feel better, he then falls prey to any substance, person, or belief that promises relief.

Such behavior creates an insurmountable barrier to authentic spirituality, and worse, to a healthy, creative relationship with that inner power called God.

The Role of Religion In Modern Society

Primary Sources:

The Dogma of Christ by Erich Fromm

A Socio-Theology of Letting Go by Marie A. Neal

Understanding the role of religion in modern society, that is, society's perception of the role of religion, helps explain why religious addicts think and act the way they do. Erich Fromm, in the Dogma of Christ & Other Essays on Religion, Psychology, and Culture, says:

...religion is often used to compensate for the deprivation created either by nature or by the ruling class, and that it also serves as a means for social control. Religion provides a fantasy means of making up for those deprivations, a mental or emotional image in which desires are fulfilled. Religion, or fantasy satisfactions, have the double function which is characteristic of every narcotic: they act as both an anodyne (painkiller) and as a deterrent to active change of reality...(106)

Fromm's description of the role of religion as a painkiller and a vehicle that guarantees perpetuation of the status quo echoes the characteristics of Schaefer's Addictive System.

Fromm goes on to say that religion has a three-fold function: (1) for all mankind, consolation for the privations exacted by life, (2) for the great majority of men, encouragement to accept their class situation, and (3) for the dominant majority, relief from guilt feeling caused by the suffering of those they oppress.

Marie A. Neal, in A Socio-Theology of Letting Go, echoes Fromm's view concerning the role of religion.

Most Americans think of religion today as CIVIL religion, a non-denominational type religion that is really not practiced by anyone but which in some mystical way legitimates the American way of life. Christianity, practiced by a few people and named by many as their traditional affiliation, has become such a religion.

....from the point of view of Christianity, priority belongs to the poor. So attractive is Christianity, however, that the rich are constantly reinterpreting it in order to make it speak for their interests. Whenever this happens, the practice of Christianity loses its prophetic

quality, that is, its capacity to call to account those who are exploiting the poor in their own interests - and becomes merely a RATIONALIZATION OF THE STATUS QUO! For the rich, all the activity focusing on the rights of the poor is annoying, even if the poor do make up 2/3 of the world; even in the Gospel is defined as bringing the poor the Good News.

...The case remains strong that religious expression in modern society fluctuates between being totally civil for the rich and radically salvational for the poor. This does not mean the same thing as being totally turned toward this world and totally turned toward the other world; it means, rather totally reinforcing the unjust status quo & being totally dedicated to changing it ... (30, 63-65, 70, 74)

According to Fromm and Neal, religion in our society is reduced to a reflection of the status quo. It is defined as a luxury for the rich and a necessity for the poor and has very little, if anything, to do with a relationship with God. These views conform to the guidelines of the White Male System and fit comfortably into the Addictive System described by Anne Wilson Schaef.

A Struggle From Birth - Original Sin & the Roots of Religious Addiction

Primary Sources:

The New American Bible

A Handbook For Today's Catholic

The Phenomenon of Man by Pere Teilhard de Chardin

The New American Bible defines original sin as "The sin committed by Adam and inherited by all mankind." In our

addictive society, the messages and teachings of original sin offer the explanation that we were born bad, and only by following God's rules can we overcome this inherent blight. The negative effects on self-esteem and spirituality created by the concept of original sin, and how it contributes to religious addiction and abuse are readily apparent. Before we have taken our first breath we are labeled sinners.

In the patterns of how religion is defined by the Addictive System, the concept of original sin teaches us that we are inherently bad, powerless, and weak - and therefore must look to God to make us good and strong. Only by placing our trust in a God who promises something better in the next life can we find peace and happiness in this life. This is the process of the promise. The focus is turned from the problems of today to the promises of tomorrow. These attitudes are central in the life of the religious addict.

In a healthy religious environment, original sin simply tells us that we're human. It points out that there is evil in the world but it does not suggest that human nature is inherently corrupt or we as individuals are inherently bad. According to The Handbook For Today's Catholic, original sin "...is best viewed as a

dark backdrop against which can be contrasted the brilliant redemption won for us by Christ our Lord" (17).

In a healthy religiosity original sin means admitting we are powerless and dependent upon God and acknowledging our own imperfections and attempting to overcome them. Recognizing the flaws in our humanity provides freedom from the guilt of addiction and the ability to say YES to life! Using our lack of power as an excuse to not participate in the celebration of life is the true original sin.

Something is apparently wrong with the addict's interpretations of the concept of original sin and other messages often given by organized religion. The resulting dysfunctional message creates dysfunction in him. Father Booth in When God Becomes A Drug argues that:

Many of the religious messages we receive, not only in the Judeo-Christian faiths but also in most of the world's religions have been twisted, misinterpreted, or misunderstood to the extent that, far from bringing us closer to God, Allah, Buddha, or the Great Spirit, they have created a spiritual void, a vast chasm that separates us from God. Our desperate search for something to fill the void, bridge the chasm, fix the problem leads us to addictive, compulsive behavior...(20)

Teaching the concept of original sin - that people are born bad - and keeping the focus on avoiding error, which religious addicts equate with sin, makes people slaves to following rules and prevents them from the

spiritual freedom of truth. Promising heavenly rewards as compensation for suffering and deprivation in this life conditions people to escape into magical thinking and denial of reality. Teaching that blind acceptance of Christ (or any prophet/teacher) is the way to absolve sins leads to rationalization and the inability to take responsibility for one's actions. Father Booth claims that this is the foundation of religious addiction and abuse: We are bad, and God will magically fix us if we do what someone tells us is God's wish.

Adam & Eve - Foundations of Sin in the Addictive System

Primary Source:
To Have or To Be by Erich Fromm

The theories and doctrines concerning sin are many and varied, but some predominant ideas about it are common to both liberal and fundamentalist theologies. Sin results in an alienation from God and others, and this has its roots in the biblical story of Adam and Eve. In the Judeo-Christian context, most theologians agree that the concept of sin was born in the story of Adam and Eve's disobedience to God's instructions. Erich Fromm, in To Have or To Be, has this to say about the story of Adam and Eve:

...the consequences of that disobedience was alienation from God and from ourselves. The

symbolism in the story of the "Fall" implies that, prior to Eve eating the fruit, Adam and Eve were unified. They were part of each other, as symbolized by Eve having been created from Adam's rib. They had no awareness of each other as separate beings. The curse of Eden, if we want to call it such, was that once Adam and Eve saw themselves as separate, mistrust, doubt, and division entered the world. From that time forth, we would always be struggling to be reunited with ourselves, with each other, and with God...(122-24)

Thus we have the basis for the fear that underlies the dysfunction of the Addictive System and religious addiction. If we are bad, we will be rejected and abandoned, always struggling to get back to, and remain in God's good graces. In turn, this leads to a desperate need to be perfect (perfectionism in the Addictive System), to do things right so that we won't be punished. This is the avoidance of error that defines unhealthy religiosity. It leads to an unhealthy, addictive perception of our humanity and to a blind following of the rules; rules which abolish all choice.

How Religion Creates Dysfunction

Primary Source:

Freedom with Justice: Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions by Michael Novak

The Religious History of the American People by Sidney A. Ahlstrom

Handbook of Denominations in the U.S. by Frank Mead

Michael Novak, in Freedom with Justice: Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions, provides a historical perspective on the addictive nature of religion. Novak says that modern Christianity holds that God, in the human form of Christ, came to bridge the alienation caused by Adam and Eve. It teaches that Christ is the only means to reunite with God and gain salvation. However, it is unlikely that this was the original belief of Christianity. It came about as a result of tremendous changes in Christianity that occurred in the first three centuries of its existence - changes involving the contemporary social and political climate.

The first Christians lived in a time of extreme economic, political, and religious oppression and chaos. Even during Christ's ministry, there were differences of opinion regarding his role and intent. Some followers believed he was going to lead a political revolt; some saw him as a spiritual leader. This difference of opinion led to many arguments and power struggles within the faith.

Gradually, new interpretations of Christ's identity and the purpose of his mission on earth replaced the original ones. Although he had once been seen as a mere mortal, a Son of Man who was adopted by God, Jesus was now seen as God in human form. God became a man, then reascended to His throne. This gave Jesus much more

power and authority and, by extension, gave that same authority to those who claimed to speak for him.

To ease the disappointment that the Second Coming was not imminent, there emerged the notion of rewards - not in this life but in the next. The concept of a conqueror who would physically deliver the oppressed was abandoned in favor of a Messiah who had brought them salvation in the next life - if they FOLLOWED THE RULES in this one! This gave the ruling classes a means of maintaining control without constant fear of revolt and allowed them to salve their own consciences about their abuses. Partly to justify this change and partly to soothe the oppressed, the tradition of the Messiah as the Suffering Servant, as described in Isaiah, was restored. Thus, for the poor, the Messiah was still one of them - a servant suffering just like them.

Ultimately, this Suffering Servant interpretation is what allowed Christianity to flourish, keeping it from being an obscure and quickly forgotten sect of Judaism. At the same time, it provided a foundation for new interpretation about the source of authority. Continuing the theme of adoption, the fourth-century Church used Paul's teachings, especially in Romans, to prove that the Church had been anointed as the arbiter of conscience. The scriptures were no longer the authority; that power now rested with the bishops as Christ's vessels. This

made the bishops divinely authorized to speak in the name of Christ; only later came the concept of the Pope as Christ's vicar on earth.

These changes were firmly entrenched from then on. The message that would free the oppressed became, in the hands of the power-hungry, the means to keep them in submission. In many ways, God and Christ now began to be used as weapons.

Perhaps, in these changes, lie the seeds of Christian guilt and shame. The shift to a "suffering servant" Messiah who was sacrificed for our sins brings with it an inherent message of shame: We were so bad that God had to sacrifice His son in order to save us.

Also, the Christian idea of God becoming a man in the person of Jesus, of the Word becoming flesh, and coming down to save the human race reinforces the idea of original sin and our inherent badness in the mind of the religious addict. It seems to have predisposed him to confuse his physical acts with his spiritual being, so that today he cannot distinguish between MAKING a mistake and BEING a mistake, a concept perpetuated in the Addictive System. More important, it conditions him to avoid taking responsibility for changing his behaviors and to look instead to something (such as grace) or someone (that is, God) to fix him. This is a perfect

example of the Responsibility and Blame aspect of the Addictive System.

The controlling authority of the clergy was maintained in part by the power structure of the Church and the lack of education among the lower classes. Until well into the 19th and even the 20th century, the clergy was the educated class, assigned the task of teaching and interpreting religion. This is true of the ancient religions that existed prior to, and alongside, early Christianity, and of other faiths in the world today. For centuries, the general populace did not have the knowledge or skills needed to study and examine religious teachings on their own. They were totally dependent on their priests, mullahs, rabbis, or shamans for guidance. Thus religion was used as a means for social control - often abusively.

So for thousands of years, human beings have been accustomed to living under an authoritarian theocracy in which the few, the chosen, and the called control the many. This divinely appointed power group claims not only to speak for God but insists that it is also the only way to God. From the cradle on, we are trained to look to someone else to tell us what to do, when to do it, and what will happen if we don't. So it is that people allow themselves to be abused in the name of God.

This power group can manipulate scripture to create doctrine and dogma designed to keep people in submission, fearful of error. They make the rules and say the rules are God's so that questioning the teachers equals questioning God. Those rules, those messages have been, and still are, often dysfunctional and abusive.

Stages of Religious Addiction

Primary Source:

The Addictive Personality: Understanding Compulsion in Our Lives by Craig Nakken
When God Becomes A Drug by Father Leo Booth

Religious addiction does exist; it is a disease like any other addiction, and it should be treated by the same methods used to treat other addictions. In a sense, religious addiction has very little to do with God or spirituality, just as food addiction and alcoholism have less to do with the substances involved than with the way in which they are abused.

The great lie of addiction and codependency is that something external, beyond us, will make life better! Something beyond us will make us feel good, acceptable, lovable, and worthwhile. The more we believe that an outside source will fix or rescue us, the more dependent we grow on external things to make us better.

In religious addiction, denial runs rampant! After all, the whole purpose of an addiction is to escape from reality. So addicts will be looking for a way out. Religious addiction, like alcoholism, springs from a reservoir of low self-esteem, a sense of inadequacy, shame, guilt, and the desire to escape, fix, or numb these feelings.

Addiction is a progressive relationship with either a substance or event that is designed to control the environment and/or produce a desired mood change. Addiction, on its most basic level, is an attempt to control and fulfill the desire for feeling happy and finding peace of mind.

Addiction is a process, with a beginning, a middle, and an end. No matter what substance or process we abuse, there are certain phases common to all. The graph on the next page provides a list of these phases and the characteristics associated with each phase.

In the first stage, the use of the addictive substance is fairly balanced. Social drinking, dining out with friends, or going to church are part of our lives; the alcohol, the food, the church rituals are not the focus of our activities. We enjoy doing these things, but somehow, the part of us which deep down doesn't feel good about ourselves gets confused about what's giving us pleasure. We begin to associate

FIGURE 2 - Stages of Religious Addiction

I. EARLY STAGE

- Ordinary religious or spiritual lifestyle
- Excessive church-going/Bible study
- Using church/Bible/prayer to avoid problems
- Using Bible to calm nerves
- Church/Bible becomes greater focal point
- Black-and-white thinking increases
- Thinking only of church
- Compulsively thinking about or quoting Scripture
- Preoccupation with church/Bible study
- Loss of control phase

II. MIDDLE STAGE

- Rationalization begins
- Secret irritation when religious practices discussed or criticized
- Increased use of church/Bible to avoid problems
- Compulsive church attendance and scripture quoting
- Church attendance bolstered by excuses
- Obsessive praying, church-going, crusades
- Loss of other interests
- Increasing dependence on religion
- Obsession with church/religion preacher
- Feel guilt when missing church functions
- Refuse to think critically/doubt/question information or authority
- Sexuality is perceived as dirty
- Efforts to control church-going fail
- Isolation from people
- Nonreligious family or friends judged or avoided
- Conflict with school or work

III. LATE STAGE

- Radical deterioration of relationships
- Unreasonable resentment
- Powerlessness
- Physical and mental deterioration
- "Messages" from God
- Preaching that sex is dirty
- Isolation/trances/stares
- Complete abandonment
- Physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion
- Hospitalization

Father Leo Booth. When God Becomes A Drug (New York: The Putnam Publishers Group, 1991) 74.

drinking with feeling more relaxed around people; crunching popcorn to relieve tension; church with feelings of belonging. We don't realize that these things are giving us the illusion that they make us feel better about ourselves.

This is what addiction does. It gives us false information, an illusion. We don't know that the need to drink is out of our fear of others; that our hunger pangs stem from anger; that we are increasing our church activities more out of loneliness than devotion to God.

But what happens is that we get hooked because whatever we end up abusing at first seems to solve the problem. Alcohol does relax inhibitions; making us feel more comfortable. Joining a church does give us a sense of family, of belonging, of being loved.

We become addicted because at first these things work - they work so well that the addict in us wants more: more alcohol, more food, to have that special place in Church. What happens is that the progressive search for a fix - the persistent need to control - leads to increasing impairment and dysfunctional behaviors. That's where the addiction begins. We grow to depend on that outside source; we have the ILLUSION of being in control, of having found something to fix us.

In the middle stages of addiction, the focus shifts. Now we can't go to a party without having a drink -

several - before we leave the house. We're not newcomers at church anymore, not getting that special attention. So we do more: join the choir, teach Sunday school, tithe more. Underneath it all there's a growing urgency, a compulsion that says we must do more. We lose control.

The loss of control signals the loss of self. What Craig Nakken, in The Addictive Personality: Understanding the Compulsion in Our Lives, calls the addictive self begins to take over; the attempts to stop and the relapses are signs of the struggle between the healthy and addicted parts of ourselves. Nakken says that the addiction starts to create the very thing we were trying to escape: pain. Thus begins the vicious cycle of trying to stop, relapsing, feeling increasing guilt, remorse, fear, and a shame and self-hatred when we go back and do it again.

Our lives grow steadily unmanageable, yet we still don't want to believe we are addicts. We're still looking for someone else to blame. When we at last face the fact that it's the drinking, the eating disorder, the religiosity that's causing our pain - when we can't deny it anymore - we still want to avoid responsibility. We want someone or something to make us feel better. We get stuck in hopelessness and despair that we'll never get free. We are powerless; our lives are unmanageable; and we cannot see any way out except to die or go crazy.

Symptoms of Religious Addiction

Primary Source:

When God Becomes A Drug by Father Leo Booth

Since many of the symptoms of religious addiction resemble the symptoms of the Addictive System described earlier, only the major ones are discussed here. A shortened list of these symptoms provided by Father Leo Booth in When God Becomes A Drug is provided on the next page.

Inability to Think, Doubt, or Question Information or Authority

This is the primary symptom of any dysfunctional belief system, for if you cannot question or examine what you are taught, if you cannot doubt or challenge authority, you are in danger of being victimized and abused. You miss the messages and miracles God places in your life because you literally do not know how to recognize them.

In refusing to think or question, you hand over the responsibility for your beliefs to a clergyman or so-called master. You are told that not thinking, doubting, or questioning is a sign of faith - so you become a slave to religion.

If you are not permitted to think for yourself, to question, you stop your spiritual growth because you do not know how to see the ways God is working with you and

FIGURE 3 - The Symptoms of Religious Addiction

- Inability to think, doubt, or question information or authority
- Black-and-white, simplistic thinking
- Shame-based belief that you aren't good enough, or you aren't "doing it right."
- Magical thinking that God will fix you
- Scrupulosity: rigid, obsessive adherence to rules
- Uncompromising, judgmental attitudes
- Compulsive praying, going to church, quoting scripture
- Unrealistic financial contributions
- Believing that sex is dirty - that our bodies and physical pleasures are evil
- Compulsive overeating or excessive fasting
- Conflict with science, medicine, and education
- Progressive detachment from the real world, isolation, breakdown of relationships
- Psychosomatic illness: sleeplessness, back pains, headaches, hypertension
- Manipulating scripture or texts, feeling chosen, claiming to receive special messages from God
- Trancelike state or religious high, wearing a glazed happy face
- Cries for help; mental breakdown, emotional, physical breakdown; hospitalization

Father Leo Booth. When God Becomes A Drug (New York: The Putnam Publishers Group, 1991) 122.

through you. When you use your critical faculties to analyze, explore, and question, you discover new shades of meaning and greater richness in God's truth. Questioning and exploring is a means of having a dialogue with God. To refuse to doubt, think about, or question what you are told is to miss an opportunity to talk with God.

Black-and White Simplistic Thinking

This is one of the predominant symptoms of religious addiction. You see life in terms of right or wrong, good or bad, saved or sinner. This is equivalent to the dualistic thinking of the Addictive System. Those who turn to religion as a means to avoid error are no doubt attracted to the black-and-white aspects of a rigid dogmatism.

Thinking in terms of such absolutes paralyzes you spiritually. People who think dualistically are always waiting for the right answer, the clear signal, the burning bush. You sit and wait for the solution that fits your simplistic dogma, even though the answer is right in front of you. Dualistic thinking prevents you from being able to find effective solutions to problems and to see when you are being abused.

Shame-Based Belief That You Aren't Good Enough

People who are taught from birth (and believe) that they are worthless never have the resources to cope with the challenges of life. Religious addiction is an attempt to escape this pervasive sense of shame and inadequacy. Shame-based thinking reinforces the belief that you don't make mistakes, but that you are the mistake. Thus you are robbed of the ability to healthily examine your behavior.

Dualistic thinking causes you to label all your behaviors or beliefs as good or bad - mostly bad. So you constantly feel that you're a failure who has not measured up. Believing yourself a failure and inadequate, you can never see when and how you have used your own gifts healthily and creatively. Shame-based thinking robs you of power, self-respect, and dignity.

Magical Thinking That God Will Fix You

This symptom is the natural offshoot of shame-based thinking. It takes you farther from reality and deeper into self-hatred and victimization, thus creating a fantasy relationship with God. Believing yourself worthless, you sit and wait for God to do things for you (this concept should not be confused with faith, a topic

which will be discussed in the next chapter). Wanting God to work the trick in our lives we often miss the sense of empowerment that comes with asking God to show us how to work our own magic - to create our own changes. Healthy spirituality mandates that we work WITH God to make changes in our life and are not totally dependent on God to manage our existence.

Rigid, Obsessive Adherence to Rules or Guidelines

The fear of punishment and the resulting need to be perfect (perfectionism in the Addictive System) creates an intense need to follow rules. Centuries ago, the Catholic Church noted how some priests gained an exaggerated sense of superiority and self-worth by rigidly adhering to rules, rituals, and doctrines. They were using these rules not to enrich or guide their lives, but as a means to avoid error and to gain authority and control.

Such behavior is dysfunctional because the sense of right and wrong become lost in the obsession with adhering to rules, which can render you incapable of questioning the validity of the rules. You use rules to give you self-esteem and control. The intense focus on rules becomes a way to avoid choice and responsibility.

Religious addicts do this out of fear and a desperate need for safety. Clinging to rules and rituals offers a false sense of control, of safety. Rigid adherence to rules gives a false sense of self-worth, based not on who you are, but what you do. This behavior reinforces the inability to see the difference between making a mistake and being a mistake. The tragic result is that you end up confused and angry at God when following the rules doesn't produce the expected rewards.

Uncompromising Judgmental Attitudes

The need to control, to be perfect, and to feel superior often lead to religious addiction. Religion offers a new sense of identity and feelings of control and self-worth based on putting down or humiliating others who do not share your beliefs. Religious addicts create the fantasy that others are somehow bad, inferior, or evil in order to maintain a sense of superiority.

Compulsive Praying, Going to Church, Quoting Scripture

The praying, crusading, and witnessing are used to create a high. They also create a wall that separates religious addicts from other people, and from God.

These behaviors are a means of CONTROL! They are the tools used by the unscrupulous to gain and maintain power. They also lead to avoidance of responsibility.

There is nothing wrong with praying, going to church, or talking about God, unless it is to the exclusion of all else. The key here is BALANCE & CONTROL! If you engage in these activities as a means to avoid responsibility, to avoid feeling discomfort, you ultimately lose all control. When you flee from all beliefs but your own, you shut yourself away from God.

Unrealistic Financial Contributions

This is the symptom glorified by the media in the scandals about Jim and Tammy Bakker, Oral Roberts, and other TV evangelists. Much of religious addiction is about control and power. Money equals power. As in any organization, the big-money contributors are those with the most influence.

In our materialistic society, so many people measure their self-worth by monetary standards. So it is only natural that many people bring this attitude to religion. The way to feel appreciated, to feel worth-while, is to give money. In this pursuit of power and control, the whole purpose is lost: God becomes just another product.

Progressive Detachment from the Real World and Isolation

At this stage, you are consumed by religion. Life revolves around the church so that you become increasingly isolated and emotionally unable to be intimate with your loved ones. Eventually, you end up alone, without family or friends. The increasing isolation deepens the depression that attends addictions. It heightens the loss of reality.

Manipulating Scripture, Feeling Chosen, Claiming to Receive Messages from God

This is a symptom of someone who is nearing the end stages of religious addiction. Desperate efforts to control the uncontrollable have not succeeded: your family has not converted; God did not work the miracles you demanded; you feel frightened and ashamed.

Thus, the addict excuses bizarre behavior and unrealistic demands with such statements as: God told me to do this...The spirit guided me in this decision.. Christ came to me in a vision and said.

Cries for Help; Emotional, Mental, and Physical Breakdown; Hospitalization

You have reached rock bottom. You hate yourself and don't even know why. You don't know where to turn for

help. You can't stop the praying, meditating, and obsessive scripture quoting. You are spiritually bankrupt. You may have a nervous breakdown. Perhaps you enter treatment for your addiction.

But in this end can be a beginning. Proper therapy - with someone who can treat religious addiction - family counseling, and support groups can help on the road to recovery. From the crisis, you can discover and create a new friendship with God as you understand God. The willingness to take the steps toward change will move you into healthy spirituality.

Arriving at the Summit - Breaking the Chains of Addiction

Primary Source:

Modifying AA's 12 Steps For Religious Addicts

Religious addiction is deeply rooted in unhealthy codependency - in looking to something outside of yourself to give self-respect or happiness. As a religious addict, you hand responsibility for your own welfare to a religious figure or to a belief system, then you passively wait to be miraculously fixed.

Recovery begins with a system shift. This shift occurs when we let go of our addictive behaviors and become active and begin to participate in our own life.

This means taking responsibility for our own actions and our own lives.

Recovering religious addicts have shared that by simply revising The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous they are able to address their religious addiction within the context of other Twelve Step programs. The spiritual message of the Alcoholics Anonymous steps remain the same; the words can change and still retain the message. An example of the revised Twelve Step program for the religious addict is provided on the following page.

Recovery from religious addiction happens in stages. Recovery is an ongoing process which coincides with an awareness of your addictive patterns. Father Booth outlines six separate stages of recovery. Upon examining each stage, we will look at the corresponding Twelve Steps that help the addict move through each level.

1. PERCEPTION - STEPS ONE AND TWO

The first stage is the hardest to work through. Addiction is a cunning, baffling disease that will fight back. There are certain feelings at different phases of this stage, and they are natural; grief, resistance, and withdrawal for example.

People who experience these initial feelings think that having such feelings is a sign of failure, or they

FIGURE 4 - The Twelve Steps For Religious Addicts

1. We admitted we were powerless over our dysfunctional religion or beliefs - that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Spiritual Power within ourselves could guide us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of a Spiritual Power as we understood this Spiritual Power.
4. Made a searching and fearless inventory of our dysfunctional religious beliefs and behaviors.
5. Admitted to our Spiritual Power, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of those behaviors.
6. Were entirely ready to work with our Spiritual Power in replacing all these old behaviors.
7. Worked with our Spiritual Power to help replace our dysfunctional patterns.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people whenever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we made mistakes, promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with our Spiritual Power, as we understood Spiritual Power, praying only for knowledge of that Power's guidance and the willingness to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Father Leo Booth. When God Becomes A Drug (New York: The Putnam Publishers Group, 1991) 136.

can't recover. Because recovery is an ongoing process, you will cycle through the feelings and phases many, many times. Learning to comfort and encourage yourself with the awareness and acceptance that you are in a natural phase of an ongoing process is one of the keys to staying in recovery.

Early on, coping with those feelings is difficult and scary; you've been numbing your emotions and running from them a long time, so they'll be intense at first. In the beginning of recovery, as in the beginning of the disease, it is natural to experience a great deal of denial. The feelings that emerge when you think of changing may be so overwhelming that you want to convince yourself that you don't have a problem, or that it's not as bad as you think.

You may feel helpless and victimized. Your dualistic thinking makes you believe that you must give up God totally, which of course feels unacceptable. You do not yet see that your dysfunctional beliefs about God are what you must abandon.

In this stage, you may find yourself struggling with the tendency to minimize the seriousness of your addiction. In this stage of trying to minimize the problem, addicts often submit rather than surrender. You have not truly taken Step One and admitted powerlessness and unmanageability.

This is the point at which all addicts need as much support from families and friends as can be given. All addicts in withdrawal experience wide mood swings: anger, irritability, blaming, and tearfulness are often present. You aren't using the old fixes and have not yet acquired healthy coping skills. **DON'T GIVE UP!** The greatest help in this phase can come from working and re-working Step One.

2. STABILIZATION - STEP THREE

The most important aspect of the stabilization phase is the movement from a mere desire to change to taking actions that create change. Not only do you want to change, but you are beginning to BELIEVE that you can. You are now saying "Show me the way." You have arrived at the next stage.

3. EARLY STAGE RECOVERY - STEPS FOUR, FIVE, AND SIX

Once you have made the decision to change and have begun to discover within yourself the tools that will create change, you are into the early stage of recovery. You recognize your religious addiction and abuse. You see the dysfunction in the messages you received about God and start seeking healthy spiritual values with which to

replace those old messages. You begin to recognize your behavior patterns and see when you are wanting to use religion as a fix. You are learning to live in reality, in the present moment.

At this stage, you begin to feel your pain and are sometimes able to connect your attitudes and behaviors to your feelings. If you are irritable, critical, and judging, you may see that you are not feeling good enough or are fearing rejection. You have greater willingness, however, to recognize this and make amends for your behaviors, and an increased desire for change.

4. MID-STAGE RECOVERY - STEPS SEVEN, EIGHT, AND NINE

Now you are getting the big picture. Not only do you see how truly unmanageable your lie was but also you see how widespread that unmanageability was. You are coming to understand how you missed yourself. You gain greater understanding of how your addiction or abuse connects to your other issues. This is the stage at which many will surrender to acceptance of other addictions.

5. LAST STAGE RECOVERY - STEPS TEN AND ELEVEN

From rigid, angry intolerance you move to becoming more open and accepting. You no longer need to control

others; you no longer feel threatened by beliefs that are different from your own. Your new self-acceptance is reflected in the way you treat others.

6. ONGOING RECOVERY - STEP TWELVE

At last, you truly find yourself. No longer are you a passive victim, waiting for God or something else to fix you. You find your own power and control by taking responsibility for your life. In your religious addiction, you left things to God. In recovery, you take action; you become a co-creator with God. In your religious addiction, you saw yourself as innately bad - a sinner. In recovery, you see yourself as a positive, creative human who sometimes makes mistakes. You have a program and you work with it daily, to the best of your ability, at peace with the knowledge that you may not always work it perfectly. You are able to take the final step.

Toward Journey's End - Attaining Healthy Spirituality

Primary Source:

The Two Faces of Religion: A Psychiatrist's View by N.S. Xavier

Attaining a healthy spiritual attitude is a struggle for the religious addict simply because the qualities of a

positive relationship with God are foreign to him. First, the religious addict must recognize that he is not spiritually healthy. If he does not like himself, if he believes he isn't good enough for God, that he is a lost sinner and God is going to somehow raise him up and make him better, he is not spiritually healthy. He diminishes his ability to be a positive and creative human being if he is addicted to anything - including God or a belief system. So the first task is accepting that his belief system and his relationship with God are dysfunctional. By doing this he can open himself to a new concept of spirituality.

Recovery for religious addicts and those who have been religiously abused begins when they become able to appreciate what Father Booth calls the concept of the "Big God":

...discovering God within the happenings of ordinary life; allowing God to be involved in the everyday choices they make. Recovery for religious addicts means discovering divinity in one's own life. It is the ability to see the miracle, see the gift - not something God gives to us, but something we create WITH God!.. (190)

Many of us think of God as the Creator without really understanding what that means. God created the world and continues to create in and through our lives - in our relationships, activities, the way we use our minds and hearts. We are co-creators with God, not

puppets on a string waiting for something to happen. We make things happen; we create the difference, not in our old dysfunctional pattern of isolated control but in choosing a partnership with our Higher Power - however we define that entity.

Recovery from religious addiction and abuse is a PROCESS. The addict must first accept that he needs to change his beliefs and behaviors. He learns the symptoms: that which he needs to change. He chooses to make the paradigm shift described by Anne Wilson Schaef. Religious addicts can then learn how to make changes, discovering what tools they need to take their own leap of faith. In recovery, the addicts realize they are powerful human beings. In that appreciation lies healthy spirituality and a rich, rewarding relationship with God as they now understand God.

The symptoms of religious addiction and an unhealthy spirituality point to a narrow, restrictive belief system, which limits spiritual growth and victimizes the addict as well as the people around them. On the other hand, healthy spirituality is very freeing. When a person is spiritually healthy he is not threatened by different belief systems. Psychiatrist N.S. Xavier, in The Two Faces of Religion says:

Healthy spirituality enlightens the mind by broadening the vision; it changes the heart for the

better - to be more courageous and prudent - and transforms the will to be genuinely loving. On the other hand, unhealthy religiosity darkens the mind by narrowing the vision, hardens the heart with fear and foolhardiness, and transforms (people) to be selfish and hateful in general or at least towards people with a different belief system...(46)

We reflect the God of our understanding. If the belief system we embrace is judging and condemning, we will judge and condemn. If we believe in a compassionate, forgiving God we will be compassionate and forgiving. We behave according to our beliefs.

Defeating religious addiction means creating a balanced spiritual life. However, creating a balanced spiritual life takes time. The religious addict cannot expect to tackle it all at once. As the addict gently replaces his dysfunctional beliefs with healthy ones he discovers that he is developing a spirituality that enhances and frees him, rather than limits him.

Religious addiction and abuse keeps the victim so focused on a dysfunctional image of God that he could never appreciate the gifts he was given. Using religion as a means to avoid error robs people of the dignity of choice and leaves them feeling deprived and worthless. From that lie springs diseased spirits that are mired in shame. Healthy spirituality allows addicts to move toward truth, frees them to discover that they were always meant to be a positive, creative human being.

Completing the Journey - Adopting 20th Century Theology

Primary Sources:

The Varieties of Religious Experience by William James

The Phenomenon of Man by Pere Teilhard de Chardin

The Psychology of Religion by Wayne E. Oates

The New Theology by Patricia Martin Zens

In The Varieties of Religious Experience, William James quotes from a letter written in 1902 by the eminent Unitarian minister Edward Everett Hale. Hale's letter points out the effect that the messages of guilt and shame have on the way we cope with life.

A child who is early taught that he is God's child, that he may live and move and have his being in God, and that he has therefore, infinite strength at hand for the conquering of any difficulty will take life more easily, and probably will make more of it, than one who is told that he is born the child of wrath and wholly incapable of good...(83)

The writings of William James reflects a growing movement in modern religion that turns away from a focus on hellfire and damnation toward a more positive, affirming theology. James goes on to say that:

We now have whole congregations whose preachers, far from magnifying our consciousness of sin, seem devoted rather to making little of it. They ignore, or even deny, eternal punishment, and insist on the dignity, rather than the depravity of man...(605)

This search for dignity rather than the depravity of man is reflected in much of the pivotal religious movements and theological writings of this century. Increasingly there is an awareness that the idea that we are born bad, evil, or inadequate has had a negative effect on our self-esteem, and on our relationships with God and our fellow humans and needs to be revised if healthy spirituality is to be achieved.

In the early 1920's, Pere Teilhard de Chardin, in The Phenomenon of Man, shocked many orthodox Catholics by rejecting original sin and espousing a theology that strove to reconcile physics and Darwin's theory of evolution with Christianity. He saw life as pure energy, expressed in both physical and spiritual domains, at once interconnected, yet independent. According to his theory, our physical and spiritual sides are two halves of a whole; we are incomplete if we deny one, or exalt one side over the other. The human task, as he saw it, was to build a bridge between our physical and spiritual sides so that the two energies could be mutually enlivened.

Pere Teilhard explained sin, or evil as he preferred to call it, as "diminishments" that come from both inside and outside us and hinder our ability to unite with God. The diminishments from within, for example, might be our own human weaknesses - our attitudes and attributes.

Diminishments from without are such phenomena as poverty, natural disasters, or disease. Pere Teilhard believed that anything obstructing or sapping our physical and spiritual energies keeps us from the source of all energy: God. These obstructions are synonymous with addiction.

Writers from William James and Pere Teilhard in the first half of the century; to modern day writers like Matthew Fox, M. Scott Peck, Wayne E. Oates, and John Bradshaw, all chronicle and explore a growing awareness of the spiritual emptiness felt by many people - the alienation and shame produced by the negative messages religion often gives.

In The Psychology of Religion, psychologist Wayne E. Oates examines the effect that the idea of sin has had on self-esteem and our relationship with God. Describing sin, he says:

The realistic acts of wrongdoing of a person - as the person PERCEIVES right and wrong - do produce a sense of guilt. When that guilt is felt to be in relation to God, the guilt is concentrated into a sense of sin. This sense of sin lowers a persons self-esteem and hinders a healthy relationship with God...(203)

Ultimately, according to Oates, this sense of sin, results in alienation from other humans and God:

Sin as alienation from God and man is the composite and end result meaning of sin. Shrinking back from participating with God and man in the demands of growth in personal and corporate life alienates one's relationships to self, others, and God...(143)

Matthew Fox, modern day theologian and priest, seeks a feminine and nature-oriented theology, in which God is as much Mother as Father. This movement away from traditional religion reflects a new kind of search for an explanation of the existence of pain and suffering - one that is not based on the premise that humans are inherently evil and deserve to suffer.

Fox makes a natural bracket, at the close of the 20th century, to Pere Teilhard. Both are priests and both seek to blend the spiritual and physical worlds. Fox, too, sees humankind as an expression of spiritual energy drawn from and back to its source. Like Pere Teilhard, Fox promotes a theology of creation spirituality, which promotes the idea of original blessing as a counter to original sin. In an article from Psychology Today, Fox says:

I also object to original sin as the starting point of religion because of the tremendous psychic damage it has done. People are already terribly vulnerable to self-doubt and guilt, especially members of minority groups - women, blacks, Native Americans. The whole ideology of original sin increases one's alienation and feeds the sado-masochistic energies in the culture - the sense that one is not worthy.

If you start with the notion that you were born a blotch on existence, you will never be empowered to do something about the brokenness of life. In creation spirituality, we begin with the idea that each of us is born a unique expression of divinity, an image of God. Teaching our children this is the only way to build the pride and security our culture needs so desperately...(71-73)

These theologies and philosophies reflect the same themes: rejection of the shame-based messages traditionally taught by the major religions because of the spiritual damage such messages inflict, thus an abandonment of God as traditionally represented. Alongside this, we see the search for personal dignity and self-respect that, when it arises out of a lack of Higher Power, leaves a spiritual hunger, a yearning, a restlessness. "We are restless til we rest in God," St. Augustine tells us.

It is this restlessness and yearning that tell us we are in need of that power in our lives. The negative teachings and dogmas that often cloak God also hide God from us and propel us into unhealthy behavior. Once we can separate God from the dysfunctional messages about Him, God comes alive, ever inviting us to become positive, creative people.

A Different Point of View - "The New Theology"

Revealing a God of love and understanding as opposed to a God of anger and wrath is the nucleus of a new religious theology. This attitude is reflected in the current doctrine of the Catholic Church. Like the writings of William James, Pere Teilhard de Chardin, and Matthew Fox, the Catholic Church's doctrine of The New Theology promotes a kinder, gentler God. But, where other theologies have mandated a complete overhaul of our religious ideas in order to arrive at this new mentality, the Catholic Church supports the idea that healthy religiosity simply requires a shift of emphasis in existing doctrine.

What is the "New Theology" and why do we need it? Patricia Martin Zens, spokesperson for the Catholic Church, states that the new theology is the old theology made new. The new theology emphasizes the POSITIVE elements of religion and spirituality. This new theology was necessary because, in the mind of the Catholic Church, people needed a refreshment of basic principles of Christianity. To understand this, people must understand the cornerstone of Christianity: love. And love is positive, a do-ing virtue. Basically, Christianity has always taught this. But for a period of time, roughly since the Reformation, the Church had increasingly emphasized the "don'ts" of religion. Many Catholics (myself included) remember from their youth

sermons of fire and brimstone. Preachers, in good faith, emphasized the negative elements of Christianity: "Don't do this, or hell will be your punishment." As a result of too much emphasis on evil, people often developed scruples (seeing evil where there is none), and consequently became shrunken in their spiritual life.

The "New Theology" aims at the positive development of the human spirit. We are - and always have been - meant to "grow in age and grace" before God and man. The new theology, by focusing on the positive, aims to help us in that development.

How do we do this? The Church tells us that we begin by thinking positively first, for the thought is brother to the deed. And by not being afraid to act. And by praying for strength to act, in OUR OWN WAY - which may mean Hail Mary's or Our Father's or simply asking God in our own words for His help.

It is important, too, that we do not worry about sinning in many trivial ways, for that is really a shrunken kind of spirituality. God meant our lives to expand, to broaden and deepen. He does not want us to ruin our spiritual vision by worrying about sinning all the time.

This does not mean that sin is non-existent. Nor does it mean that the Ten Commandments no longer apply. Not at all. It does mean that we have returned to a

position of greater balance: that we see excessive concern and worry about petty misdemeanors as selfish. Our own salvation is of great importance, but we save our soul by losing ourselves in larger concerns for others. This is real love of God and neighbor. We do not show love for others by tabulating every little (and often unintentional) mistake. God is not a tyrant. He looks at our total intention, and if we are people of good will, we can be certain of being in His grace.

The "New Theology" tries to bring about Christ's Incarnation - His RE-Incarnation - in a real and positive way in our lives by making us concerned for others, those immediately concerned in our daily lives, seven days a week.

The "New Theology" aims to emphasize the positive. Concretely, beyond our own immediate circle, this means our acceptance of responsibility for the social and economic well-being of our society. Reduced into personal terms, this means such things as exercising the right to vote and attending such affairs as school board meetings. It means we try to develop a well-formed conscience, which integrates our religion into our daily life. It means we appreciate the joy - NOT THE FEAR - in being a Christian.

Religion is real and is meant to be amalgamated into our lives. The young people today especially demand a

kind of religion that addresses itself to life. The new theology speaks to them and to all of us who are alive and imaginative enough to listen. We are invited to a reincarnation of joy in the knowledge that we live in God's presence. We are to be witnesses to the truth that Christianity is as meaningful today as it ever was.

Simply put, the "New Theology" is asking us to live a full and real Christian life - not in terms of "don'ts" but in terms of "do's," which will bring us to maturity as Christian human beings. As Terry Hess, a public school teacher and lifetime Catholic says in the Time magazine article, "U.S. Catholicism - A Church Divided," "Years ago I would do things out of fear of the Lord. Now it is out of love" (59).

CHAPTER 4: A LONG JOURNEY HOME - NAVIGATING TODAY'S STORM

The Storm of the Day - Addiction

There is a spiritual sickness in America, one that is disabling much of our population. This sickness is the end result of society operating under guidelines imposed by an addictive system. Though the primary symptoms are a variety of addictions - alcoholism, drug abuse, religious abuse, eating disorders, etc. - the malaise is a pervading sense of hopelessness, a feeling that we are no longer in control of our lives, that our destinies are being decided by forces we are unable to influence, direct, or change. We are victims of the storm of our day, and, like a ship caught in a maelstrom, we are in distress. All the safe, stable social structures with which we were once able to identify are changed; the sense of belonging is gone. As the prominent social psychologists Stanton Peele and Archie Brodsky observe in their book Love and Addiction:

Our country, our government, our educational system, our economic system, our economic programs, our social status, our families, our religious institutions, even God - all those certainties that once helped us structure our lives and define our meaning - are now beyond our control; worse, they are controlling us. Where once we had a say in the creation of our institutions, organizations, associations, and bureaucracies, we now are at

their mercy. We are in a vacuum of uncertainty. The malaise we feel is isolation, loneliness, powerlessness, worthlessness, hopelessness...(127)

The alcohol and drug problems of the day are ample proof of the power of the Addictive System and of the desperate need for some external structure to belong to and depend on. The fact that alcohol and drug abuse is the number two killer in America (second only to cancer) should alert society to the seriousness of addiction. Yet very few people seem concerned and the indulgence not only continues but it is encouraged and rewarded.

Stephen P. Apthorp suggests that the disintegration of the family is the primary factor contributing to our loss of identity and our feeling of hopelessness; thus it goes to the heart of our social demise and to the root of addiction. Apthorp says in Alcohol & Substance Abuse: A Clergy Handbook:

In 1930 a child spent an average of three to four hours a day in interaction, actively involved in relevant experiences with various members of his immediate extended family. In 1982, however, the average ten-year-old or older, from a two-parent family, spent only fourteen and a half minutes in interaction during a typical twenty-four day. Of those fourteen and a half minutes, twelve and a half minutes were spent with parents issuing warnings or correcting things that had gone wrong. There were about two minutes available for positive communication, assuming there was no lingering trauma from the previous twelve and a half minutes.

...There is a change within and without the family. There is a sense of loss of individual and family identity. There is a sense of hopelessness

in the face of the forces that control a person's life. There are no longer the strong ties that bind and provide the security of belonging - not at home, not at work, not at worship. Generally, there is a lack of meaning and purpose in people's lives as a result of all this, a pervading sense of rootlessness. People are looking to ground themselves in something firm and lasting. People tend to look to the family or to religion to provide the roots that they most desperately seek; unfortunately they ground themselves in an addictive fashion...(34)

There appears to be no one we can turn to for guidance, nowhere to go for help. This is especially true for the young people in America. The soaring adolescent suicide rate among teenagers certainly exemplifies their sense of instability and insecurity. According to an article in "The Boston Globe," suicide is the second leading cause of death among college students. There has been a 300% increase in the suicide rate among young people ages fifteen to nineteen in the last twenty years. In a recent Newsweek article "Teenage Suicide In The Sunbelt", it was reported that 5000 teenagers kill themselves every year, half a million more attempt to do so, and that:

...the fifteen-to-twenty-five-year-old group is the only segment of the population whose death rate has increased (by 13%) in recent years. Among fifteen-to-nineteen-year-olds, suicide is now the second leading cause of death, after traffic accidents - many of which are suspected suicides...(57-59)

A 1993 national survey on teenage drinking showed that there is an alcohol related fatality involving a teenager in this country every 57 minutes. The same study also showed that 40% of all fatal car accidents involving a teenager were alcohol related.

These grim statistics indicate there is an urgent need for a sense of purpose among adolescents. Life has gotten out of control. The social structures that once provided a sense of meaning have become too impersonal. The result is a feeling of being lost and isolated - all characteristics of the Addictive System described by Schaefer. People are simply unable to function in such a spiritual wasteland. Now that there no longer seems to be any constants with which to identify - not God, not country, not community, not even family - people are encouraged to seek solace in their addictions.

Addictions offer people the CONTROL over their lives that the world wrested from them. Even if they cannot control their destinies, they can control what they swallow and what they shoot. They can control when they use their addictions - they can control their feelings!

Shelter from the Storm

Like any addictive substance, religion answers the problems of weariness, boredom, drudgery, rejection, and

loneliness in our feel-good, dog-eat-dog society. Unhealthy religiosity offers the illusion of unity with one's fellows, temporary deadening of anxiety, and the quieting of inner conflict. Its relief is temporary and illusory, but available to many who have found no other. It is a feeling which for a time can banish frustration, disappointment, and feelings of inadequacy. It can provide feelings of self-confidence and the illusion of strength. These benefits have tremendous appeal, an appeal which those who seek a better way must take into account.

Religion can furnish principles that provide an abiding sense of comfort, strength, and security. Like alcohol and drugs, religion promises a haven, and a heaven, too, but one that is free of charge, constantly available, permanent, and everlasting. In and of themselves these are healthy, admirable and desirable qualities. However, when a person seeks the haven of religion as a hiding place from his feelings that religion moves from healthy to unhealthy. It is when a person looks to the promise of heaven at the expense of living in the present that religion becomes addictive.

Religion, like alcohol or drugs, has the ability to give temporary feelings of mutual acceptance and unity among men, and between man and the rest of creation. When a person feels lost and alone, estranged from

himself, from others, and from his God, the addictive substance has the strange effect of reuniting him; with it he can "get it all together." It satisfies a very basic and powerful human need - the need to control!

For far too long the Church has tried to solve the social problems of a "feel-good", addictive society as well as the personal complexities of addiction by moralizing, i.e., by applying rigid, Scripture-based rules to enforce appropriate, acceptable, moral behavior. It has sought to use these religious beliefs like a vestment, draping it over this vast problem. The goal has been to make the sacred fabric cover ALL the issues, suit ALL the circumstances, or at least give the appearance that substance use, misuse, and abuse are encompassed by moral theology.

The problem with ANY religious answer to the question of addiction is not the question of whether or not God moves into our lives, rather, it is our inability to believe there is any worthwhile reason to respond in a healthy manner. One of the main tasks of religion is TO DESCRIBE THE WAYS GOD CALLS US AND TO INSPIRE PEOPLE TO ANSWER IN A HEALTHY MANNER!

Because people are looking for a foundation on which to build their lives, because they are searching for guidelines, the modern Church has the opportunity to provide a theological foundation for caring that can

change people's attitudes and beliefs. The Church is in a unique position to offer a healthy alternative to the Addictive System. The Church has the potential to rescue us from the storm of the day and deliver us to an environment of healthy spirituality.

But the Church cannot accomplish this rescue without our assistance. We must become active participants in our own recovery and assume accountability for our own salvation. This is where the religious addict fails. The Church has the ability to encourage us, to nurture us, to guide us; but the Church cannot do it all. Ultimately, the responsibility for religion is ours. The Church provides the tools; using those tools to create a healthy relationship with our Higher Power is up to each one of us.

Healthy spirituality means acknowledging our own humanity. This implies accepting our imperfections and mistakes as part of that humanity. In a healthy spirituality our mistakes and shortcomings are the results of our exploration of life and are not God's guarantee of eternal damnation; they are opportunities to achieve a closer relationship with God, to discover a greater goodness.

In the world of religious addiction, the role of God is reduced to nothing more than a repairman. Religion becomes a simple, modern convenience. The religious

addict sits idly by and waits in fear and isolation for God to repair his problems and correct all his faults. He is afraid to think, to feel, to question. He turns to God and to religion only in times of need, or on those occasions when it is convenient for him to do so. When his problems are not fixed, he blames God or his Church. He denies everything and accepts responsibility for nothing.

A healthy relationship with God is a two-way street. Like life, it is a process, an ever-changing phenomenon requiring our full and constant participation. This means that we are required to think, to feel, and to respond with UNSELFISH love and honesty to all God has given us. Healthy spirituality is dynamic, constantly changing and growing. We, as individuals, must change and grow with it or run the risk of being victimized by the power of Addictive System.

CHAPTER 5: COMPLETING THE JOURNEY

Reflections

Growing-up in a strict, conservative Catholic household and attending a Catholic grade school and high school in a small Mid-Western town provided me a certain point-of-view on issues pertaining to religion, faith, spirituality, and life in general. Like many small towns, the Church had (and continues to have) a very strong influence on attitudes and ideas among the people that live there. From the time I was six years old, my teachers lectured about the difference between right and wrong, good and evil, and how God punishes those who are bad, damning them to an eternity of unquenchable fire.

One of my earliest memories of religion involved memorizing the definition of original sin. It was the first lesson on the first page of my first-grade catechism textbook. I recall being told that each person is born with original sin and must therefore be baptized in order to remove the stain and get back into God's good graces. I was told that persons who failed to have the stain of original sin removed through the sacrament of baptism were not allowed in heaven. They went to a place

called purgatory, a limbo-type place that was neither heaven nor hell but someplace in between. "How unfair this was" I remember thinking. Whatever the Church's real message was with regard to original sin, as a child it left me with the message that I was born bad and had done something wrong by simply being human.

Like many of the practicing Catholics I know and have talked to throughout the writing of this paper, I was taught to fear God and to follow his rules to the letter or pay the consequences. And like most of my family and friends, the majority of my religious experiences and beliefs were based on fear, guilt, and the illusion that God watched every move I made so "Don't screw up!." From early childhood, my peers painted a picture of an angry and vengeful God. I was taught that God was fair and loved only those who followed his rules. I carried these images through childhood, my adolescent years, and eventually into my adult life.

Based on this background I must confess that I was a bit apprehensive to write a paper about religious addiction. I commented several times that "God will probably strike me down halfway through writing this paper." I felt guilty as I began researching and writing about unhealthy religion. But as I researched the subject I discovered that this type of thinking was exactly what religious addiction was all about! My idea

of an angry God who abhorred the notion of my questioning my own faith was a sign of my own addiction. In retrospect, I could see many of the characteristics of the Addictive System manifested in my behaviors (denial, perfectionism, responsibility and blame, and self-centeredness to name a few). Like so many of the practicing Catholics I knew, I had surrounded myself with the rules and rituals of the Church as a protective barrier. I had many times used these rules to set myself apart from those who were not as "lucky" as I. Unfortunately, in the process I had sealed off my true feelings concerning my faith and my ideas about religion. Many times in my life I remember wanting to ask questions about certain religious doctrine, but to do so would defy all that I had been taught. In my mind, to question the rules and doctrine of the Church would be to question God himself. Who did I think I was?

But the more I read on the subject of religious addiction, the more I realized how crazy the idea was that God would become angry if I tried to find ways to expand my ideas of healthy religion! I remembered a slogan I had read as a child that said "God made me and God doesn't make junk." How contrary this slogan was to the messages I had received as a child and that I had carried into my adult life. This slogan took on new meaning as I realized that I was human and that it was

alright to make a mistake because I now saw a God of compassion and forgiveness. I realized that "screwing up" was not necessarily evil and, in reality, was just part of being human. Through my research, I understood the necessity of replacing my images of an angry God with a God of love and understanding. I realized that there are times to depend on God but that I must assume the responsibility for some of the burden as well.

God wants us to explore, to question, to achieve our human potential. Attaining this potential is an impossible feat for those who adopt an attitude of unquestioning acceptance of all that is around them. God did not place all the wonders in this world as items to be admired from afar. They are to be explored, felt, and discovered, for in doing so we are striving for perfection and enhancing our relationship with God. This is the key to being truly alive and attaining healthy spirituality.

I have found that there is an inherent freedom in this "New Theology," in this new approach to God, to religion, and to spirituality. The rules of the Church, the dogma, and our spiritual leaders are important and should be used as guidelines (and not as a restraining harness) to help achieve our creative, human potential and attain spiritual freedom. We cannot rely on blindly following Church rules and Church leaders as the means to

acquire that freedom. It is up to us to take responsibility for our relationship with God and ultimately make our religion healthy and meaningful. Anything less constitutes addictive and unhealthy behavior.

I have come full circle in my quest to understand the Pope's 900 number. I have arrived at the conclusion that the issue is not whether the Pope has a 900 number. Rather, it is HOW that service is used by the Church AND how it is perceived by individual members. If calling this number helps someone achieve a more positive, creative relationship with their Higher Power then it is indeed a healthy behavior. If this service helps a person actively participate in and take responsibility for enhancing their life then it cannot be considered addictive. However, if the individual looks to this number as a magical cure for all their problems OR if the Church uses this number to play on the guilt and fears of its' members, then it is indeed unhealthy and part of the addictive process.

The Power of Addiction - Removal of Self-Worth

Primary Source:

Another Chance by Sharon Wegscheider-Cruse

Sharon Wegscheider-Cruse, president of Onsite Training and Consulting, Incorporated, Palm Desert, California, in her book Another Chance (32-43) offers the most insight into the hope and health available to the addict. What makes her book so effective is that it explains addiction as an illness that infects the WHOLE person. Addiction is a disease that damages what Wegscheider calls six distinct "personal potentials." She labels these potentials physical, emotional, social, mental, spiritual, and volitional.

Wegscheider-Cruse depicts a person as a circle - a figure long recognized as a symbol of wholeness. In her model the circle is divided into six equal and equally important segments, each representing a "personal potential." The segments, like slices of a pie, all join at the center. Likening the circle to a wheel, Wegscheider-Cruse points out that each potential, though distinct, affects and is affected by the others, much as a deformity in one part of the wheel will have an effect on the functioning of the whole. Ordinarily these potentials are in operation all at once and in many combinations. However, a look at the effects of addiction on each explains how the whole person is impaired when one area is contaminated by addiction.

The Physical Potential

Each of us is born with a body. The one we have is uniquely our own, a set of possibilities that no other human being shares. It is our first line of contact with the world around us. It holds our receptors for perceiving what is out there and all our equipment for responding to what we find. It is the foundation of health.

Deterioration of all aspects of the physical potential is rarely seen as dramatically as in the victims of addiction. The body once offered the addict a number of avenues for enjoying his life and wholeness. One by one these avenues are destroyed; physical skills, personal appearance, sexual desire and satisfaction, health.

The Emotional Potential

Developing the emotional potential, unlike the physical, calls for no nurturing or practice. The whole range of emotions springs naturally in each of us, giving life zest and flavor. Emotion is just another word for feelings - an inner response to both inner and outer events.

Feelings that are honestly felt give life its pulse and color. They allow that part of ourselves that we experience as human to reach out and relate dynamically

to the material world and the humanity of those around us. Addiction robs us of this opportunity to relate to the world. True feelings are a threat to the Addictive System and therefore not allowed to exist inside of it. Frozen feelings is a primary characteristic of the Addictive System and vital to its success.

Whatever the personal pain that first made the addictive substance attractive to an addict, the chances are that he once felt good about himself and his life - at least part of the time. But as the addictive substance slipped into harmful dependency, the good feelings became fewer, and there were onslaughts of uncomfortable feelings that made his original discomfort, for which he started using the substance in the first place, seem mild indeed. In time, the addict experiences the whole catalogue of painful human emotions that go hand-in-hand with addiction: anger, hostility, resentment, fear, anxiety, tension, shame, guilt, feelings of worthlessness, remorse and depression.

When the burden of painful emotions reaches a point he can no longer tolerate, he begins to repress them - to turn them off. The addict is left with no feelings at all. He is numb, turned-off, no longer able to relate to other people or events as a human, feeling being.

The Social Potential

We draw on the social potential in even our most superficial relationships. If it is functioning well, it can make all those contacts more pleasant and effective. Qualities like honesty, openness, intimacy, compassion, or cooperation are the aspects of the social potential that are absolutely essential to forming and deepening the more important relationships in our lives. These include relationships with spouses and children and parents, with friends and lovers, with all those who truly matter to us.

As the addict goes deeper into his addiction, the friendly relations become strained. As the disease begins to transform his personality and the addict becomes increasingly hostile, all but his close friends learn to avoid him. At home, his relationship with his wife and children is cold, stormy, tearful, or intermittently all three. His marriage and home remain intact, if they do, through his wife's sense of duty (co-dependence), her ability to make changes - or most often - her own participation in most of the patterns of the disease.

The Mental Potential

It has often been exalted as the single gift that separates us from the animals. The mind has immense

internal value in helping the individual become a whole person. And in our addictive society, the most lavish rewards are bestowed on those with the greatest mental potential.

The mental power has three aspects; one is in the past, in the memory, the second focuses on the present through ideas, the third is in the future, in fantasy and imagination.

At first glance, the incipient addict seems to have his mental powers honed to a fine edge. The addict alibis, "cons", charms, and bluffs; he covers all the bases. But his cleverness is an illusion. The defenses that he has called into action to protect him from criticism and from his own painful feelings end up giving him a distorted picture of reality. Rationalization and denial keep him from seeing the truth about any person or situation. Eventually all of the addicts mental processes are focused on denying and suppressing his feelings. This activity keeps the addict trapped in the Addictive System and robs him of the chance be truly alive.

The Spiritual Potential

In a fully developed person the spiritual potential can find expression in a wide variety of both inner and outer

activities; meditation, prayer, discipline, organized religion, development of the higher Self, or humanitarian services. The possibilities for joy and satisfaction in such pursuits transcend anything else that the human potentials can offer.

But the spiritual potential does not forever drift among the clouds. It is also a very practical matter, for it is the source of our values. When the value system is illumined by a lively spiritual awareness it can find meaning, beauty, and nobility in even the most mundane aspects of our lives.

When the spiritual potential is not activated the person sees little reason to exist. A person finds relief in social drinking, drug abuse, or religious addiction. He sees the addiction as a resource with value. And when he becomes dependent on it, the addictive substance moves from something that HAS value to something that IS value in itself - in time, the central value of his life. All else begins to revolve around it, and preserving his relationship with it is his first priority.

The Volitional Potential

This is the capacity for making choices. Centered in the will, it mobilizes the data, experiences, values, and

energy generated by all the other potentials and puts them to work in the service of the whole person.

The healthy person will effectively set goals, rank priorities, make decisions, persevere in the face of difficulty, and sustain effort until his goals are reached or changed.

The addict loses his power of choice by slow increments. As dependency sets in, loss of control literally deprives the addict of choice over one very important thing in his life - how much of the addictive substance he will consume and when he will stop. Later when the dependency has evolved into total physical addiction there is no choice at all. Continuing to find the fix ceases to be a choice and becomes a matter of life and death. The addictive substance provides the addict the illusion of control. In reality, the lifestyle of the addict offers few choices about anything and control of nothing. Eventually the addict needs so much of the addictive substance that the body becomes overloaded and result is usually death.

Each of the personal potentials, then as it is developed, brings its own rewards in both inner satisfaction and effective behavior. But that is not all. When all six are healthily developed the individual not only IS whole, he FEELS whole! He enjoys strong

feelings of self-worth. Self-worth is an essential ingredient - perhaps the MOST essential ingredient in personal well-being and interpersonal harmony. A persons sense of self-worth is something abhorred by the Addictive System. In the Addictive System a person's self-worth does not come from the inside, from a genuine awareness of their humanity. Rather self-worth is obtained through the addiction; alcohol, drugs, religion, etc.. This illusion of self-worth is how the system maintains control. When our perception of our self-worth diminishes we head for a refill; we head for the fix.

Faith versus Magic

Throughout this paper we have described "faith" as an important ingredient to a healthy religious experience. Writings from Vatican II define faith as:

Faith: man freely committing his entire self to God, making "the full submission of his intellect and will to God who reveals" and willingly assenting to the revelation given by him.

In contrast, we have discussed the concept of "magic" as pertaining to unhealthy religiosity and addiction. But what is the difference? Both convey the idea of belief in something mystic, something unexplainable, something unknown. Why, then, in the context of the Addictive

System, is faith considered healthy and magic deemed unhealthy?

A person who is seeking deeper insight into reality may sometimes have doubts, even about God himself. Such doubts do not necessarily indicate a lack of faith. Faith is alive and dynamic. It seeks, through grace, to penetrate into the very mystery of God. If a particular doctrine of faith no longer "makes sense" to a person, the person should go right on seeking. To know what a doctrine says, is one thing. To gain an insight into its meaning through the gift of understanding is something else. When in doubt, "Seek and ye shall find." The person who seeks by reading, discussing, thinking, or praying eventually sees light. The person who talks with God even when God is "not there" is alive with faith. Faith is your belief in God and your commitment of your total being to him as the personal source of all truth and reality and of your own being. Faith is a trust, a loyalty to a power higher than yourself.

Modern theologian Edward Barbotin, in Faith For Today, says:

We have faith and believe in God because God has spoken. He has spoken in history, addressed men and told them he exists and has revealed his Name.

That is the greatest event in all history, the current event beyond all others. God didn't stay hidden in his transcendence. Freely, out of love,

he has burst into our world, claimed that he exists, revealed who he is, first to Israel: "I am who am" (Exod. 3:14), then in the visible, tangible humanity of Jesus of Nazareth, who reveals to us that God is Love.

This is what grounds and nourishes every Christian's faith, and the faith of the whole Church. We believe because of an always current event: God's revelation of himself in Jesus Christ, God become man, a man of flesh and blood in history, two thousand years ago, in Palestine, dead, risen, glorified, always present in "the Church of here and now."

Faith is not for the mind alone, but lays siege to the whole man: mind, freedom, will, feeling, action, existence, and way of life...(82)

Faith involves a participation in life; it is dynamic; it is a total commitment to our I AMness. It is a constant search for truth in all things.

Magic, on the other hand, is non-dynamic and non-participative. Magic sacrifices our involvement with life for the false security that God will somehow figure things out for us provided we do nothing. When nothing happens we become angry and blame God for our pain and suffering. Magic is an excuse to not feel; a reason to sit and watch as life passes us by. In short, it is life in the Addictive System.

Weathering the Storm - The Role of the Church

Primary Sources:

Alcohol & Substance Abuse: A Clergy Handbook by Stephen P. Apthorp

**Lumen Gentium: the doctrine of the Second Vatican Council
Excerpts from conversations with Father Frank Cleary**

The Church is a very powerful institution and has a profound influence on our ideas and attitudes about a great many things both religious and non-religious in nature. So what should the primary task of the Church be in influencing healthy religious behavior? According to Stephen Aporp, in a healthy, non-addictive society the primary task of the church is:

...to receive people as they are, enable them to submit their lives in healthy dependence upon God, the source of their being, and to return them to society renewed and strengthened in order that they may PARTICIPATE not only in their own life, but in the lives of their brothers and sisters, and other social institutions as well. The purpose of the Church is to enable members of society in their role as citizens to realize their individual needs and also the real human needs of their community, by helping them in their role as worshipers to realize their full potential...(14)

There is nothing magical or addictive about this approach. It requires that each member take responsibility for his relationship with God and not leave it in the hands of the minister or priest. Healthy religion requires that we take charge of our life and the life of our fellow man; it means realizing and attempting to achieve the full potential of our life. The Church can guide us and support us in this effort but in the end, it is up to each of us to make our life and our relationship with God a positive and fulfilling one.

Father Frank Cleary, a respected Catholic priest and teacher, says that the goal of Church involvement is to offer the possibility of freedom to choose one's own path to fulfillment. Until a person takes responsibility for his own choices and the consequences of his own decisions he is not free and for him religion will continue to be unhealthy and addictive.

The Second Vatican Council echoes these sentiments in its' document Lumen Gentium (Light of Nature). This doctrine discusses the nature of the Church and stresses that the Church is not merely the Pope and his bishops but the entire "people of God," whose common convictions carry a natural truth of their own.

All of life is the Church's concern. That concern, however, does not mean that the Church is responsible for living each life. The task of the Church in the community is to enable people to find direction and meaning for the whole of their lives, to provide a value system for their diverse relationships in society, and to help them relate to God who alone is able to provide strength for their work. The aim of the Church should be to build a sense of community, a family in which parishioners can satisfy their need for honesty, for conversion, for fellowship, and for honest witness. Moses was told by God that his name was "I am who am."

The job of the church is to orchestrate life so that the sense of "I Am" can grow and expand.

The problems of life are complex. Social, economic, and cultural pressures are overpowering. Ancestral and historical prejudices are disruptive. The church has the potential to alter the influence of all these forces, to change the direction of people's lives. The proven method is the simplest of all; it is by offering a genuine, honest-to-god measure of concern.

Offering this genuine, honest-to-god measure of concern, and making the individual UNDERSTAND it, is the challenge facing modern churches and modern religion.

Our Spiritual Guide - The Role of the Pastor or Minister

Primary Source:

The Management of Ministry by Lewis D. Anderson & Ezra Earl Jones

No body of professionals is better equipped to offer the building blocks of a fulfilling life than the clergy. They are the group people trust most. As a variety of polls suggest, the American public ranks the clergy highest in terms of honesty and ethical standards. Parishioners are looking to the clergy for some sense of direction, they are crying out for something firm they can hold onto, rely on. Standards. Guidelines. Foundations. Faith. A believing hope. People are

looking to the Church for leadership. God has called the Church to care for His people in a healthy, spiritually-fulfilling manner.

Stephen P. Apthorp says that, according to a study done in 1981 by Connecticut Mutual Life Insurance Company to determine what influenced Americans' values, it was determined that Americans' religious commitment has a greater impact in determining differences in values than age, race, sex, income, or political viewpoint. It also found that religious leaders were the group most admired by the public and closest to the public's views.

If this study is correct, then our spiritual leaders are among the most powerful, influential members of the community. But with that power comes a large burden of responsibility and heavy (and almost always unfair, unrealistic) demands from the people they lead. The congregation looks to their spiritual leaders to describe religious standards they can use as a basis for their own behavior and to suggest guidelines they can use to define their children's behavior. They want to know if their lives make a difference, if they are important, and just how their faith can help them find meaning in the face of growing obscurity.

The role of the pastor or spiritual leader is a complicated and complex issue. In their book Management

of Ministry, Lewis D. Anderson and Ezra Earl Jones point out that ministers are confronted with several dilemmas:

1. Ministers are to be prophets, priests, and teachers. They have the responsibility of interpreting God's will for His people on the one hand and relating to people in their sin and existential concerns to God on the other.

2. Aware of the ideals for which the church was established, ministers are nevertheless daily confronted with the need for merely preserving the institution itself. They recognize that the church exists to extend itself outside of its own walls, but they must give attention to membership growth, finances, and building repairs.

3. They are sometimes caught between the demands of the denominational organization and the distinctive needs of the people who make up their congregation.

4. They are managers whose first responsibility is to the congregations they serve, but who cannot limit their concern to the "insiders" who pay their salaries.

5. They are people who must come to terms personally with the ambiguities of their roles as clergy on the one hand and as private citizens on the other - roles that are not always clearly defined and differentiated and appear at times to be in conflict.

6. The task of synthesizing the many demands of ministry is enormous. It would seem that the job of parish pastor is impossible for one person...(12)

With such a large responsibility and profound influence in determining American values and behavior, what should be the role or mission of our country's spiritual leaders?

Anderson and Jones sees the ministers role as that of a spiritual catalyst:

The pastor's role in the process of ministering is an enabling one. It is not his or her ministry - ministry belongs to the whole congregation - nor his or her responsibility to do the ministry - all members carry out the ministry. The pastor's role is to minister to the ministers and be a catalyst in the church - one who causes and facilitates the process of ministry but who is not personally "used up" by it. A catalyst, by definition, participates in a process of transformation and facilitates its occurrence, but it is not itself changed or harmed in any way by the process. In the church, when the role of the congregation and the role of the pastor is confused, so that the pastor assumes the responsibilities of the congregation, ministry does not occur and the pastor becomes frustrated, harried and ineffective. The ministry is to those who come to church to be related to God. It is the pastor's job to manage their coming and their going out. The church's ministry is performed by those who come and then return to society...(13)

Stephen P. Apthorp, in Alcohol & Substance Abuse: A Clergy Handbook, suggests:

The mission of the clergy is to devote themselves to promoting and maintaining an atmosphere of openness, honesty, and caring that minimize or eliminates judgements, fear, denial, and prejudice...(64)

Too often in our addictive society the pastor becomes the whipping boy, the scapegoat for the shortcomings of his or her congregation. While it is true that the leaders ARE responsible for guiding the

flock, they are NOT responsible for living the life of each member. The pastor provides the tools for a healthy, creative relationship with God; it is up to each member to use those tools to the best of his abilities, to the fullest of his potential. Only then is he truly alive.

Father Leo Booth says:

The Church and the pastor are not out to get us. Our pride and an unwillingness to change is what is the matter with the Church and our ministers, and what keeps them from being what God means them to be on earth. The change must begin somewhere. We know it ought to begin in us. We must discard the values of our materialistic world and turn to the gentler, kinder qualities of a healthy spiritual life...(72)

The pastor and the Church will always be there to guide us. It is up to us, however, to make our religion work, to make it effective and a part of our daily lives. Each member must come to understand that it is his or her responsibility to establish and maintain a healthy relationship with God.

Recognizing the Guideposts to Healthy Religiosity - God's Values & Qualities

Primary Sources:

Homecoming by John Bradshaw

Growing Young by Ashley Montagu

It has been said that the qualities we exhibit in our lives reflect the qualities we attribute to God; likewise, we may examine many of the qualities usually attributed to God to see how we might apply them in our own life. There are four such qualities that increasingly reflect healthy spirituality the more we develop them in our lives. These qualities provide the freedom that move us closer to God, closer to the Living Process System, and farther from the confines of the Addictive System. They are truth, energy, love, and acceptance.

Truth

The spiritual pursuit of truth is fundamental to our creating a meaningful relationship with God because it conveys our desire to be honest. Truth reflects our desire to integrate our thoughts with our feelings, the matching of parts of ourselves that allows us to be real, to have integrity. It allows us to reveal our true selves while confronting those hypocritical aspects of our personalities - those aspects which trap us in the Addictive System. The healthy search for God necessitates that we get in touch our TRUE feelings and allow ourselves to be vulnerable. In religious addiction, the addict hides his true feelings behind

rituals and rules, magical thinking and fantasies, control and perfectionism. Sharing our real feelings first requires learning to identify them and learning to risk sharing them. This means that the addict must rise above the fear of the Addictive System and have the courage to face his feelings. Like so many of the ideas that relate to healthy religiosity, the concept of truth is a PROCESS which takes time, one that is always in motion. When the process stops, the addiction begins.

Energy

According to Pere Teilhard de Chardin, a Jesuit priest and noted geologist from the 1920's, we as humans are energy moving toward Source, that God is pure energy, and we are channels of that same energy.

God is often revealed most powerfully and gloriously through creative energy. The sheer artistry found in the complexities of the way in which our world is put together manifests an imaginative and creative God. If such imaginativeness and creativity exist in God, it seems natural, that they must also exist in us.

Religious addiction is in many ways, an avoidance of energy, a self-abnegation, especially of the creative self. The passive waiting and denial of personal power

that mark the religious addict is a refusal to acknowledge, much less use, one's own energy.

Recovery permits you to draw on your God-given energy and to appreciate that its presence in you makes you unique and special. John Bradshaw in his book Homecoming observes:

When we are spiritual, we are in contact with our uniqueness and specialness. It is our fundamental beingness or I AMness... My belief is that our I AMness constitutes our core godlikeness. When a person has this sense of I AMness, they are one with themselves and are self-accepting... The deepest sense of human spirituality is this I AMness, which incorporates the qualities of being valuable, precious and special...(38)

God told Moses: "I am that I am." Thus did God tell us who we are. In recognizing our own individual I AMness, we energize our positive creativity. We are not afraid to doubt or question beliefs or authority. Rather than avoid or negate who we are, living mired in toxic shame, bereft of the ability to see God in ourself, we rejoice in our creative energy. In that self-acceptance, we find God.

Love

Love is essential to any healthy religious and spiritual person. But what is love? It is critical to look at the

specific qualities we attribute to love, for if we talk about a God of love, or say that God is love, we need to know what we really mean.

In Growing Young, Ashley Montagu describes love as being modeled for us by our parents.

Love is the active process of conferring survival benefits in a creatively enlarging manner upon the other, the communication to the other, by demonstrative acts of one's involvement in his welfare, giving him the support, sustenance, and stimulation that he requires for the fulfillment of his potentialities for being the kind of human being that you are being to him, that he can depend on you whenever he is in need, that you will never commit the supreme treason of letting him down when he most stands in need of you. It is in this way that one learns to love, simply by being loved, the most powerful of all the developers of one's humane abilities...(92-93)

In this way, we become what we are shown. Yet the ways in which we manifest love, and how we need others to demonstrate their love for us are different. There is the love of a parent for a child, that of lovers, and that of friends.

Love is all of these and more: What we love, we accept, nourish, delight in, and grow from. We strengthen and sustain ourselves in it - whether we find it in art, music, literature, nature, science, children, parents, lovers, friends, even pets. Whatever we love, however we are loved, there we find God.

In religious addiction, the addict yearns for and preaches about a God of love, while secretly believing in an angry, judging God who found him inherently unacceptable. Thus his actions could never match his words. Believing himself worthless, he treats others as though they are worthless. He is critical, judgmental, and condemning. He relies on outside rituals and dogma to supposedly absolve him of this inborn wretchedness.

In recovery, the addict no longer looks outside to the external trappings of rules, regulations, and platitudes for his self-worth. He finds it within. When he can treat himself with love and respect, he then has no difficulty treating others the same way. Thus love becomes the bridge to healthy relationships. God is love, because he is loving and lovable. He now lives what he used to merely preach.

Acceptance

Our understanding of God's love and the special relationship that comes with knowing we are children of God produces self-acceptance. Gone is the frightening, angry, wrathful, critical God who sat majestically enthroned too far away to reach, and whom we approached expecting condemnation and judgment. Instead we find a loving parent to whom we turn for guidance, comfort, and

nurture - a playful daddy or mommy, rather than the forbidding father or mother figure whose rules helped create our dysfunctional beliefs. This shift from the traditional, Old Testament view of God as distant ruler to a more personal relationship with a co-creator nurtures our self-acceptance. We develop personal dignity when we appreciate how GOD REQUIRES OUR PARTICIPATION IN OUR OWN REDEMPTION! We are not passive spectators waiting to be magically saved, but active partners in the exchange of values and behaviors that no longer work for a new set of guidelines to take us on this phase of our journey.

When you change your belief about yourself and start from the premise that you are born wholly capable of good and a creature of dignity and grace, you accept that God - and everyone else - loves you for who you are. No longer is your life defined by the boundaries imposed by the Addictive System. You are able to break the chains of low self-esteem, powerlessness, unworthiness, and sin so that you can take an active role in the creating of your own life.

In your addiction, you believed that God said NO to everything pleasurable. In recovery, you come to believe that what God has created, God also accepts. Risk becomes easier, knowing you are not going to be eternally

damned for failure. You share your feelings knowing they are not bad; they cannot be bad if God made them.

Staying the Course - Creating & Maintaining a Balanced Spiritual Life

Primary Source:

A Gentle Path Through the Twelve Steps by Patrick Carnes

We have talked about the need for creating balance as a key to healthy religion. In his workbook, A Gentle Path Through the Twelve Steps, Patrick Carnes developed a worksheet for creating sobriety or balance in any addiction. Father Leo Booth has adopted this worksheet and guidelines for use in creating spiritual sobriety and balance.

Identify the behaviors that manifest your addiction

You will want to give priority to those that have had the greatest consequences; they will become your sobriety boundaries. Next, list at least one way each behavior hurts you or someone else physically, mentally, or emotionally.

Set your boundaries about how you're going to use behavior

Remember that your goal is BALANCE. Some of the addictive behaviors will have not to be eliminated but rather modified. When setting sobriety boundaries, there are four primary options you might want to consider:

1. Refrain from the activity entirely
2. Eliminate it for a limited amount of time
3. Limit participation under certain circumstances
4. Substitute healthy behaviors for unhealthy ones

Identify triggers & danger zones that might lead to relapse

Define the situations or processes that might tilt you into relapse. Then you can indicate what action you will take when confronted with these triggers or danger zones.

Define behaviors that constitute a slip

Having identified triggers and danger zones you will be better able to decide what causes a slip or relapse. Your goal is to learn to develop your own guidelines, which allow for growth and recovery without being so flexible as to permit you to rationalize indulging in your addictive behaviors.

You will rarely be confronted with all-or-nothing choices. You are striving for progress, not perfection.

You want to learn to recognize, and live comfortably within the gray area that lies between the black and white. There is no sense in setting yourself up to fail by creating a structure to which it is impossible to adhere.

Use affirming thoughts or behaviors that reflect healthy beliefs to replace dysfunctional ones

Gentle self-nurturing is essential in recovery from any addiction, especially religious addiction and abuse. You have been accustomed to living with self-condemnation, rigid, rules, and judgments. As a result, you want to reinforce the idea that you are not giving up God, but are merely replacing that dysfunctional God or belief system with a healthy one that permits spiritual growth. You can do this by creating affirmations or by finding a healthy behavior that replaces the dysfunctional one.

Healthy Spirituality versus Healthy Religion

One of the primary goals of this paper is to define the qualities of healthy spirituality and show how these qualities differ from unhealthy spirituality.

Spirituality was defined as an inner attitude that emphasizes energy, creative choice, and a powerful force for living. However, healthy spirituality is so much

more. It is a partnership with a power greater than the individual, a co-creatorship with God that allows a person to be guided by God and yet take responsibility for his life. Father Leo Booth in When God Becomes A Drug describes spirituality as:

The power to discover and use one's own unique specialness. That is the essence of true religion. It supplies the supportive community whereby one can find a unique sense of self. Spirituality is the process of becoming a positive, creative person and that spirituality is separate from religion...(3)

Father Booth defines religion as being essentially a set of man-made principles about God, focusing on a teacher or prophet, in contrast to spirituality, which is the process of becoming a positive and creative person. This definition of religion allows us to look not only at organized religion but also at any group or belief system that either generates dysfunction or is used dysfunctionally.

When those beliefs concerning religion inspire us to develop our creative potential, whether spiritually, as individuals, or culturally, as a society, those beliefs move us forward and may be seen as healthy. When they limit or paralyze us, are used by ourselves or others to oppress and victimize us, they can be regarded as unhealthy and addictive.

People can be spiritual without being religious - and religious without being spiritual. Religion is a belief system organized around a prophet, teacher, or set of human precepts. Spirituality is the ability to discover and use our own unique specialness, and religion does not always help us do that. Spirituality consists not in what religion you practice, but in the acceptance of your own humanity - your limitations as well as your strengths. Spirituality means developing a relationship with the God-within.

Home At Last - Healthy Religion

Throughout my research into addiction, and specifically religious addiction, I have discovered a number of common themes and ideas which are included in each piece of literature. In these "uniformities" are to be found the keys to understanding addictive behavior and also the guidelines to recovery and a healthy relationship with God.

1. THE IDEA OF WHOLENESS

In all of the documentation concerning addiction and recovery there is invariably some mention of the wholeness of the human spirit. Humans are complex

creatures, made up of many different tangible and intangible parts. These parts, distinct in their own right, must "fit" together if we are to have the opportunity to be fully alive and achieve our potential. In the case of the human spirit, the whole is truly greater than the sum of the parts. When one of these parts becomes infected, the remaining parts are infected as well. The spirit loses its' sense of wholeness and operates on a level below its' maximum potential. This is the power of addiction. By contaminating one part of the human spirit, the addiction infects the remaining pieces and eventually destroys the entire spirit. Recovery from addiction means ALL parts of the individual are free from the addiction and are allowed to operate both independently of and in harmony with the remaining pieces.

2. BALANCE

A concept that relates to the idea of wholeness is the notion of balance. All religions deal with balance in some form or context. We mentioned that the human creature is a complex organism; a being comprised of multiple physical and non-physical entities. Each of these entities (i.e., our wants, needs, emotions, and fears) combine to make up the total human experience.

As humans, the natural tendency is to focus exclusively on those entities that we're most comfortable with. At the same time, we attempt to suppress those that cause discomfort. By silencing those objects that create pain we provide ourselves the illusion that everything is alright and we are in control. This is the power of the Addictive System. Reality, however, reveals an individual in control of nothing and out of touch with the world around him; it reveals an individual devoid of feeling and full of fear.

When any part of the human experience is suppressed or ignored, we are "out of sync." And like the idea of wholeness, when one part is "out of sync" the remaining parts suffer. The key to remaining "in-sync" and maintaining a healthy attitude toward life is to find a balance between ALL the parts that comprise our individual humanity. This balance must include those items that cause discomfort. In order to achieve our full human potential there must exist a harmony between all the parts. This is a process that we must ultimately accomplish alone. Internal harmony cannot be determined by sources outside of our personal experiences. The individual must achieve this balance and decide how best to maintain it.

Once we attain this balance within ourselves we can begin to seek balance in our personal relationship with

the rest of the planet, our relationship with our fellow man, our relationship with the environment, and our relationship with God.

3. LIFE IS A PROCESS

Life is a dynamic, ever-changing phenomenon, full of unexpected twists and turns. It is many times compared to a roller coaster ride. Life is never stagnant. It is a PROCESS and this process implies activity! The concept of life as a process pertains to us as individuals and to everything around us; the Church, our religion, our environment, our entire planet. This means that everything within the realm of our senses and our understanding (ourselves included) is constantly changing. This is the power and wonder of life itself.

In order to function in a healthy, non-addictive manner, our lives must also be a process. We must grow, we must change, we must live! This is the key to avoiding the pitfalls of the Addictive System.

The Addictive System fears change; for change brings the potential for new feelings, new experiences, and the chance to grow and develop as an individual and as a society. The message of the Addictive System is that change is evil and brings nothing but pain to any who would attempt it. The system teaches us to avoid change

and to grip tightly to the present. It places a premium on maintenance of the status quo. Unfortunately, our refusal to accept change and our satisfaction with and acceptance of the status quo, are all invitations to unhealthy, addictive behavior. Father Cleary says that:

The individual, the Church, religion, and the world are daily participants in a growing process; they are all constantly changing. There is an inherent pain associated with this process and with any growth process for that matter. This pain is unavoidable and part of life. The trouble comes when individuals refuse to acknowledge and feel the pain associated with change. They begin to avoid the pain associated with change and, as a result, stop changing and choose to become content with the present, with the status quo. Ultimately, they sacrifice the opportunity to feel for the illusion of security.

But Father Cleary offers this piece of advice to those who fear the pain associated with change:

Life means change; it is unavoidable. With this change comes pain; this is also unavoidable. As individuals, we have the option of accepting the challenge of change or choosing to live in the emptiness of imagined stability. Located within the Gospel are the messages that guide us in accepting our change and confronting our pain. This is the true power of religion and the Gospel. Acceptance of change is the choice of life; it is choosing to grow and develop as individuals and as a congregation. It is saying yes to ALL the experiences of our humanity and, ultimately, saying yes to God.

4. RESPONSIBILITY, INDIVIDUALITY & PARTICIPATION

The power of any addiction is the ability to remove from the individual the desire to think and feel. It is, in essence, removing the chance to be human, the chance for life itself. One of the primary characteristics of addiction involves allowing someone else to think for us, to tell us what to feel, to tell us what to do, and to tell what is right and wrong. Our fear ensures us that we remain a slave to this type of thinking. When something goes wrong, we apply the responsibility and blame to someone else. In doing so we maintain our illusion of perfection and control. The saddest part of any addiction is the removal of our individuality, our opportunity to share in the mysteries and wonders of life in our own, unique fashion.

Recovery and the arrival at a healthy religiosity means that the individual must take responsibility for his or her own life. Healthy spirituality means allowing ourselves the opportunity to think and feel; in other words, the chance to be human. Freeing ourselves from addiction involves taking that "Leap of Faith" to a system where mistakes are accepted as a fundamental part of discovering our humanity. It also involves accepting the change and confronting the pain that comes with the daily experience of being alive. Recovery from addiction provides the realization that we are individuals and that life for each of us is a UNIQUE experience. Ultimately

life in a non-addictive environment mandates that no one tells us how to think and feel, or worse, how NOT to think and feel. This is the essence of healthy religion and the way to achieve a positive, creative, non-addictive relationship with God; it is also the true message of this paper.

APPENDIX A

The Twelve Steps of AA

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol, that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people whenever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for the knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry these messages to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

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