

ALCOHOL, ADDICTION AND CHRISTIAN ETHICS

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CHAPTER I

Alcohol, addiction and Christian ethics: introduction

Alcohol has many and contrasting associations. A glass of wine with a meal can symbolise love, friendship, relaxation and enjoyment of a special occasion. It can represent romance, coming of age, success, beginnings and endings, good news and good company. At a Christian Eucharist or Jewish Passover, where wine is also shared, thanks are given to God for divine salvation from all that enslaves, restricts and condemns. In drinking the wine, Christians participate with the first disciples in their last supper with Christ, and Jews participate with the ancient Hebrews in their exodus from enslavement in Egypt. But sadly, the sacredness and redemptiveness of these occasions contrasts with the associations of alcohol with drunken violence in our towns and cities, cirrhosis of the liver on our medical wards, debt in families, and death on our roads. It contrasts also, and more especially, with the enslavement that is alcoholism, or alcohol addiction.

In more purely statistical and objective terms, alcohol misuse is a contemporary social problem of enormous economic significance, which exacts a high toll of human suffering as a result of the social, psychological and medical harms to which it gives rise. Alcohol-related morbidity and mortality are high in most parts of the world, and in many developing nations alcohol consumption and its concomitant harms are on the increase.¹ Yet, moderate alcohol consumption is tolerated, enjoyed and encouraged in most countries around the world, with the majority of the adult population being drinkers of alcohol, in almost all countries other than those with an Islamic culture.²

What are we to make of these observations? It is easy to project blame to a safe distance by arguing that they are the responsibility of other people or forces beyond our control. Governments, industries and

¹ World Health Organization, 1999.

² This is not to suggest that problems of alcohol misuse are not significant in Islamic countries. Although a minority of people drink alcohol, often contrary to the law and therefore in secrecy, some of the alcohol-related problems experienced by these people are extremely serious.

moderate drinkers can blame a minority of irresponsible citizens for their excesses. The beverage alcohol industry can easily be blamed for promoting a product which causes so much harm. Or else, the product itself can be blamed and made the subject of prohibition, on the basis that everyone would be better off if it were not consumed at all in civilised society.

But perhaps no-one needs to be 'to blame' at all? Rather than blaming people for being irresponsible – whether in their own drinking behaviour or their promotion of alcohol in society so as to cause harm indirectly – and rather than blaming alcohol itself, as though it had some demonic and ubiquitous power to bring innocent people to ruin, perhaps the problem is better understood more in terms of disease? Perhaps some people are exceptionally vulnerable, because of a disease of some kind, in such a way that (although they are not really to blame for it themselves) alcohol causes them harm, and through them harms other people too. This disease might be understood simply as that of having a liver, or brain, or other organ system, which is peculiarly sensitive to the toxic effects of alcohol. Or, in a more complex fashion, it might be understood as a disease affecting the moral and spiritual nature of human beings in such a way as to impair their judgement, self-control and integrity in a far more fundamental way. And, at risk of over-simplifying things and jumping ahead of the argument, this disease might be called 'alcoholism' or 'addiction'. If this model is valid, then most people can drink without harm or guilt, but some – the addicts or alcoholics – must abstain for their own good and that of others. No-one is responsible for such a disease, although sufferers have a responsibility to seek help and society has a responsibility to provide them with treatment.

It might be argued that such a disease model is simply another way of projecting blame – so that most people can continue drinking without any sense of guilt, and so that the alcoholic is responsible only for engaging in a programme of recovery and not for the root of the problem. However, that would be to prejudge the case. If alcoholism is a disease, it surely is a most malignant and destructive one, and those who suffer from it, and their families, certainly deserve sympathy and understanding rather than blame. But another argument arises which makes it difficult to leave the matter here. Extensive research, on alcohol consumption and on a variety of addictive behaviours, suggests that there is in fact no completely separate group of people who can easily be distinguished as 'addicts', in contrast to the 'normal' population. It is true that addiction, in its more severe forms, is easily perceived as alien to the statistical normal range of

human experience. But the many shades of grey between addictive and normal drinking, for example, make it difficult to know where to draw the line.

The concept of addiction, in its more clearly distinguishable and severe manifestations, also presents another challenge to ethical analysis. If individuals can suffer from a disease which impairs their own self-control over certain behaviours, to what extent are they responsible for these behaviours? Contemporary ethical analysis tends to assume a central importance of human autonomy in choosing freely between available arbitrary options. But what if some people cannot freely make certain choices in such a fashion? Where then does the responsibility lie if their choices cause others harm? Can blame be projected on to a disease, the causes of which lie outside an individual person's control?

But do any of these projections of blame, attractive to the extent that they make someone or something else responsible for the problem, actually do anything in practice to address the problem effectively? And does that problem lie outside of us – in the community, in industry, in other people, in a disease, or in alcohol itself – or does it lie within each of us? Whatever our response to that question may be, there is a series of important and immediate practical and ethical questions which we face as individuals and as a society if we are to respond adequately to so pervasive and destructive a problem as that of alcohol misuse.

For the individual drinker, there is the important ethical question as to what criteria should be adopted in order to ensure that personal alcohol 'use' does not become alcohol 'misuse' (or, worse still, addiction). Whatever criteria are adopted, they may come into conflict with other influences upon drinking behaviour and they will be likely to increase or reduce the risk of a variety of threats to personal well-being. What should individuals do when they discover that what they had thought to be responsible drinking actually causes harm? In what way, and to what extent, should they modify their drinking? How great a risk to health is justified by the pleasures and benefits of moderate alcohol consumption? Or else, what should total abstainers do when told that they might acquire benefits to health from moderate drinking?

For society as a whole, for governments, industries, health professionals and academics, important ethical questions are raised in respect of social policy, health promotion, and planning of medical services which will have important consequences for economic and social stability, as well as for public health and the well-being of individuals. An enormous body of scientific literature and research has attempted to inform the governments,

authorities and individuals who seek answers to such questions.³ However, this is not merely a question of science or social policy. Governments and industries gain economic benefit from the production, sale and taxation of alcoholic beverages. The enormous popularity of alcohol – our ‘favourite drug’⁴ – can at times make wise evidence-based policies politically unattractive. And if alcohol is both a profitable commodity and also a cause of social and medical harm, or disease, then shareholders in the alcohol industry might, at least conceivably, face a choice between a sales policy which provides maximum achievable sales and one which minimises harm.

The matters of production, distribution, and consumption of alcohol therefore present a variety of important ethical questions to both individuals and societies. And yet, the debate about the proper answers to these questions is often now conducted primarily as though it were not an ethical debate, but rather simply one of scientific opinion, political expediency and consumer choice. Against this trend, it is argued here that, while science, politics and personal preference are all important and legitimate considerations, alcohol is also an important ethical issue which concerns us all. The debate about its proper production and use should therefore include, not only scientific and political and commercial considerations, but also explicitly ethical considerations. Alcohol policy should be based, not only upon sound and carefully considered scientific evidence, but also upon soundly reasoned ethical principles.

Before embarking upon construction of an ethical framework for response to the problems of alcohol misuse and addiction in our society, however, it must be noted that there is a remarkable dearth of ethical debate at many levels. It is true that some religious groups continue to eschew the use of alcohol.⁵ It is also true that academics and others have expressed concern about the influence of the alcohol industry upon research and policy formation.⁶ However, for many young and not so young people, drunkenness is at best socially unacceptable, and at worst is understood as being a very good objective for an evening out with friends.⁷ As an example of governmental discourse, the 2004 Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy for England, published by the British Prime Minister’s Strategy

³ For an authoritative and recent account of this literature as applied to social policy considerations, see Babor et al., 2003.

⁴ Royal College of Psychiatrists, 1986.

⁵ See, for example, the detailed defence of total abstinence (based mainly upon scripture) by Samuele Bacchiocchi, a Seventh Day Adventist (Bacchiocchi, 1989).

⁶ See Chapter 2. ⁷ Prime Minister’s Strategy Unit, 2004, p. 23.

Unit, nowhere gives explicit consideration to ethical issues.⁸ Rather, it talks about the ‘pleasures’ of ‘drinking responsibly’, as opposed to ‘harmful patterns of drinking’, and of strong encouragement of the drinks industry towards ‘social responsibility’.⁹

Some encouragement may be derived from the ‘Ethical principles and goals’ of the European Charter on Alcohol published by the World Health Organization (WHO).¹⁰ These are undoubtedly a welcome reminder that ethics as well as research should underlie social policy at the national and international level, and no issue is taken here with their fundamental merit. However, perhaps they raise more questions than they answer. Their prime concerns are with freedom from harm, access to information, access to care, and freedom to choose abstinence. But, does freedom to choose abstinence also imply freedom to drink? If so, is it possible to exercise complete freedom of choice in relation to alcohol consumption? If it is, then what happens when this freedom conflicts with the right to freedom from harm? More fundamentally, the language used is that of human rights, and yet there is no legal status to these rights. Human rights are social realities only insofar as they are a product of human agreement,¹¹ and it is not clear to what extent these human rights might be agreed upon outside of the 1995 conference from which they originated. Whether or not they might also be considered in some sense natural rights is not discussed, but would inevitably require a theological position to be adopted, and would in any case be very debatable.

Where the ethics of alcohol are discussed in more detail, conflicts emerge between different sets of ethical principles. For example, Robin Room has argued that the responsibility that modern societies place upon individuals for rational and responsible behaviour conflicts with the ‘ethic of free trade’, which sees alcohol as just another commodity which should be made freely available.¹² For Pekka Sulkunen, the conflict is between the consequentialist ethics of rationally based public rules and the ethics of individually conceived notions of ‘the good life’.¹³ Further ethical analysis is required in

⁸ Prime Minister’s Strategy Unit, 2004. ⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 2–3, 6.

¹⁰ World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe, 1995.

¹¹ Vardy and Grosch, 1994, pp. 191–193.

¹² Room, 1997. As a result, control of consumption and alcohol related harm becomes the responsibility of the individual consumer rather than of society. Those who fail to manage this responsibility, according to Room, are defined as alcoholics. Room concludes that, historically, alcohol problems have usually been best addressed by strong popular moral movements.

¹³ Sulkunen, 1997. Sulkunen writes as an employee of ALKO, what was then the Finnish state monopoly on alcohol. His solution to the conflict that he identifies is in the form of a social understanding of ethical decision-making whereby groups with shared moral values might be encouraged to adopt lifestyles in which alcohol features less prominently, or not at all. He seems to be optimistic that this might in time influence national policy on pricing and availability of alcohol.

order to provide a non-conflicted ethical framework for understanding the place of alcohol in our society.

To attempt a comprehensive ethical analysis of this field would be an enormous project. It raises questions concerning the social, developmental, psychological, genetic and other biological influences upon human behaviour and, assuming that radical determinism is not accepted, the ways in which people exercise 'free will' in the face of these influences. It would be a multidisciplinary project, requiring an understanding of a range of social, biological and health sciences as well as theology and ethics. It would be concerned both with the factors which generate a range of social, psychological and medical alcohol-related problems, and also with the human responses and solutions which are offered in an attempt to address these problems. A comprehensive ethical analysis of all of these facets of the problem would be a very valuable, but complex, lengthy and time-consuming undertaking. Necessarily this book will therefore be able only to allude to some of these facets, and in many cases references alone will have to suffice to direct the reader towards the relevant wider literature.

However, this book will also be limited in scope to a specifically Christian ethical and theological perspective, and I imagine that some readers will feel that this requires a little further justification. Christian ethical thinking has had an enduring influence upon the now largely secular ethical values of the developed world, not least Europe and North America, as well as on much of the developing world. Even if many of these nations and continents might now be considered largely post-Christian (not to mention postmodern), yet their Christian history has affected their commonly accepted ethical values in ways that are often not apparent. An analysis of this history and its relevance to the present is therefore of importance to all people, regardless of their religious faith or lack of it.

A specifically Christian perspective is obviously also of importance to the worldwide Christian Church. This might seem self-evident, and yet it is apparently not a matter about which the Church is currently greatly concerned; at least insofar as that concern may be judged by heatedness of public debate and content of published works. Whereas in the nineteenth century the matter of temperance or, more correctly, total abstinence from alcohol consumption was a major topic of debate and disagreement among Christians, now the popular ethical concern is apparently with matters such as human sexuality. Whereas in the nineteenth century a large proportion of Christians in all denominations (and all Christians in some denominations) in Europe and North America concluded that they should remain abstinent from alcohol, now the majority conclude that moderate

alcohol consumption is ethically uncontroversial and generally unremarkable. And this, despite the fact that we are more aware than ever of the toll that alcohol exacts. According to WHO estimates, 1.1 million people worldwide died of alcohol-related causes in 1990, and by 2004 this had risen to 1.8 million per annum.¹⁴ Doubtless nineteenth century Temperance campaigners would be left completely aghast at the sanguine stance of twenty-first-century Christians in the face of this massive toll of human life. And indeed twenty-first-century Christians continue to be concerned about morbidity and mortality on a much lesser scale when it is due to other causes or when it is encountered in other contexts.

Furthermore, the Christian ethics of alcohol misuse tell some interesting stories of how scripture, tradition and reason variously interact and assume greater or lesser importance from one generation to the next in terms of their importance as a basis for ethical argument. Perhaps some lessons may be learned here which are of relevance to contemporary Christian debates about human sexuality, and other matters which we perversely consider more important subjects for argument than the lives of 1.8 million people every year.

It might, however, be argued that God is best kept out of the argument and that the ethics of alcohol are best analysed by human reason alone. Richard Holloway, for example, has argued that the ethical analysis of alcohol and other drugs in society is a matter of 'moral calculus', which is concerned with the tension between freedom and personal morality on the one hand, and the public good on the other.¹⁵ Among his arguments against involving God in the debate appears to be his concern about the influence of what he considers to be a fundamentalist superstition that alcohol and drugs are inherently evil.¹⁶ He rightly recognises that the ethical arguments concerning alcohol and drug use are more complex than this, and draws attention to the failures of prohibition, and to the plurality within society which makes it unlikely that such negative absolute views will ever again achieve widespread consensus. But this seems to imply that the only contribution that theology has to make to such debate is one of offering unpopular and naïve moral absolutes.

A Christian theological perspective is offered here on the basis of a belief that theology should not be excluded from secular discourse and, indeed,

¹⁴ World Health Organization, 1999, p. 46; World Health Organization, 2004, p. 1. This is partly offset by estimated deaths averted as a result of the cardio-protective benefit of light to moderate alcohol consumption. The net worldwide mortality due to alcohol for 1990 was thus estimated by the WHO to be 773,594.

¹⁵ Holloway, 2000, pp. 87–107. Reference to 'moral calculus' is to be found on pp. 96, 105.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

that it has a useful contribution to make to such discourse on the important topics of our time. Alistair McFadyen has argued that 'consciously relating the world to God . . . holds explanatory and symbolic power in relation to reality'.¹⁷ While the present work does not primarily attempt to prove this, it proceeds on the basis that it is true, and the reader must judge whether or not the perspective that is offered has gained in explanatory or symbolic power as a result. While the truth of this assertion is accepted by the present author, however, it is accepted from a position of theological realism,¹⁸ acknowledging that there are many and important continuities between theological and secular discourse. This is made clear, not to deny that there are also certain discontinuities, but rather to indicate that it is not necessarily expected that theological and secular discourse will be in radical conflict with each other. Theology has been brought into this conversation, not with the purpose of creating an argument, but because it has something of value to say.

Finally, however, a Christian perspective is offered because this author is a Christian. I cannot write from any other perspective. I write from a personal conviction that in Christ there is grace for those who suffer, and that this includes those who are poor, addicted, ill and abused as a result of alcohol misuse. I hope that this will not distract from the fact that I also write with due respect for those who come from other faith traditions, as well as those who are agnostic or avowedly atheist. I hope that they will also write about the ethics of alcohol misuse from their standpoints. With those from other faith traditions I especially share a concern that too much ethical, social and scientific discourse now takes place from a standpoint of pragmatic atheism. As a result of the Enlightenment, faith and religion have become private matters which are not usually addressed in public debate in the so-called developed world. A Christian perspective is therefore offered here in the hope that it can be seen that theology *does* have something to say which is of value to wider contemporary debate about an important social problem of our time.

¹⁷ McFadyen, 2000, p. 12.

¹⁸ Gill, 2004.

CHAPTER 3

Drunkenness as vice in the New Testament

The history of the Christian ethics of alcohol use and misuse has roots in Hebrew and Christian scripture, and especially in the Christian New Testament references to drunkenness as a vice. A careful tracing of these roots is foundational to a complete analysis of the Christian ethics of alcohol misuse and addiction.

In the New Testament literature, drunkenness finds a place within the so-called ‘catalogues’ of vices and virtues. These catalogues, or lists, provide an especially helpful key to understanding the historical, cultural and theological context of the Christian ethics of alcohol misuse. First, they enable an estimation of the relative seriousness of the problem of drunkenness alongside a number of other vices, as understood by the New Testament authors and communities. Secondly, they enable consideration of the ways in which the problem of drunkenness was related to these other vices. Thirdly, since the practice of compiling such catalogues was adopted from the wider classical world, they enable an assessment of the way in which early Christian ethics in this field drew upon, or reacted to, other philosophical and religious systems of thought.

Before proceeding to a detailed consideration of the New Testament texts in question, it is necessary to consider what is known about the background and context of the New Testament literature, in terms of both drunkenness and alcohol misuse in New Testament times, and the literary and ethical device of compiling ‘catalogues’ of virtues and vices.

THE HISTORICAL, PHILOSOPHICAL AND LITERARY CONTEXT OF THE CONCEPT OF DRUNKENNESS AS USED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

What was the contemporary understanding of problems of drunkenness and alcohol misuse in the Greco-Roman and Jewish world of the first

century CE? Fee¹ suggests that the ‘pagan world’ had little of a negative nature to say about drunkenness, except insofar as it led to other vices such as ‘violence, public scolding of servants [and] unseemly sexuality’.² However, Reicke,³ describing the context in Asia Minor in the mid-first century CE, refers to social ‘clubs’, which were prohibited by the Roman emperors on the grounds that the excessive drinking which they encouraged easily led to revolutionary sentiment. Such clubs were understood as being under the ‘protection’ of an oriental or Greek deity, often Dionysos. The activities of these clubs were marked by violence, dissipation, unlawful cultic practice and anti-Roman sympathies.

The association of drunkenness as a problem specifically associated with the worship of Dionysos (in Greek mythology) or Bacchus (in Roman mythology) is perhaps easily susceptible to over-statement.⁴ Wine was understood as a gift of this god and perhaps as an aid to communion with him, but he was primarily a god of abundant life and liberation, and the ecstatic frenzies of devotees of the cult were not necessarily alcohol-induced. That said, the cult was outlawed by the Roman Senate in 186 BCE because of concerns about its effect on social order and evidence of its association with immorality and human sacrifice.⁵ There is also evidence that it was influential in Corinth, and that Paul’s correspondence with the Corinthian church was influenced by his concerns at its adverse effect on the congregation there.⁶ The association of drunkenness with the Dionysiac cult must therefore have been a negative social consideration in the Greco-Roman world.

Petronius’ *Satyricon* was written at a date sometime before 66 CE, probably within ten years of Paul’s letter to the Romans.⁷ Petronius was a courtier of Nero. Although there is debate about the literary genre of this work, with some seeing it as satire, and others as the first realistic novel in European literature,⁸ it portrays a vivid account of a Roman banquet at which excessive drinking is very much in evidence, alongside other excesses of numerous and diverse kinds.⁹ The guests are given wine in which to wash their hands,

¹ Fee, 1987, pp. 225–226.

² His primary sources are somewhat unclear. His only reference is to the work of Lucian (see below), who was writing a century later than Paul.

³ Reicke, 1980, pp. 117–119.

⁴ See, for example, the comments on the Dionysiac cult offered by Kalivas, 2004, pp. xi–xx, and Vellacott, 1971, pp. 24–32, in their introductions to Euripides’ play *The Bacchae*. This play, written in the late fifth century BCE, provides a vivid picture of the practices of the cult in the fictional context of a play in which a mother possessed by a Dionysiac frenzy murders her own son.

⁵ Vellacott, 1971, pp. 401–415.

⁶ Kroeger and Kroeger, 1978a, b. Note in particular his concern at drunkenness in the context of eucharistic practice in 1 Corinthians 11:21.

⁷ Sullivan, 1965, pp. 7–10; Dunn, 1988, p. 789.

⁸ Sullivan, 1965, pp. 13–20.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 45–88.

are offered an amusingly ostentatious wine of impossible vintage, and are treated to recitals of the host's works by a youth acting the part of Bacchus, the god of the vine and of ecstasy. The serving of wine is associated with the bringing in of statues of household deities, which the guests are expected to kiss. Enormous quantities of wine and food are consumed by all concerned, and the banquet continues until at least the middle of the night. Even the servants are offered wine to drink, and the host issues instructions that it is to be poured over their heads if they will not drink it. A guest arrives already drunk, and immediately asks for wine. The host, delighted at this, demands an even larger cup for himself. The effect of alcohol on the narrator of the tale is such that 'there seemed to be more lights burning and the whole dining room seemed different'.¹⁰ The effect on the host's wife is such that she wishes to dance – a public display of bad manners.¹¹ For Petronius, drunkenness is associated with pagan ritual, altered perceptions of one's surroundings and poor manners. However, the greatest emphasis by far is on a pattern of behaviour which is governed by excessive indulgence in pleasures of all kinds. It is not at all clear that drunkenness is any more the cause than it is the result of these excesses.

Lucian, a Greek rhetorician writing in the second century CE, provides an interesting, albeit slightly later, account of drunkenness in his book *Timon, or the Misanthrope*.¹² Through the words of the character Timon, he describes the effects of drinking on Thrasycles, a character who, when sober, is gentlemanly, correct in demeanour and profuse in praise of virtue, albeit somewhat superior in attitude, covetous, dishonest and sycophantic. When drinking, Thrasycles becomes overtly gluttonous, insatiable and riotous. He abuses others and 'flies into a passion'. His drinking is apparently brought to an end only when he vomits and has to be carried out of the dining room. Even then, he tries to assault a girl playing the flute as he is taken away. For Lucian, it would seem that drinking reduces inhibitions and brings to the surface the evil of the drinker's true character; evil which otherwise lays hidden by decorum and a concern about public appearances.

In a similar vein, the Roman philosopher Seneca, writing in the first century CE, is quoted as saying, 'Drunkenness does not create vices, but it brings them to the fore'.¹³ Pittacus, one of the seven sages of ancient Greece, is attributed with having understood wine as being a 'mirror of the soul', which reveals what a man is really like.¹⁴ Rolleston, in his survey of

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 75. ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p81; see n. 63.

¹² Harmon, 1960, pp. 387–389. ¹³ Skehan and Di Lella, 1987, p. 390.

¹⁴ Rolleston, 1927, p. 104.

alcoholism in classical antiquity, quotes a variety of other similar Greek and Roman sayings to the same effect.¹⁵

It would therefore appear that the Greco-Roman world of the first century CE saw drunkenness as a form of excess, sometimes associated with pagan cults, which led to, or brought to the surface, immoral or antisocial behaviour. As Fee has suggested, there would appear to be little evidence that it was seen as being wrong in itself. However, it was clearly seen as a risky activity, which could easily lead to embarrassment or worse.

Fee similarly argues that Judaism of this period was more concerned with the behaviour to which drunkenness leads than with drunkenness itself.¹⁶

A comprehensive and detailed survey of all references to drunkenness in the Jewish scriptures is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, some consideration must be given to the ways in which drunkenness is portrayed in the Old Testament and in the Apocrypha.¹⁷ For example, in the book of the Wisdom of Ben Sira¹⁸ (31:25–31), there is an interesting passage relating to the drinking of wine at banquets. On the one hand, wine is seen as being a good part of creation:

Wine is very life to human beings if taken in moderation. What is life to one who is without wine? It has been created to make people happy. Wine drunk at the proper time and in moderation is rejoicing of heart and gladness of soul. (31:27–28)¹⁹

On the other hand, wine drunk to excess is understood as the cause of 'bitterness of spirit', quarrels, anger, and loss of strength (31:29–30). But the Greek text may also be translated in such a way as to bring out a

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 105. He further documents the recognition by Greco-Roman writers of the adverse effects of 'alcoholism', including impairment of sexual performance, insanity, crime, poverty and the adverse effects upon the child conceived in drunkenness (pp. 112–116). However, his use of the term 'alcoholism' in reference to a historical period two millennia before that term had been coined is obviously anachronistic.

¹⁶ Fee, 1987, p. 225.

¹⁷ These are, of course, Christian terms, the latter reflecting the Protestant terminology for Roman Catholic 'deuterocanonical' writings. The Jewish canon was in fact not clearly defined until the end of the first century CE, but the Christian Church separated from Judaism before the First Jewish Revolt (66–70 CE). It is therefore difficult to speak meaningfully of what was or was not Jewish 'scripture' prior to approximately 90 CE. Most of the Christian, 'New Testament', scriptures containing the vice lists which are the subject of this chapter were written prior to this date. For the sake of precision and convenience, the terms 'Old Testament' and 'Apocrypha' will therefore be used here, albeit with full awareness that they are somewhat anachronistic as far as the historical context is concerned. (See Skehan and Di Lella, 1987, pp. 17–19, for a helpful discussion of the canonicity of Jewish scriptures, the Old Testament and the Apocrypha.)

¹⁸ Probably written in the early second century BCE (Skehan and Di Lella, 1987, pp. 8–16).

¹⁹ All quotations of scripture are from the New Revised Standard Version (Anglicized Edition), unless stated otherwise.

different emphasis. Where verse 28 refers to the drinking of wine 'at the proper time', verse 29 can be understood as referring to the drinking of wine 'amid anger and strife' as a contrast to this.²⁰ In other words, the harmful effects of alcohol are not simply a result of excessive drinking, but also of drinking at the wrong time or, more specifically, in the wrong emotional frame of mind. Similarly (v. 31), a time of drunkenness is not the time to engage in argument or dispute – especially at a banquet or in 'the presence of others'.²¹

Verse 30 of this passage describes the effects of wine on 'the fool'. The fool in the Wisdom of Ben Sira, and elsewhere in the Hebrew wisdom literature, is generally taken as referring to the sinner who rejects the path of wisdom.²² The effect of drunkenness upon the fool is again harmful:

Drunkenness increases the anger of a fool to his own hurt, reducing his strength and adding wounds. (31:30)

This is apparently a very similar view to that later espoused by Seneca (see above), to the effect that wine is not the cause of vice, but rather brings it to the fore.²³ However, it is not so much vice that is emphasised here as the harm that the fool brings upon his own head.

There are other references to drunkenness in the Hebrew wisdom literature, which further emphasise the themes of the dangers of excess,²⁴ and the unmasking of vice.²⁵ Elsewhere, related themes emerge. In the Pentateuch, the only references²⁶ are to be found in the book of Genesis, where Noah plants the first vineyard, produces the first wine from its grapes, and then becomes drunk on it.²⁷ As a result, Noah's son Ham sees him laying naked in his tent and is cursed by his father.²⁸ In Hebrew prophetic literature, drunkenness is often used in a metaphorical sense, usually to emphasise incapacity, shame and desolation,²⁹ or satiation.³⁰ A similar usage is found in Hebrew poetry, perhaps most beautifully in the reference to being 'drunk with love' which is to be found in the Song of Songs.³¹ In the historical literature of the Old Testament and Apocrypha, drunkenness appears as a

²⁰ Skehan and Di Lella, 1987, pp. 385, 390. ²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 385, 390–391. ²² *Ibid.*, p. 310.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 390. ²⁴ Proverbs 23:20–21; 23:29–35. ²⁵ Proverbs 20:1.

²⁶ Apart from metaphorical 'drunkenness' in Deuteronomy 32:34.

²⁷ See also Genesis 43:34, where Joseph and his brothers drink and 'become merry'.

²⁸ Genesis 9:20–25. It has been suggested that this provides a parallel with the story of 'the fall' in Genesis 3. In Genesis 3 Adam and Eve eat the fruit and become aware of their nakedness. In Genesis 9 Noah takes the fruit of the vine and, losing his senses, exposes his nakedness (Tomasino, 1992).

²⁹ Isaiah 19:14; 24:20; 28:7; 29:9; Jeremiah 25:27; 48:26; 51:39, 57; Ezekiel 23:33; Joel 1:5.

³⁰ Isaiah 28:1; 34:5; 49:26; 51:21–22; Ezekiel 39:19; Habakkuk 2:15–16.

³¹ Song of Solomon 5:1; see also Lamentations 4:21; Psalm 107:27.

successful or attempted means of taking advantage of another person, as for example in the stories of Judith and Holofernes, and David and Uriah.³²

Mounce, offering a brief contemporary overview of drunkenness and drinking in the Old Testament, argues that the drinking of wine is sometimes viewed as good, but that elsewhere it is viewed as evil, and that drunkenness is always seen as evil.³³ This would appear to be a somewhat simplistic view. As the above survey of Old Testament and Apocryphal references shows, it is invariably the consequences of drunkenness that these authors condemn. Drunkenness itself, insofar as it is seen as undesirable, is more to be understood as a form of 'excess' associated with the risk of possible harm.³⁴ It is perhaps 'unwise', rather than strictly 'evil'.

But how did Jewish commentators and non-canonical Jewish authors understand drunkenness at the time when the New Testament texts were being written?

The *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* form a pseudepigraphical work of uncertain date, probably written somewhere between the second century BCE and the second century CE. Depending upon the view taken on their date, they may either be originally Jewish writings, with later Christian interpolation, or else primarily from Christian authorship.³⁵ The *Testament of Judah* contains an interesting comment on drunkenness, which draws attention to its evil consequences.³⁶ Among these are lust, fornication, filthy talk, wrath, riot, war and confusion. The writer encourages his readers to drink in moderation: 'If ye drink wine in gladness, with shamefacedness, with the fear of God, ye shall live.' He advises them that they should exercise discretion, and that a man should drink only 'as long as he keepeth decency'.

A more extended treatment of drunkenness is provided by Philo, an Alexandrian Jew writing during the first half of the first century CE. In *De Plantatione*, he considers what the philosophical schools have to say about drunkenness. In *De Ebrietate*, he proceeds to consider what he believes the views of Moses to have been on the subject. In *De Plantatione*, he raises the question: 'Will the wise man get drunk?' The term used for 'get drunk' is the verb μέθειν. This term may be used in two senses. On the one hand it may mean simply 'hard drinking' (οἰνοῦσθαί), and on

³² Judith 13:15 and 2 Samuel 11:13 respectively. See also 1 Maccabees 16:16; 1 Kings 16:9–10; 20:14–21.

³³ Mounce, 2000, p. 175.

³⁴ For a cataloguing of harms attributed to alcohol in the Old Testament, see Seller, 1985.

³⁵ Cross and Livingstone, 1997, p. 1593.

³⁶ Paragraphs 14–16; Christian Classics Ethereal Library website, <<http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/ANF-08/anfo8o8.htm>>.

the other hand it may mean drinking to the point of foolish behaviour (λερεϊν). Philo asserts that all believe that heavy drinking carried to the point of 'foolish behaviour' is wrong. The question is really whether or not the wise man may engage in 'hard drinking' that does not lead to foolish behaviour. It seems fairly clear that Philo concludes that 'the wise man will get drunk', although the manuscript is incomplete, its conclusion having been lost.³⁷ In *De Ebrietate* he asserts that Moses uses wine as a symbol for five things: foolishness or foolish talking, complete insensibility, greediness, cheerfulness and gladness, and nakedness. Clearly the first three of these are evil, while the fourth is good. The manuscript is again incomplete, and the discussion of the last two has been lost.³⁸ However, the general sense here is again that drunkenness is wrong where it leads to wrong behaviour. This impression is further reinforced in *De Somnii*, where Philo describes the differing effects of wine on different people. Some are 'bettered' by it, and others 'worsened'.

CATALOGUES OF VIRTUES AND VICES

There are various accounts of the 'catalogues' of vices and virtues which were a common feature of the literature of the first century CE in the Greco-Roman world, including Hellenistic Judaism.³⁹ There is no clear or agreed definition of what constitutes such a list. Longenecker refers to 'systematic lists, often with descriptions of the items listed',⁴⁰ but this hardly clarifies things. Their origins appear to date back to Plato, Aristotle and Zeno.⁴¹ They usually encompassed the conventions of the period and included abstract and concrete terms, and mental dispositions as well as overt behaviour. They were used for diverse purposes, including 'characterisation, description, exemplification, instruction, exhortation, apology and polemic'.⁴² Greco-Roman philosophers would frequently commence a speech with a list of vices as an illustration of the 'wretched moral condition of the masses'.⁴³

There are said to be no examples of catalogues of vices and virtues in the Old Testament, although lack of a clear definition makes it difficult

³⁷ Colson and Whitaker, 1968, pp. 209–211. ³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 308–317.

³⁹ See, in particular, Longenecker, 1990, pp. 249–252; Conzelmann, 1981, pp. 100–101; Betz, 1979, pp. 281–283, and Freedman, 1997 (entry on 'virtue/vice lists') upon which the following account is largely based.

⁴⁰ Longenecker, 1990, p. 249. ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 249–250.

⁴² Freedman, 1997 (entry on 'virtue/vice lists'). ⁴³ *Ibid.*

to understand why some passages⁴⁴ should not be seen as ‘catalogues’ of a kind. However, these lists did not constitute a distinctive literary form, and neither did they serve as models for later Jewish or Christian usage. Hellenistic Judaism, however, did adopt this device, and Philo of Alexandria (30 BCE–50 CE) is perhaps the best example of a Jewish writer who made extensive use of them. One of his lists contains almost 150 items!⁴⁵ Catalogues of virtues and vices are also to be found in the Apocrypha.⁴⁶ In Hellenistic Jewish usage, the virtues tend to be seen as commandments of God, and the vices as ‘pagan trademarks’.⁴⁷

The catalogues of vices and virtues were taken up by the writers of the New Testament, as well as by later Christian writers, and were probably also used in catechetical teaching prior to baptism.⁴⁸ There is no agreement as to specific sources from which particular New Testament lists might have been taken.⁴⁹ Their content was not intended to convey a new system of ethics, but was a continuation of Jewish ethical teaching.⁵⁰ The functions of the New Testament lists were apparently largely analogous to those of the lists of the surrounding culture. There is generally no particular system to their compilation, or any attempt at comprehensiveness, but there may be a rhetorical method in their order.⁵¹ The traditional form of the lists is said by some scholars to forbid any contextual links with local circumstances.⁵² However, this does not seem to prevent others from making direct links between the content of the lists and the local context.⁵³

There are numerous catalogues of vices and virtues in the New Testament, and they are diverse in length and content. There is also some divergence of opinion as to which texts should be understood as constituting ‘catalogues’ and which should not. Some texts, such as Matthew 11:19 (and its synoptic parallel, Luke 7:34), which might be considered as fairly clear examples, seem not to appear in many (or any) such listings.⁵⁴

⁴⁴ Lists of virtues may be found in Exodus 31:3; 34:6–7; 35:31; Numbers 14:18; Job 1:1, 8; 2:3; Psalms 15:1–5; 86:15; 103:8; Ecclesiastes 2:26; Jeremiah 7:5–6; Ezekiel 18:5–9, 14–17; Jonah 4:2. Lists of vices may be found in Proverbs 6:16–19; 8:13–14; Jeremiah 7:9; Ezekiel 18:10–13, 18; Hosea 4:1–2.

⁴⁵ Colson and Whitaker, 1958, pp. 116–119.

⁴⁶ Wisdom of Solomon 8:7; 14:22–27; 4 Maccabees 1:2–4, 18–28, 32a; 2:15; 5:23–24; 8:3.

⁴⁷ Conzelmann, 1981, p. 100. ⁴⁸ Longenecker, 1990, p. 251.

⁴⁹ Freedman, 1997 (entry on ‘virtue/vice lists’). ⁵⁰ Conzelmann, 1981, p. 101.

⁵¹ Conzelmann, 1981, p. 101; Betz, 1979, p. 282. ⁵² Conzelmann, 1981, p. 101.

⁵³ See, for example, Reicke, 1980, p. 118, in relation to the list in James 4:3; and Mounce, 2000, pp. 166, 175, in relation to the lists in 1 Timothy 3:2–7, 8ff.; Titus 1:7–8.

⁵⁴ See, for example, the listings provided by Freedman, 1997 (entry on ‘virtue/vice lists’); Betz, 1979, p. 281; Conzelmann, 1981, p. 100; Fee, 1987, p. 225; Longenecker, 1990, p. 250; Francis and Sampley, 1984, pp. xxiii, 98.

The use of catalogues of vices and virtues continued, in non-canonical Christian literature, into the second and third centuries CE.⁵⁵

DRUNKENNESS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT CATALOGUES OF VICES
AND VIRTUES

Nine of the New Testament vice and virtue lists make reference to drunkenness. Four occurrences are in epistles of Pauline authorship,⁵⁶ four are in the pastoral epistles,⁵⁷ and one is in 1 Peter (4:3). Three of these lists are among those usually considered as 'virtue' lists, and in these lists the reference is to *not* being a drunkard, *not* indulging in much wine, or *not* being a slave to drink.⁵⁸ However, in the so-called 'vice' lists, there are also references to *not* living in drunkenness,⁵⁹ and *not* being addicted to wine.⁶⁰ The distinction between vice lists and virtue lists, at least so far as drunkenness is concerned, may therefore not be quite so clear-cut as some commentators appear to assume.⁶¹

Six different Greek words or phrases are used in these lists in reference to 'drunkenness' or related concepts:

1. μεθη (meaning⁶² 'drunkenness' or 'debauchery')
2. μεθυσος (meaning 'drunkard' or 'drunken')
3. οιοφλυγία (meaning 'drunkenness')
4. παροινοσ (meaning 'drunkard' or 'given to strong drink')
5. οινω πολλω προσεχω (meaning 'to be addicted to wine', 'be fond of much wine')
6. οινω πολλω δουλωω (meaning 'to enslave to drink' or 'to make [someone] a slave to drink')

Four other Greek words are used elsewhere in the New Testament in reference to 'drunkenness' or related concepts:

1. οιοποτης (meaning 'drinker' or 'drunkard')
2. κραιπαλη (meaning 'drunken dissipation', 'drunken nausea', or 'surfeit-ing')
3. μεθυσκομαι (meaning 'to get drunk' or 'to intoxicate')
4. μεθω (meaning 'to be drunk' or 'to drink freely')

⁵⁵ Longenecker, 1990, p. 251; Freedman, 1997 (entry on 'virtue/vice lists').

⁵⁶ Romans 13:13; 1 Corinthians 5:10–11; 6:9–10; Galatians 5:19–21.

⁵⁷ 1 Timothy 3:2–4; 3:8–10; Titus 1:7; 2:2–10.

⁵⁸ 1 Timothy 3:2–4, 8–10; Titus 2:2–10, respectively. ⁵⁹ Romans 13:13. ⁶⁰ Titus 1:7.

⁶¹ A 'virtue' is usually considered to be 'a quality of living in particular moral excellence' (Carr et al., 2002, p. 388) and therefore the negatives of drunkenness ('not being a drunkard', 'not indulging in much wine', etc.) would hardly qualify as virtues in the strict sense.

⁶² Meanings of the Greek are taken from Bibleworks for Windows version 4.0; CD-ROM, 1998.

There is debate as to the relative strength of these terms. It is suggested by some that *παροινοῦς* is to be understood as a stronger term than *φιλοῖνος*⁶³ or *οἰνω πολλῶ προσεχῶ*.⁶⁴ However, it would seem unwise to place too much significance upon these apparently fairly speculative differences.

In total, there are twenty-two occurrences of these words and phrases in the New Testament, of which nine are in a context usually understood as being a vice or virtue list. However, a further six (all in the gospels) occur in the context of some kind of 'list' of vices, albeit not one which is usually considered to be a 'vice list'. Table 3.1 provides a full listing of the occurrence of all these words and phrases in the New Testament.

References to drunkenness in the gospels occur in the context of accusations made against Jesus, where drunkenness is associated with gluttony;⁶⁵ in the context of eschatological parables, where drunkenness is associated with not being ready for the coming of the Son of Man;⁶⁶ and in the context of the miracle at the wedding at Cana, where drunken guests are provided with vast quantities of additional wine.⁶⁷ A reference in Acts is concerned with the possibility that the effects of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost might be confused with drunkenness.⁶⁸ Two references occur in the book of Revelation, and both exemplify metaphorical usage of the word – in the one case to drunkenness with the 'wine of fornication', and in the other to drunkenness with the 'blood of the saints'.⁶⁹

The remaining twelve occurrences, in the New Testament epistles, are all Pauline⁷⁰ except for 1 Peter 4:3. Only three of these references are not in the context of a vice or virtue list. Of these, one is concerned with a contrast between drunkenness and being filled with the Holy Spirit,⁷¹ one is in the context of contrasting the activities of the day and night,⁷² and one is in the context of an admonition about inappropriate behaviour at the Eucharist, where some were going hungry and others becoming drunk.⁷³

⁶³ Meaning 'fond of wine'. The word is not found in the New Testament.

⁶⁴ Mounce, 2000, p. 175. ⁶⁵ Matthew 11:19; Luke 7:34.

⁶⁶ Matthew 24:49; Luke 12:45; 21:34.

⁶⁷ John 2:10. An eschatological theme may also be inferred here: Barrett, 1978, p. 193; Brown, 1966, pp. 104–105.

⁶⁸ Acts 2:15.

⁶⁹ Revelation 17:2 and 17:6 respectively.

⁷⁰ That is, they are all in the Pauline tradition. At least six of these occur in epistles of 'indisputably' Pauline authorship, four are in the pastoral epistles, and one is to be found in Ephesians.

⁷¹ Ephesians 5:18.

⁷² 1 Thessalonians 5:7; cf. Romans 13:13 – the contrast of activities appropriate to the day and the night has Old Testament and Apocryphal precedents, and is to be found elsewhere in the New Testament. In Roman society it was believed that 'during the night everything was permitted' (Dunn, 1988, pp. 788–789).

⁷³ 1 Corinthians 11:21.

Table 3.1 *New Testament Greek words for drunkenness and related concepts.*

Greek	Part of speech	Meaning ^a	Occurrence in vice and virtue lists	Occurrence elsewhere in the New Testament
μεθη	noun	'drunkenness' or 'debauchery'	Romans 13:13 Galatians 5:21	Luke 21:34 ^b
μεθυσος	noun	'drunkard' or 'drunken'	1 Corinthians 5:11 1 Corinthians 6:10	
οινοφλυγια	noun	'drunkenness'	1 Peter 4:3	
παροινος	adjective	'drunkard' or 'given to strong drink'	1 Timothy 3:3 Titus 1:7	
οινω πολλω	noun, adjective and verb	'to be addicted to wine', 'be fond of much wine'	1 Timothy 3:8	
οινω πολλω δουλω	noun, adjective and verb	'to enslave to drink' or 'to make [someone] a slave to drink'	Titus 2:3	
οινοποτης	noun	'drinker' or 'drunkard'		Matthew 11:19 ^b Luke 7:34 ^b
κραιπαλη	noun	'drunken dissipation', 'drunken nausea', or 'surfeiting'		Luke 21:34 ^b
μεθυσκομαι	verb	'get drunk' or 'intoxicate'		Luke 12:45 ^b John 2:10 Ephesians 5:18 1 Thessalonians 5:7 Revelation 17:2
μεθυω	verb	'be drunk' or 'drink freely'		Matthew 24:49 Acts 2:15 1 Corinthians 11:21 Revelation 17:6

^aMeanings of the Greek are taken from Bibleworks for Windows version 4.0; CD-ROM, 1998.

^bReferences which provide 'lists' of vices, but which are not usually quoted as being 'vice lists'.

References to drunkenness in the New Testament therefore generally appear to assume that drunkenness is a vice. However, the miracle at Cana, where Jesus turns an enormous volume of water into wine for wedding guests who are already drunk, suggests that drunkenness is not an entirely negative concept.⁷⁴ Similar themes to those in Greco-Roman society, the Old Testament, Apocrypha and Jewish literature may be detected. In particular, the sense of drunkenness as 'excess', satiation or over-indulgence is

⁷⁴ Pace Mounce, who argues that drunkenness is always seen as evil in the New Testament, and that drinking wine is at best 'neutral' (Mounce, 2000, p. 175).

apparent, including (in Revelation) a metaphorical application. However, new themes also emerge. Similarities and contrasts between the effects of drunkenness and the effects of the Holy Spirit are apparent in Acts and in Ephesians, and an eschatological context is also found in the gospels, in which drunkenness is seen as impairing readiness for the coming of the Son of Man.

The references to drunkenness within the vice and virtue lists raise a number of issues which reinforce and extend the general impressions that have been outlined, based upon the Old and New Testament context.

First, for those who believe that the content of the lists reflected local concerns, the references to drunkenness imply that there were problems with drunkenness in the various communities to which the epistles relate. Thus Mounce, commenting on the pastoral epistles, sees evidence of such problems in the Ephesian church and in Crete, and makes reference to contemporary epitaphs which listed heavy drinking as a virtue.⁷⁵ Similarly Kelly, although he believes that the list in 1 Peter 4:3 has probably been taken from elsewhere, sees its use there as reflecting the contemporary problems of first-century CE Asia Minor.⁷⁶

Secondly, there is evidence that at least some of the drunkenness referred to may have occurred in the context of festivals in honour of the god Dionysos (or Bacchus).⁷⁷ Kelly notes that the lists in 1 Peter 4:3 and Galatians 5:20 both refer to idolatry as well as drunkenness.⁷⁸ However, the evidence for a cultic association appears to be largely based upon the use of the word κωμος, which occurs in association with μεθη in Romans 13:13 and Galatians 5:21, and in association with οιοφλυγία in 1 Peter 4:3. Κωμος was originally a festal procession in honour of Dionysos, and carried a sense of 'uninhibited revelry to excess'. When used in conjunction with μεθη, the meaning may be 'drinking bout' or 'drunken revelry'.⁷⁹ Dunn suggests that Trimalchio's banquet may give a fair idea of what Paul had in mind when using these words in Romans 13:13.⁸⁰ Bruce sees a somewhat more positive connotation, such as might be associated with a celebration of victory at the games, but also recognises that 'insobriety' at the conclusion of such celebrations might have invited moral censure.⁸¹ Reicke, on the other hand, refers to evidence that these celebrations were of a more

⁷⁵ Mounce, 2000, pp. 174–175, 390, 410. ⁷⁶ Kelly, 1990, p. 170.

⁷⁷ Longenecker, 1990, p. 257; Reicke, 1980, pp. 117–118; Best, 1982, p. 153.

⁷⁸ Kelly, 1990, p. 170. ⁷⁹ Dunn, 1988, p. 789.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 789. ⁸¹ Bruce, 1998, p. 250.

sedition nature, being associated with revolutionary sentiment, rioting and violence.⁸²

Thirdly, the association of drunkenness with other items in some of the lists may be taken as suggesting that the author (usually Paul) was concerned with the problems and vices to which drunkenness leads. For example, Cranfield suggests that the drunken revels of Romans 13:13 can be seen as the cause of the debauchery, strife and jealousy mentioned in the same list. He also quotes Chrysostom as seeing a link between drunkenness and fornication in this list.⁸³ Similarly, Bruce sees drunkenness as the cause of the behaviours of the reviler and the robber, who appear alongside the 'drunkard' in the lists in 1 Corinthians 5:11 and 6:10.⁸⁴ Fee also draws attention to the connection between drunkenness and reviling, and the association of drunkenness with carousing, in 1 Corinthians 5:11.⁸⁵

Fourthly, the theme of drunkenness as excess is again apparent in these lists. In 1 Corinthians 5:11 and 6:10, the 'drunkard' is mentioned in close proximity to the 'greedy'. Bruce suggests that *μεθη* represents the vice of excessive indulgence in wine, just as gluttony is the vice of excessive indulgence in food.⁸⁶ Similarly, Best suggests that the vices of drunkenness, revels and carousing in 1 Peter 4:3 are all 'sins of intemperance'.⁸⁷ Again, Kelly sees sexual and alcoholic excess as prominent in 1 Peter 4:3, Romans 13:13 and Galatians 5:19–21.⁸⁸

Fifthly, three of the lists are presented in terms of a contrast in which drunkenness is understood as in some sense being a desire of 'the flesh'. In Romans 13, drunkenness is seen as among those vices which are making 'provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires' (v. 14). In contrast, the reader is urged to 'put on the Lord Jesus Christ'. In Galatians 5, drunkenness is among the 'works of the flesh' (v. 19) which are contrasted with the 'fruit of the Spirit' (vv. 22–23). Drunkenness and the other vices listed are ways of gratifying the 'desires of the flesh' (v. 16) and are 'opposed to the Spirit' (v. 17). In 1 Peter 4, the reader is urged to live 'no longer by human desires but by the will of God' (v. 2). Drunkenness is clearly among these 'human desires'.⁸⁹ In Pauline usage, 'desire' has a negative connotation, and is a key concept in his analysis of human sinfulness.⁹⁰ While it might have a connotation of 'natural/animal appetites'⁹¹ which could be understood as including the physical craving for alcohol, its usage is clearly broader

⁸² Reicke, 1980, pp. 117–118. ⁸³ Cranfield, 1995, p. 334.

⁸⁴ Bruce, 1998, p. 250. ⁸⁵ Fee, 1987, pp. 225 n. 29, 225–226.

⁸⁶ Bruce, 1998, pp. 249–250. ⁸⁷ Best, 1982, p. 153. ⁸⁸ Kelly, 1990, p. 170.

⁸⁹ In v. 6, which is somewhat difficult to interpret, it would appear that drunkenness is among those works for which people will be judged 'in the flesh', in order that they might live 'in the Spirit'. (See Best, 1982, pp. 155–158).

⁹⁰ Dunn, 1993, p. 297. ⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 791.

than this.⁹² Although it would be wrong to attribute to 1 Peter a Pauline understanding of 'the flesh',⁹³ it would seem that the use of the word 'desire' in this epistle is similarly concerned with those appetites which keep a person away from God.⁹⁴ In this sense, drunkenness is not simply excessive indulgence of an appetite, it is indulgence of a wrong appetite.

Sixthly, four of the references occur in the Pastoral Epistles, in lists concerned with the qualities expected of church leaders. While these lists do not vary in any significant way from what might be expected of all Christians,⁹⁵ it does suggest the possibility that the author understood drunkenness as offering an example which is potentially unhelpful to others. In each case, it is also possible to understand drunkenness as prejudicial to the qualities which are expected of leadership. Bishops are expected to be 'above reproach' and 'blameless',⁹⁶ deacons must be 'serious',⁹⁷ and the older women should be 'reverent in behaviour'.⁹⁸ Drunkenness is clearly likely to undermine or jeopardise these qualities.

Finally, in the case of three of the lists, there is an eschatological context. In Romans 13, this serves particularly to contrast the activities appropriate to the coming age with those appropriate to the present time.⁹⁹ Drunkenness is among those activities characteristic of the 'night', or of the present age, in contrast to those which belong to the 'day' of God's coming kingdom. In 1 Corinthians 5, the contrast is between those who will, and those who will not, inherit the 'kingdom of God'. In 1 Peter 4, the contrast is between living according to human desires and living according to the will of God (v. 2). In each case, it would seem that drunkenness is understood as being inappropriate to the coming kingdom, or at least likely to make a person unprepared for its coming.¹⁰⁰

A BIBLICAL BASIS FOR A CHRISTIAN ETHICAL UNDERSTANDING OF CONTEMPORARY ALCOHOL MISUSE

On the basis of the above review, it is argued here that a comprehensive biblical basis for a Christian theology and ethics of drunkenness should take account of

⁹² Ziesler, 1989, p. 321.

⁹³ It would, however, be interesting to develop further a Pauline understanding of drunkenness as a desire of the 'flesh'. The concept of the flesh in Pauline theology is an interesting one. To live by the flesh is to live by a power which is not God (Ziesler, 1990, pp. 77–80), and Romans 13 and Galatians 5 show that Paul understood drunkenness as an example of such a power.

⁹⁴ Kelly, 1990, pp. 68, 104. ⁹⁵ Houlden, 1989, p. 77. ⁹⁶ 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:7.

⁹⁷ 1 Timothy 3:8. ⁹⁸ Titus 2:3. ⁹⁹ Cranfield, 1995, p. 331.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Matthew 24:49; Luke 12:45; 21:34; 1 Thessalonians 5:7.

1. the nature and extent of the alcohol-related problems that arise in a given community
2. the consequences of drunkenness
3. the religious and spiritual context of drinking
4. a concept of drunkenness as a vice of 'excess' indulgence
5. the subjective individual experience of 'desire' to drink
6. the example that drunkenness sets to others
7. the appropriateness of drinking in an eschatological context

Problems of alcohol misuse were not unknown to the Old or New Testament authors. In particular, drunkenness was recognised as a problem which led to a range of other vices, including 'sins of speech', sexual immorality, violence, strife and jealousy. It appears to have been understood as a problem of excess indulgence of an appetite, rather similar to gluttony as excess indulgence in food. It appears to be this excessive self-indulgence, and the problems to which it led, which were considered to be the root of the problem that it constituted. Although in many places drunkenness is apparently portrayed as being a vice in and of itself, it would appear that it is seen in this light both because of the excessive self-indulgence from which it arises, and because of the other vices to which it leads. This would appear also to have been the view of the Jewish and Greco-Roman cultures from within which the New Testament authors wrote. As such, it represented the kind of behaviour which leaders of the early Christian community were encouraged to avoid, and which was not considered to be a good example to others.

However, within the New Testament, there are also more specifically Christian reasons offered for avoiding drunkenness. Some of the New Testament catalogues of vices suggest that Christians were concerned about the association of drunkenness with the worship of pagan deities in a context which represented an especially extravagant, and possibly seditious, form of revelling and dissipation. As a 'desire of the flesh', drunkenness represented life under a power which is 'not God'. There was also an eschatological understanding of drunkenness as being inappropriate to life in the kingdom of God. Drunkenness was understood as putting the believer at risk of not being 'ready' for the coming Son of Man.

The problems of alcohol misuse faced by contemporary western society are in many ways similar to those found in the New Testament context. A direct relationship between quantity of alcohol consumed, and the prevalence of alcohol-related problems within a population, has been demonstrated by numerous research studies. Similarly, recommendations are made concerning the 'sensible' or 'safe' limits of alcohol consumption

for individuals, above which drinking is likely to lead to harm.¹⁰¹ Alcohol misuse is, perhaps more than ever, seen as a vice which represents excessive indulgence of an appetite that is otherwise accepted as good by the majority of the population.

Heavy drinking leads to a variety of other problems of a social, psychological and medical nature. Among these, drunkenness is a problem primarily because of the other behaviours to which it leads, and because of the contexts in which it occurs. Among these are family disharmony, drinking and driving, violence and problems in the workplace. Some of the contexts of concern are even perhaps not entirely dissimilar to the *κωμος* of New Testament times. Although stripped of the pagan religious connotations,¹⁰² contemporary experience of football violence is similarly fuelled by alcohol, contrary to law and order in society, and representative of the kind of dissipation which most members of society would condemn.

The similarity of New Testament and contemporary ethics of alcohol misuse might also be seen in the apparent agreement between the Christian community and wider society as to the nature of the vice of drunkenness. Both then and now, it would appear that there was widespread consensus between Christian communities and wider society that drunkenness is a potential source of vice which the wise will eschew. Then as now, the wisdom of this was also flouted by many.

A distinctively Christian theology or ethic of drunkenness should go beyond this common ground with the surrounding culture. Where drunkenness is the result of a desire which exerts over an individual a power which competes with the call of God, and where it results in a life which is inappropriate to, or unready for, the kingdom of God, it is something which Christians have additional and especial reasons to eschew.

¹⁰¹ See G. Edwards, Marshall and Cook, 2003, pp. 16–18, 26–27.

¹⁰² However, sport is viewed by some as being a form of 'secular' spirituality (Thomas, 1996). It may, therefore, potentially be understood by Christians as offering a focus of idolatry of a kind arguably equivalent to the Dionysian focus of the *κωμος* of New Testament times.