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CHAPTER FIVE

BEYOND "THE ADDICT'S EXCUSE": SIN, PUBLIC ADDICTION, AND ECCLESIAL RECOVERY

Ched Myers

So the people worked all day and night and all the next day, gathering the quails; the least anyone gathered was ten homers. . . . But while the meat was still between their teeth, before it was consumed, the anger of G-d was kindled against the people, and G-d struck them with a very great plague. So that place was called *Kibroth-hattaavah* (which means, "the graves of craving").

—Num 11:32–34

The great obstacle is simply this: the conviction that we cannot change because we are dependent upon what is wrong. But that is the addict's excuse, and we know that it will not do.

—Wendell Berry

"The vocabulary of Christian faith suffers from misunderstanding at every turn, but no one term is as badly understood in both society and church as the little word, 'sin,'" writes the Canadian theologian Douglas John Hall.¹ Most modern critics of Christianity would concur. Our Christian discourses of sin have been favorite targets of the culture of narcissism. For such critics, however, the problem lies in churchly concepts of sin that are too severe, too absolute, and too ubiquitous—in short, too *big*. Hall's argument, however, is that the notions of sin circulating in the North American churches persist in being too *small*.

A fatal mistake is made, Hall contends, whenever the church switches its focus from *sin*, a matter pertaining to the human condition, to *sins*, transgressions to be cataloged and controlled: "The individualism fostered by pietistic

and liberal expressions of Protestantism has greatly aggravated the tendency to identify sin with negative qualities (sins)—specifically, negative *personal failings*.²

Dominant culture Christianity in the United States has indeed domesticated the language of sin. Conservatives tend to focus upon personal morality while equivocating about structural and historical manifestations of human alienation. Such religion continues to prosper in our social context because its essential individualism is congruent with the privatizing culture of late capitalism. Liberals, meanwhile, having assimilated into the optimistic secular myth of progress, tend to be embarrassed by the rhetoric of sin. Exceptions were the “social gospel” and “neo-orthodoxy” movements in this century, which attempted to reassert the public and political character of sin. Both movements remained, however, steeped in theologies of historical entitlement, and excluded from their critique not only their own gender, race, and class privileges but also the essential superiority of the American national project.

The problem is that neither privatistic nor positivistic theologies can account for the horrors of the twentieth century. It is not surprising, then, that in the last quarter century it has been Third World liberation theologians, working in contexts of severe human oppression and violence, who have consistently articulated an enlarged discourse of sin. Gustavo Gutierrez, for example, writes: “Sin is evident in oppressive structures, in the exploitation of man by man, in the domination and slavery of peoples, races, and social classes. Sin appears, therefore, as the fundamental alienation, the root of a situation of injustice and exploitation.”³ Recently Third World theologians have directed their reflections on sin specifically toward the First World church. The “Road to Damascus” Kairos document, for example, denounces “the sin of idolatry . . . that serves the total war being waged against the people, leading to the death and destruction of our communities.”⁴

But such pointed appeals from the Third World have made relatively little impact upon mainstream churches in the United States. If anything, these churches are increasingly defensive, reflecting the dominant culture’s anxieties as the national dream of ever-expanding political hegemony and ever-increasing economic affluence fades.⁵ Thus while most middle-class people now intuit that they can no longer count on upward mobility for their children, their tendency is to channel their resentment toward the poor rather than trying to understand *why* the concentration of wealth is intensifying.⁶ Indeed, the more social and economic systems are restructured at home and abroad to benefit capital—at the expense of the workplace, the neighborhood, and the home—the more First World churches seem to retreat into an obsession with personal sins.

Despite a growing sense that our exploitation of the earth is unsustainable, there are few serious, popular efforts to curtail the consumption that makes this exploitation both profitable and inevitable. Affluent North Americans are increasingly unable to stop their self-defeating, neurotic responses to a way of life that is out of control. We have become externally reliant upon a socioeconomic system that destroys the land, exhausts its resources, and alienates and exploits human labor: “The steps we have taken to quell the anxiety,” writes Paul Wachtel “have actually exacerbated our sense of insecurity and—by

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greatly aggravated the tendency to specifically, negative *personal failings*.²² The United States has indeed domesticated itself to focus upon personal morality and historical manifestations of human sin in our social context because its privatizing culture of late capitalism is tied to the optimistic secular myth of the absence of sin. Exceptions were the movements in this century, which challenge the character of sin. Both movements are a result of historical entitlement, and concern gender, race, and class privilege as part of the American national project.

Neither positivistic theologies can nor liberation theologians, working in the tradition of those who have consistently articulated the sin of man by man, in the dominion of the rich classes. Sin appears, therefore, as the result of injustice and exploitation.²³ In their reflections on sin specifically in the "Kairos document," they serve the total war being waged in the destruction of our communities.²⁴

The world have made relatively little change in the United States. If anything, these are the dominant culture's anxieties as a result of hegemony and ever-increasing inequality. Middle-class people now intuit that for their children, their tendency is to try to understand rather than trying to understand. Indeed, the more social and economic mobility abroad to benefit capital—at the expense of the home—the more First World nations are concerned with personal sins.

The privatization of the earth is unsustainable because it curtail the consumption that is inevitable. Affluent North Americans are neurotic responses to a society that has become externally reliant upon a system that exhausts its resources, and alienation have taken to quell the anxiety,²⁵ our sense of insecurity and—by

ironic logic familiar to the student of neuroses—have thereby called forth still more of the same kind of efforts and thus still more undermining of security and still further acceleration of a one-sided and self-defeating pattern.²⁷

In his classic *Whatever Became of Sin?*, psychologist Karl Menninger caricatured this kind of "American progress":

We glowed; we gloried; we prospered; we preempted; we evicted; we extended; we consolidated; we succeeded! We shut our eyes to all that was unpleasant about these words and these processes. We were too busy to discern the misery created everywhere, too smug to see the devastation we were wreaking, too greedy to recognize the waste and the inequity and the ugliness and the immorality. . . . Suddenly we awoke from our pleasant dreams with a fearful realization that *something was wrong*.⁸

What is wrong, says Wendell Berry plainly, is that "we all live by robbing nature, but our standard of living demands that the robbery shall continue."⁹ We are so internally captive to our illusions, excesses, and appetites that we can no longer *imagine* the world differently—and our little theologies of sin can't explain why. Berry, however, has this suggestion: we are using "the addict's excuse, and we know that it will not do."¹⁰

SIN AS ADDICTION

If a representative analogue for sin in a Third World context is *oppression*—the inability to say yes to life because of deprivation and injustice—then a corresponding First World analogue may well be *addiction* as the inability to say no because of captivity to pathological desires. "Empire," wrote the historian William Appleman Williams, "is the child of an inability or an unwillingness to live within one's own means; empire as a way of life is predicated upon having more than one needs."¹¹ An apt biblical metaphor for this condition might well be the alternative account of the manna story found in Num 11. Indeed, addiction is a kind of deadly "too muchness," in which we hoard the gifts of creation and overconsume in defiance of Exodus 16's express instruction to limit consumption based on need and to distribute the goods equitably.¹² The Numbers version of the manna tale captures perfectly the "plague": in our anxiety over the possibility of scarcity and our lust for gratification, we gorge ourselves to death (Num. 11:34). Yet today it is the poor who precede us to the "graves of craving" that our addictions have dug.

There have been three recent notable attempts by North American theologians to reflect on addiction as an analogy for sin. Psychologist Gerald May's *Addiction and Grace* sees addiction as universal in the human experience, and thus as a primary metaphor for alienation:¹³ "We succumb because the energy of our desire becomes attached, nailed, to specific behaviors, objects, or people. *Attachment*, then, is the process that enslaves desire and creates the state of addiction."¹⁴ May identifies two classes of addiction—the *attractive* (which attaches compulsion) and the *aversive* (which attaches repulsion)—and explores their psychological, neurological, and theological character.

Reformed theologian Cornelius Plantinga, in *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be* acknowledges the condition of addiction as *tragic*: "Like the fallenness of the human race, the chaos of addiction comes out of particular human character and sin but also out of the temptations and disorganizing forces resident in an addict's home and neighborhood and maybe even in her genes. The serpent is both within and without."¹⁵

Catholic moral theologian Patrick McCormick's *Sin as Addiction* considers the traditional "stain" and "crime" models of sin, and then proposes a "disease" model that allows us to move from punitive to therapeutic strategies of intervention.¹⁶ He defines addiction as "a pathological relationship with a (normally) mood altering substance or process":

[It] promises the "user" a consistent, dependable and repeatable solution to the anxieties and pains of life. . . . As the person becomes more and more immersed in and dependent upon this substance or process he/she experiences himself/herself as less free, more compulsive. At the same time the addictive process begins to produce tangible and painful side-effects or consequences. More of the substance or process is required to kill the pain. . . . The solution has become the problem, but continues to be employed as if it were a solution. In order to continue the use of the addiction solution and maintain the addictive belief system the person must now engage in all sorts of denial and deception to ignore its counter-productivity and painfulness. . . . The addiction operates as a chronic and progressive disease, disintegrating the physical, spiritual, emotional and psychological life of the person, leading inevitably to insanity and/or death.¹⁷

McCormick contends that addiction has significant "theological likenesses." It arises from a "denial of creatureliness," our inability/unwillingness to live within limits, seeking instead the omnipotence promised by the delusional attachment. It represents also a denial of the Creator by its idolatrous fixation on the addictive object. Addiction seduces with the promise of liberation from pain, only to deliver progressive enslavement, which it masks through a delusional world of Denial. It is sustained through a web of lies: "The Devil is a murderer from the beginning . . . a liar and the father of lies" (Jn 8:44).

There are several compelling reasons why the addiction model can help restore a more comprehensive discourse—and more specifically a political theology—of sin in the North American context. First, personal addiction in North America today is epidemic. One must ask what social forces engender and sustain the current high levels of substance abuse and compulsive behavior among the populace. At the same time, the recovery movement (particularly Twelve-Step programs) is probably the most widespread form of individual and group transformative work current in the culture, cutting across gender, race, and class lines.¹⁸ McCormick points out that the classic models of sin have been defined and adjudicated by professional clerics, judges, and psychologists, whereas the diagnosis of addiction and the practice of recovery has largely been the domain of *addicts themselves*. The ubiquity of the addiction/recovery phenomena represents a sociocultural gestalt that cries out for theological reflection.

Second, addiction anthropology that prescribes an addict in denial cannot be understood as a captivizer. The recovering addict must also "confront the true self—because of the recovery process—generated the voice of their addiction and the true self."

Third, the model ("sins") to a radical analyzes the predatory, let exponentially toward distress. In fact, trying to center in distress the distress. In fact, trying typically the mechanism before that the apostle Romans sounds to me stages of addiction: "I am another law at war with sin that dwells in my limbs this body of death?" (Romans seek to manage, the

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able and repeatable solution to addiction. The person becomes more and more compulsive as the process he/she experiences. At the same time the person's side and painful side-effects or process is required to kill the problem, but continues to be required to continue the use of the addiction-relief system the person must learn to ignore its counter-productive as a chronic and probably spiritual, emotional and possibly to insanity and/or death.¹⁷

significant "theological likenesses." It is the inability/unwillingness to live the promise promised by the delusional Creator by its idolatrous fixation with the promise of liberation from sin, which it masks through a deluge of a web of lies: "The Devil is a liar, the father of lies" (Jn 8:44).

Why the addiction model can help understand more specifically a political theology. First, personal addiction in North America is a social forces engender and sustains and compulsive behavior among the 12-step movement (particularly Twelve-Step) form of individual and group therapy across gender, race, and class. The models of sin have been defined by theologians and psychologists, whereas the recovery has largely been the domain of the addiction/recovery phenomena representing theological reflection.

Second, addiction offers a more complex view of evil than a moral anthropology that presumes that humans make "free" choices. Because the addict in denial cannot "see" her addiction, though surrounded and consumed by it, moral exhortation alone is impotent to change her behavior. Addiction is understood as a captivity, which means the addict is victim as well as victimizer. The recovering addict, consequently, must address both his *injury* and his *culpability*. On one hand he must seek to understand how severance from his true self—because of life-texts of abandonment, violation, poverty, and so forth—generated the void that addiction tried to fill. On the other hand addicts must also "confront the damage they have caused, to accept the consequences of their addiction and to shoulder responsibility for all their actions."¹⁹

Third, the model of addiction moves beyond behavioral symptomology ("sins") to a radical analysis of dysfunction as a way of life ("sin"). This emphasizes the predatory, lethal, and even demonic nature of sin. Addiction spirals exponentially toward destruction: "No matter how they start, addictions eventually center in distress and in the self-defeating choice of an agent to relieve the distress. In fact, trying to cure distress with the same thing that caused it is typically the mechanism that closes the trap on an addict."²⁰ It has been noted before that the apostle Paul's meditation on the enslaving power of sin in Romans sounds to modern ears like someone wrestling with the advanced stages of addiction: "I am sold under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate . . . I see in my limbs another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my limbs. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" (Rom 7:14 f, 23 f). Unlike the "sins" that moral philosophies seek to manage, the wages of addiction are *death* (Rom. 6:23).

The problem with the addiction model as it is understood by most First World psychological and religious professionals is that it has, like ourologies of sin, been domesticated as a strictly personal pathology. The social implications of the model are rarely addressed. While the role of the addict's family system is acknowledged, the role of the economic or political system is not. But addiction is biologically and socially *systemic*, both in its genesis and maintenance. Human appetites and deficits, engendered by the society at large, are exploited by addictive substances and relationships, which means that addiction has a complex personal and collective *history*. The addicted personality is embedded in social networks of complicity, as McCormick recognizes: "The burgeoning data on co-dependence, co-addiction, addictive families and addictive societies provides verifiable evidence concerning the ways in which addiction operates on the personal, familial and societal levels as well as the manner in which addiction is communicated from generation to generation."²¹

Anne Wilson Schaeff has pioneered the application of the addiction model to organizations²² and to society as a whole.²³ Her work has spawned other efforts to relate the model to the economy²⁴ and to other cultural strata such as education and religion.²⁵ I agree with this emerging literature that we should view the personal and political dimensions of addiction as ultimately inseparable.

DIAGNOSING PUBLIC ADDICTION

For purposes of the following discussion I will refer to individual pathology as "household addiction," recognizing the essentially domestic locus and often covert nature of the behavior. Collective pathology, on the other hand, I will call "public addiction." This not only underlines its social character, but also acknowledges that the addictive behavior can be engaged in quite publicly—indeed it is often *rewarded* by the body politic. McCormick names several examples in the First World context of what I am calling "public addiction": consumerism, colonialism, militarism, and sexism.²⁶ I will now focus on what might be the most obvious case: consumerism.

In the United States, individuals and households are relentlessly seduced by the promises and the products of consumer culture. Our desires often become so attached to commodities that we are truly possessed by our possessions—we simply *must* have the new dress, the nicer home, or the computer upgrade. Many consumer products themselves are manufactured to breed psychological and/or physiological dependence: titillating soap operas, sugar-filled fast food, and the planned obsolescence of virtually everything.²⁷

Huge marketing apparatuses, in turn, both create and sustain the addiction by creating a vast, intense universe of artificial needs. Popular cultural forms such as music, art, and storytelling are put at the service of commercial marketing—a long-standing corporate design, argues Stuart Ewen, to "transform the consciousness of a proletariat into that of a consumeriat."²⁸ Advertising is a relentless aural and visual onslaught upon our consciousness with objectified texts and alluring subtexts that we cannot help but absorb. "Why ask why?" taunts a popular current beer commercial: the perfect mantra for an addicted consumeriat that passively ingests the aggressive marketing discourses that seek to form us economically, socially, politically and spiritually.²⁹

Capitalism triumphs, warned Herbert Marcuse in *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, when "people recognize themselves in their commodities": "Free choice among a wide variety of goods and services does not signify freedom if these goods and services sustain social controls over a life of toil and fear—that is, they sustain alienation. And the spontaneous reproduction of superimposed needs by the individual does not establish autonomy; it only testifies to the efficacy of the controls."³⁰ When the opportunity to choose between twenty varieties of deodorants becomes our working definition of freedom, and we no longer experience cognitive dissonance when Budweiser sponsors spots on "responsible drinking," our identity as a consumeriat has truly been consum-mated.³¹ This collective condition reflects the compulsive and delusive nature of addiction.

Plantinga lists eight dynamics characteristic of the phenomena of addiction (though he cautions against attempting a "neat taxonomy"³²). Let us test the culture of consumerism against this list, using brief, suggestive examples from both the household and public spheres:

ADDICTIVE DYN.

Pleasurable and habit-forming behavior that escalates tolerance and desire

Unpleasant aftereffects such behavior, e.g., withdrawal and self-

vows to moderate/quit followed by relapses attendant distress

Easing distress with rounds of same or "companion" addictive behavior

Deterioration of work relationships with accompanying denial deception

Preoccupation then obsession with addictive substance

Compulsivity in addiction will is enfeebled

Drawing others into addiction = codependence

C ADDICTION

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characteristic of the phenomena of addiction a “neat taxonomy”³⁰). Let us test it, using brief, suggestive examples

ADDICTIVE DYNAMIC

Pleasurable and habit-forming behavior that escalates tolerance and desire

Unpleasant aftereffects of such behavior, e.g., withdrawal and self-reproach

Vows to moderate/quit, followed by relapses and attendant distress

Easing distress with new rounds of same or “companion” addictive behavior

Deterioration of work and relationships with accompanying denial and deception

Preoccupation then obsession with addictive substance

Compulsivity in addiction; will is enfeebled

Drawing others into web of addiction = codependence

HOUSEHOLD SPHERE

Instant gratification of a product purchased

Struggle to pay for products bought on credit

Unsuccessful attempts to resist further overextensions; desires rekindled by next product “improvement”

Working harder to earn more to pay bills and enable more purchases

Debt mounts, creditors demand payment and refuse to admit overextension

Increasingly desperate efforts to increase income or restructure credit; money fetishism and gambling

Inability to reduce material expectations, mortgaging of assets

Complicity of family, banks, and employers with financial demise of consumer addict

PUBLIC SPHERE

Short-term benefits of economic growth reflected in corporate profits, glut of investment capital, falling consumer prices

Unemployment, inflation, tightening of credit

Adjustments in interest rates and money supplies

Renewed economic growth will solve all problems (tax cuts, wage freezes, public subsidy of new development)

Capital flight, erosion of labor codes, corporate domination of local communities

Subordination of social and political issues to need for economic growth; speculative and high-risk financial transactions, volatile markets; rewarding debt through credit ratings; deficit financing

Refusal to question basic economic structures; sacrificing rights and public assets to private corporate interests

Globalized system of resource and labor exploitation and profiteering via “structural adjustment”

While these correlations are neither precise nor comprehensive, they do suggest that the addiction model can illumine individual and collective economic behavior.

McCormick identifies a further key dynamic in the destructive spiral of addiction: the pendulum of manic omnipotence in the fixation/attachment phase, and of depressive impotence in the "crash" phase.³³ One can see this same dynamic in the national mood swings that correspond to perceptions concerning the ebb and flow of the economy. Skyrocketing personal salaries for major CEOs and entertainers are watched by a mostly underemployed and under-compensated working class with envious fascination (publicly lionized grandiosity) while those on public assistance or the homeless or immigrants are scapegoated (publicly "split-off" depression).³⁴ The addiction prevents people from seeing that both manic and depressive manifestations are signs that the system isn't working.

The private and public compulsion of consumerism drives an economy which, as Barbara Brandt has shown, also keeps us addicted to work and to money.³⁵ A wasteful, growth-dependent economy is unsustainable in the long run, whether the limits are determined by ozone depletion, aquifer contamination, fossil fuel shortages, the trash crisis, or any other combination of ecological indices.³⁶ The only question is how long this complex addicting and addictive system can perpetuate itself before the organism collapses.

In the meantime, however, not only is this economy slowly but surely destroying the environment it mercilessly utilizes, but also the human societies it purportedly serves, by intensifying the stratification of wealth and the exploitation of human labor.³⁷ This latter phenomenon is both domestic and international. Writing in the *Los Angeles Times*, Jeff Gates summarizes the economic polarization in the United States over the last decade:

The financial wealth of the top 1% of Americans now exceeds the combined net worth of the bottom 95%. . . . The wealth of the Forbes 400 richest Americans grew by an average \$940 million each over the past two years (topping a combined \$1 trillion). That's while the modest net worth of the bottom 40% shrunk by 80% between 1983 and 1995. . . . Eighty-six percent of stock market gains between 1989 and 1997 were harvested by the top 10% of households, while fully 42% flowed to the topmost 1%.³⁸

Accompanying this dysfunctional distribution of wealth are a whole array of pathological behaviors, which fetishize not only commodities, but also money itself, whether through the public lionizing of the lifestyles of the rich and famous or through the stunning recent growth in the gambling industry.³⁹

In the international political economy, Walden Bello characterizes the First World as draining the Third World: "Draconian policies of debt collection produced a staggering net transfer of financial resources—\$155 billion—from the South to the North between 1984 and 1990."⁴⁰ This pillage is accomplished primarily through global policies of "structural adjustment" that have

been devastating among the have-nots among the have-nots.

What might it mean for an American to re-examine not just rhetorical discourse of sin but also implied a negative project was equally benign.

Standing in the Temple prophet John was a militant the Judean cleric preaching relentlessness of the wrath to yourselves, "Vindicta these stones to reveal an ical analysis of the world. It is not a moral challenge is not primary project is headed to opposite direction." The same message of

A discourse of social, economic dominant culture entitled within the perspective the system even grows and by nineteenth-century liberal Protestant continuity resonance might we learn.

The Twelve genuinely popular the First World. pietistic Protestant explain the Twelve conversion, but

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been devastating for the poor, both at home and abroad.⁴¹ Sin-as-addiction
 among the haves, we must conclude, makes sin-as-oppression inevitable
 among the have-nots.

CONVERSION AS RECOVERY

What might it mean, wonders Hall, for dominant culture Christians in North
 American to rediscover "a hamartiology (doctrine of sin) that was truly—and
 not just rhetorically—biblical"?⁴² In the prophetic traditions of the Bible, the
 discourse of sin and repentance go together. The prophetic call to repent
 implied a negation of continuity with the historical project of Israel, insofar as
 this project was predicated upon illusions of a benign national past and an
 equally benign future (see e.g., Isa 6 and Jer 7).

Standing firmly within this tradition of "harsh love" was the late Second
 Temple prophet John the Baptist. According to the ancient historian Josephus,
 John was a militant Jewish nationalist who objected to the Hellenistic alliances of
 the Judean client-king Herod Antipas. According to the gospels, however, his
 preaching relentlessly attacked Judean ideologies of entitlement: "Who warned
 you of the wrath to come? Bear fruits that befit repentance! Do not begin to say
 to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor,' for I tell you God is able from
 these stones to raise up children to Abraham" (Lk 3:7 f). This discourse offers a *rad-*
ical analysis of the system: "Even now the ax is laid to the *root* of the trees" (Lk 3:9).
 It is not a moral exhortation to "be better" but a historical *ultimatum*. This chal-
 lenge is not primarily directed to individuals, but to a *people*. Our historical pro-
 ject is headed toward destruction, it claims; we must *turn around and move in the*
opposite direction. The synoptic gospels all portray Jesus of Nazareth as taking up this
 same message of John after the authorities had silenced the Baptist (Mk 1:14 f par).

A discourse of repentance that calls for radical *discontinuity* with the
 social, economic, and political order enjoys little hospitality today among the
 dominant culture churches of the United States. The reason is simple: for those
 entitled within the system, the greatest social value is *continuity*. From their per-
 spective the system *works*: it has no fatal contradictions; it perpetuates itself; it
 even grows and spreads. This is why *conversion*—a theme once taken seriously
 by nineteenth-century Protestantism—is today either wholly marginalized (by
 liberal Protestants) or wholly spiritualized (by evangelicals). Repentance as dis-
 continuity resonates strongly, however, with *those in recovery from addiction*. What
 might we learn from them?

The Twelve-Step movement has emerged over the last half-century as a
 genuinely popular insurrection against the epidemic of household addiction in
 the First World. Alcoholics Anonymous was developed in relationship to the
 pietistic Protestantism of the "Oxford Movement" of the 1930s.⁴³ These origins
 explain the Twelve-Step tradition's oft-noted congruence with the theology of
 conversion, but also caution us to beware of its limitations.

Because the Twelve-Step tradition has worked within the privatizing
 religio-psychological paradigms of capitalist modernity, it has tended to give

nonpolitical, personal definitions of recovery. The systemic character of our public addiction, however, warns us against individualistic notions of recovery. If I am liberated from household addiction, but ignore the social and political expressions of, or contributors to, that addiction, I have only learned to function better in a pathological public system. What are needed instead are *collective* and *long-term* disciplines of "turning around."

Still, I believe the Twelve-Step tradition reflects three important insights for a theology of addiction and recovery. First, it is a "conversionist" model. *Step One*, as essential as it is uncomfortable, is the acknowledgment that the addictive system that controls me is destructive to me and to all those around me. To be liberated from the nihilistic logic of that system I must

- appeal to and yield to a "Higher Power" (*Two and Three*);
- accept my culpability in that system and "confess" it to others (*Four and Five*);
- seek to "repent" of those practices (*Six and Seven*);
- make reparation to those I've wronged (*Eight and Nine*).

The Twelve-Step process assumes that because the addictive system cannot be reformed, we must struggle to live in radical discontinuity with it. In this sense it is "apocalyptic": it seeks to overthrow the dominating system and concedes that the power to do so must come from "outside."

The aim is, in other words, nothing less than revolutionary transformation. As the recovering addict becomes stronger he invites other family members (as well as other addicts) to join in the insurrection against dysfunctional behavior so that the family system as a whole may be transformed. This insight need only be politicized. As Herbert Marcuse put it in his classic *Essay on Liberation*: "'Voluntary' servitude (voluntary inasmuch as it is introjected into the individuals), which justifies the benevolent masters, can be broken only through a political practice which reaches the roots of containment and contentment. . . . Such a practice involves a break with the familiar, the routine ways of seeing, hearing, feeling, understanding things so that the organism may become receptive to the potential forms of a nonaggressive, nonexploitive world."⁴⁴

The second key insight of the Twelve-Step process—particularly for North Americans—is that it begins with our *own* experience of pain, oppression, culpability, and responsibility. An abstract analysis of the system is impotent; we are the *subjects* of the struggle for social change. This is crucial if we are to take seriously what Marcuse and other New Left thinkers called the "social psychosis of mass capitalist culture" as it relates to Marx's theory of alienation. The commodification of life demonstrated the "irresistible tendency toward the universalization of alienation . . . turning all human subjects into passive spectators of their own alienated existence."⁴⁵ More recently Michael Lerner has described this as the "surplus powerlessness" of capitalist individualism.⁴⁶

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-Step process—particularly for our *own* experience of pain, abstract analysis of the system for social change. This is crucial and other New Left thinkers "culture" as it relates to Marx's life demonstrated the "irreversible of alienation . . . turning all in our own alienated existence."⁴⁵ This is the "surplus powerless-

The field of popular education has shown that if people perceive themselves to be powerless, they must be engaged at the level of their own experience if they are going to be animated toward change.⁴⁷ This is what popular theater practitioner Augusto Boal calls moving from spectating to "spec-acting."⁴⁸ It is true that in capitalist formations the focus on oneself risks degenerating into *subjectivism*, a danger we have noted already in both religious and therapeutic culture, including Twelve-Step programs.⁴⁹ But we cannot avoid this error by falling into the opposite trap, which concludes that structural problems are so vast and remote that "nothing I can do will make any difference." We must acknowledge and understand how we are part of the addictive system (complicity) and how it is part of us (internalization). This allows us to recognize the power of the system over us (our addiction) in a way that does not concede impotence or resignation (the addict's excuse).

The third, and perhaps most important, aspect of the Twelve-Step recovery process is its recognition of the necessity of an ongoing community of accountability and support in sustaining resistance to the addictive system. However great our internal opposition to recovery may be, the *external* opposition will be much more formidable, because the status quo always attempts to constrain fundamental changes in the system. In the family system, those who hold power are invariably the ones who, while rhetorically affirming the addict's quest for recovery, refuse to acknowledge their own complicity. Such "conserve-atism" is often desperate to maintain the family *ideal* (how it views itself) and *reputation* (how it is viewed in the community). As the recovering addict tries to stand her ground while refusing to cooperate with old family patterns, the alternative community of recovery becomes crucial as a place of understanding, identity, and support.

This is, of course, much more difficult in the case of public addiction, because it means breaking with the national "family" and its myths. Moreover, there is no socially constructed "shame" when it comes to consumption-addiction in this culture the way there is with, for example, alcoholism. Because the economic, social, and ideological mechanisms of seduction in the dominant culture are so powerful, and the mechanisms of repression so potentially vicious, a community of resistance and alternative consciousness-formation becomes key to a strategy of recovery from public addiction. If our diagnosis of the sociopolitical pathologies that define life in the United States were clearer, our recovery groups would necessarily become more "politicized"—as basic Christian communities in the Third World long ago discovered.

In sum, the traditional bourgeois Protestant notion of sin as moral failure simply cannot explain why it is so difficult for church members to confront public addiction such as consumerism in capitalist culture. Liberals have discovered that people do not "reform their behavior" just because they are so exhorted, even when it is argued that it is in their self-interest to change. Evangelicals have discovered that highly emotive "experiences of salvation" prove to be inadequate for the long-term struggle against the "old self" in a society that rewards pathological behavior. Perhaps then a First World theology of sin

should reconsider the congruence between the old biblical language and the new discourse of the Twelve-Step tradition, in order to explore repentance as a *strategy of intervention* in an addictive system and conversion as a *strategy of recovery*.⁵⁰

COMMUNITIES OF RESISTANCE AND RECOVERY

It is probably fair to say that most churches in the United States today have at least one Twelve-Step group meeting in their halls during the week. What might it take for our churches to *themselves* become communities of discontinuity with public addiction? First we need to name our sinful condition clearly. Consumerism, to take our example, is mildly scolded in our churches on occasion, but hardly considered to be a deadly *addiction!* To propose it as such would obviously provoke congregational opposition. This would not in most cases be attributable to any deep commitment to consumerist values and practices, however. Rather the objection would be that issues of economic culture are simply too large for regular church folk to deal with. Where, after all, would we *begin?*

We must recognize this as a socialized response. We have been formed to believe that we cannot make any real "difference" in the economic system unless we are powerful politicians, bankers, or corporate chiefs. Insofar as it concerns the structural imperatives of capitalism regarding profit, production, and power this is, unfortunately, all too true:

When we consider where we experience some degree of freedom, we always find it exists within a broader framework over which we have no control. We are like the little child who is free to run away from home but not free to leave the block. The environment is a conspicuous example. We can recycle paper and other waste materials, but industrial America fouls the environment in ways we seem helpless to restrain. In large measure it is the nature and dynamic of the economic order that controls the framework within which we can make only rather inconsequential decisions.⁵¹

But this truth strips us of our illusion that we are somehow *not* entrapped in an addictive system (Step One!).⁵² It thus presents us with two, somewhat paradoxical challenges.

On one hand it means that there is no such thing as strictly "personal liberation" from public addiction, a delusion that capitalist culture promotes vigorously. Just as credulous consumers imagine that a racy sports car will "set them free," so do many disaffected individuals imagine that they can disconnect from the dominant culture by wearing thrift store clothes or by fleeing the city. But private strategies of defection only strengthen a system whose purpose is to privatize the consciousness of the consumeriat. Our practices of recovery must address the *public* character of the addiction and must therefore include disciplines of collective analysis and action.

On the other hand, we are not absolved of individual responsibility. Just because we cannot *personally* change a system does not mean we have ceased to

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exist as moral and political agents. This is precisely the erasure capitalism seeks:
to convince us that socioeconomic processes are so complex and cosmic that
we, as isolated producers/consumers, are absolved of all obligation to think crit-
ically or to act discontinuously.⁵³ But this reflects the late stages of addiction:
total capitulation to the structural imperatives of the system. Privatization and
exoneration are the warp and woof of denial in public addiction; to embrace
both culpability and responsibility, therefore, is to begin to unravel the whole
cloth. A community of recovery reasserts responsibility *and* repoliticizes it,
empowering members to take steps in their political bodies to resist the imper-
atives and expectations of the addictive body politic in the *actual* social, political
and economic spaces of their lives.

This requires us to reimagine the church not as a venue for religious
entertainment (in which most attendees are essentially spectators) but as a com-
mitted community of recovering addicts (in which each member is a "spec-
tator" struggling for sobriety). A quarter century ago Brazilian theologian
Rubem Alvez called for precisely such a restoration of the church: "What the
biblical sociology of liberation tells us through the symbol of community is
unequivocal: the creative event cuts its way through the social inertia by creat-
ing *counter culture*."⁵⁴ This conviction has in each era of Christendom inspired
renewal movements to attempt to disestablish the church and to find ways to
live discontinuously from the dominant culture, from the early monastic
movement to Franciscanism, and from the Anabaptists to nineteenth-century
Christian socialist communitarians. In our time it has spawned base commu-
nity movements throughout the Third World⁵⁵ and less widespread but no less
important First World experiments with alternative forms of church.⁵⁶

Countercultural movements have failed, contended Alvez, whenever they
lacked both "communal discipline" and "political practice." The ancient
metaphor for such discipline, Gerald May reminds us, is *asceticism* (from the
Greek *askeeo*, "to exercise"): "Any struggle with addiction is a desert because it
involves deprivation," he writes. "With major addictions . . . the desert can grow
to encompass all of life: every habit may be exposed to the searing, purifying
sun; every false prop is vulnerable to relinquishment; and one can be left truly
dependent upon the grace of God for sustenance."⁵⁷ What "ascetic" disciplines
might the church as a community of recovery from public addiction practice
and promote?

REVISING THE EVANGELICAL DISCIPLINES

A fruitful beginning place might be to reappropriate the three great "evangel-
ical disciplines" articulated in the old monastic Rule of St. Benedict (490–543
C.E.): poverty, chastity, and obedience. The early monks understood three key
things about "civilization":

1. It is built upon the concentration of wealth and exploitation. If their com-
munities were to repent they must become self-sufficient as possible.

2. The root of wealth-concentration is private property. If they wanted to resist the "temptations of the world" they must renounce exclusive ownership.
3. The exploitation of human labor is the root of all alienation (Marx later rediscovered this). If their communities were to restore human dignity they must practice manual (i.e., unalienated) labor.

For the first monastic communities the vow of "poverty" actually intended to inspire a social model that would *eradicate* poverty.

Today North Americans "spend \$5 billion a year on special diets to lower their calorie consumption, while the world's poorest 400 million people are so undernourished they are likely to suffer stunted growth, mental retardation, or death," writes Alan Durning.⁵⁸ The affluent clearly need disciplines different than compulsive diets and obsessive gym workouts, which only mask the addiction to consumerism! The vow of poverty today might represent the equivalent of Steps One through Three in the Twelve-Step tradition. To recognize our public addiction to economic privilege and power means keeping the dysfunctional and deadly disparity of wealth always in view, and daily deciding to "turn over" our economic lives to the alternative reality of the divine "Great Economy" of grace.⁵⁹

Three household disciplines of "economic sobriety" come to mind. The "simple living" movement has been well-documented.⁶⁰ As a spiritual discipline, so-called "downward mobility" is necessary but not sufficient, as it too easily can remain a private (and for many, a privileged) strategy. Groups such as the Ministry of Money have developed processes specifically for affluent people, including exposure tours to poor countries and suggestions for personal economic partnerships. Other groups are trying to help individuals and churches invest responsibly, particularly given the need for capital in poor neighborhoods. Building local organizations that promote economic sharing, on the other hand, takes us more into the public struggle. Experiments in alternative economics range from communal common purses to community credit unions. Collectivist living and cohousing arrangements, while difficult to sustain under capitalism, nevertheless encourage the recovery of traditional practices of extended family and hospitality that have atrophied in modern urban culture. Cooperative work strikes at the heart of alienated and alienating wage-labor, as do some of the emerging "green" and socially responsible business practices.⁶¹ Land trusts and agricultural or environmental conservancies represent an alternative to private ownership, and community money systems and the burgeoning Community Supported Agriculture movement address the challenge of "recommunitizing" the marketplace.

An even better discipline of recovery is making *ourselves* available to the poor. People of privilege should socially relocate to live and work in proximity to disenfranchised people not primarily in order to "help," as in the old missionary model, but in order to view the world *from that space*. We thus avoid liberal abstractions about poverty and begin to build relationships with poor people. I have found community among the very folk against whom I had

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rooted in such neighborhoods the more the issues so familiar to the poor
become our own. Our work then moves from "aid" to "alliance," from sym-
pathy to solidarity.

Such disciplines expressing a "vow of poverty" no more make us poor
than do those of an institutionalized monk today. But they do create the con-
ditions for engagement with bigger structural issues, because our awareness of
public addiction is heightened in direct proportion to our *actual* discontinuity
with it. Lifestyle changes are not a political *solution* to anything, but can repre-
sent a political *question* to everything. As Marcuse put it: "No matter how great
the distance between the middle-class revolt in the metropolises and the life-
and-death struggle of the wretched of the earth—common to them is the
depth of the Refusal."⁶³

Behind traditional vows of "chastity" lay the early monks' profound
appreciation of the fundamental connection between flesh and spirit. Eco-
nomic practices, like sexuality, are not inherently evil; they are intrinsic to our
humanity. But our appetite—economic and sexual—are exploited mercilessly
by the highly sophisticated techniques of seduction in capitalist culture. Recov-
ery thus also involves a kind of "consumer celibacy" toward commodity
fetishism. Rather than yielding to the promises and obfuscation of marketers,
we reassert responsibility for what we buy, investigating what conditions the
product was made under, who profits from it, what its environmental impact is,
and so on.⁶⁴ This represents Steps Four through Seven: the ongoing struggle to
remove the addictive behavior from our lives.

In this case, chastity is not a private vow, but a discipline of collective
accountability. We middle-class people are hostages to deeply ingrained
assumptions about private ownership, freedom, and control. This extends not
only to material things but also to use of time, space, vocational options, and
above all, decision making. Nothing challenges our socialization into the fictive
autonomy of the consumer more viscerally than accountability for how we
earn and how we spend, because we *actually* (not hypothetically) have to give
up private control. More accurately, however, we are *taking* back control from
the expectations of the market. Such disciplines are the only way to discover
how deeply we are possessed by our possessions, and the most effective means
of facilitating recovery.

The vow of "obedience" was understood by the monks to represent sin-
gle-minded attentiveness to the will of God. Here it means living in fidelity to
the Great Economy. This requires both a defensive strategy of noncooperation
with the social and economic imperatives of the public addiction, and an offen-
sive strategy of engagement with the political Powers. War tax resistance, for
example, is a household spiritual discipline of refusing to cooperate with the
political economy of militarism, and an act of citizenship responsibility some of
us believe to be more meaningful than voting.⁶⁵ Because public addiction is
legal, the vow of obedience may often lead to civil *disobedience*. There is a grow-
ing movement around Sabbath-keeping that is trying to reassert the healing

(and subversive) character of regular rhythms of rest and "nonproductivity" for both individuals⁶⁶ and for society.⁶⁷

Offensive strategies require us to move beyond household-based lifestyle changes to political action. This includes promoting economic literacy at the grassroots and organizing consumer education and actions, from boycotts to shareholder protests. A Catholic priest was acquitted by a Chicago jury in 1990 after a campaign of defacing neighborhood billboards advertising alcohol and tobacco products that ravage the lives of so many in his urban, working-class, black and Latino parish. In South Central Los Angeles churches and community groups organized to prohibit the rebuilding of liquor stores after the 1992 uprising, and ended up fighting a white political establishment "under the influence" of the powerful alcohol lobby.⁶⁸ Other strategies include participation in labor organizing such as the nationally spreading "Living Wage Campaign," zoning battles, class-action lawsuits, and of course political lobbying. There are many consumer, public interest, and corporate watchdog organizations that would welcome the support of churches, such as Corporate Watch (www.corpwatch.org) and the Alliance for Democracy (www.igc.org/alliance). The historic disruption of the World Trade Organization by a broad coalition of grassroots advocacy groups in Seattle in late 1999 served as a hopeful wake-up call for populist struggle for global economic justice in the new millennium.

Steps Eight and Nine demand *reparation*, the most demanding discipline of obedience in the economic sphere. For those of the dominant culture, resisting addiction to immediate entitlements does little to deconstruct generations of inheritance upon which privilege is based. Reparation means exploring meaningful ways to redistribute wealth and power in conversation with those who have been disinherited, in order to create justice in the present and to heal past injustices. Sadly, for all our talk of reconciliation, we First World Christians have not seriously grappled with the tasks of reparative politics. The historical victims of oppression, however, have.

Many Third World countries, for whom the legacy of colonialism is continued indebtedness, are calling for debt forgiveness.⁶⁹ Another example is the National Coalition for Redress/Reparations, a successful decade-long campaign by Japanese Americans to get the U.S. government to apologize for the wartime internment of more than 120,000 Japanese Americans, and to provide symbolic redress to surviving internees.⁷⁰ "America had sinned, had been sinning for nearly a century, and the wages of sin is spiritual death," wrote a survivor Edison Tomimaro Uno. "Racism, economic and political opportunism were the root causes of this crime. . . . The Japanese American heritage is no exception to the experience of all minorities and oppressed people who know the bitter sting and enduring stigma of hate, fear and despair in a land of abundance. . . . Justice was trampled upon, and it is a responsibility all Americans must share."⁷¹

The struggle of Japanese Americans gave new impetus to the long-ignored National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America. And the oldest wound on the continent, the dispossession of Native America, is also beginning to be addressed, whether through efforts at the United Nations to

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1. Douglas John Hall,
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2. *Ibid.*

3. Gustavo Gutiérrez,
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4. Robert McAfee Br
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catalog treaty violations against indigenous people by national governments worldwide⁷² or in denominational apologies to native peoples for the oppres- sive legacy of Christian missionaries.⁷³ While restorative gestures are necessar- ily *symbolic* to some degree, this does not mean that they cannot also be *sub- stantive*. In fact, they must be; psychologists point out that in order for reparation to be therapeutic for the culpable party, it must be *felt*. Perhaps the best current example of reparative struggle is the worldwide "Jubilee 2000" movement, calling for debt reduction/write-off for the most heavily indebted nations (www.j2000usa.org). Without disciplines of reparation, the rhetoric of reconciliation and recovery among First World churches will remain empty. And the longer we opt for cheap grace, the more costly real forgiveness will become. For the sin of First World addiction and Third World oppression are bound inextricably together in our common history.

The types of new evangelical disciplines just overviewed are hard work, and we are forever *reverting* rather than *converting*! We soon learn the truth of Jesus' parable about casting out one unclean spirit only to have "seven spirits more evil than itself return" (Lk 11:24 f). Recovery is like peeling an onion: each layer of internalized capitalism we remove brings more tears. That is why disciplines of economic celibacy demand both greater pastoral sophistication and contemplative commitments in our faith communities. Neither politics nor piety can substitute for the authentic inward journey here (Step Eleven).

"America is in deep trouble," writes anthropologist Marvin Harris, "but let no one suppose that our plight cannot get a whole lot worse."⁷⁴ With reac- tionary politics again on the rise, we who are entitled will face an ever-starker choice between the path of feeding public addiction or breaking it. It is likely that few members of the dominant culture in North America will want to walk the difficult path of recovery, especially when that demands costly reparation. Our churches, on the other hand, with their tradition of repentance, conver- sion, and the evangelical disciplines, are uniquely situated to shatter the denial, name the addiction, and model the practice of sobriety. Only as we become communities of resistance and recovery can we truly proclaim the good news to both the addicted and the oppressed that "the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set us free from the rule of sin and death" (Rom 8:2).

NOTES

1. Douglas John Hall, "The Political Consequences of Misconceiving Sin," *The Witness* (March 1995) 8 ff.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, trans. by Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1973) 175 f.

4. Robert McAfee Brown, *Kairos: Three Prophetic Challenges to the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) 125.

5. Ched Myers, "God Speed the Year of Jubilee: The Biblical Vision of Sabbath Economics," *Sojourners* (May-June 1990), 3 ff.
6. Chuck Collins, Betsy Leondar-Wright, and Holly Sklar, *Shifting Fortunes: The Perils of the Growing American Wealth Gap* (Boston: United for a Fair Economy, 1999).
7. Paul Wachtel, *The Poverty of Affluence: A Psychological Portrait of the American Way of Life* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1989) 60.
8. Karl Menninger, *Whatever Became of Sin?* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1973) 4 f.
9. Wendell Berry, "The Futility of Global Thinking" *Harper's* (September 1989) 19.
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11. William Appleman Williams, *Empire as a Way of Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980) 31.
12. Myers, "God Speed the Year of Jubilee."
13. Gerald May, *Addiction and Grace* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1998).
14. *Ibid.*, 14.
15. Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 139 f.
16. Patrick McCormick, *Sin as Addiction* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989).
17. *Ibid.*, 150 f.
18. Elaine Emeth, "Recovery and the Christian: A Bibliographic Essay on Addiction," *Sojourners* (December 1990) 40 ff.
19. Ellen McGuire, "A Place Called Hope," *The Nation* (28 December 1992) 822.
20. Plantinga, *Not the Way it's Supposed to Be*, 131.
21. Patrick McCormick, *Sin as Addiction*, 147.
22. Anne Wilson Schaefer and Diane Fassel, *The Addictive Organization* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988).
23. Schaefer, *When Society Becomes an Addict* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987).
24. Barbara Brandt, *Whole Life Economics: Revaluing Daily Life* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1995).
25. Denise Breton and Christopher Largent, *The Paradigm Conspiracy* (Center City, Minn.: Hazelden, 1996).
26. McCormick, *Sin as Addiction*, 163 ff.
27. Marvin Harris, *America Now: The Anthropology of a Changing Culture* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981) 17 ff.; and Wachtel, *Poverty of Affluence*, 31 ff.
28. Stuart Ewen, "Living by Design," *Art in America* (June 1990) 69 ff.
29. John Kavanaugh, *Following Christ in a Consumer Society: The Spirituality of Cultural Resistance*, 2d ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1992) 21 ff.
30. Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon, 1964) 8.
31. For a trenchant analysis of our unconscious role in the development of Capitalism, see Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*.
32. Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*, 131.
33. McCormick, *Sin as Addiction*, 150 f.
34. This pendulum swing has been identified by Merle A. Nelson (New York: Norton, 1991). Nelson's piece in this depression in relation to Myers, *Who Will Roll the Dice?* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1992) 19.
35. Brandt, *Whole Life Economics*, 19.
36. Two of these trends were reported in early February 2000 that "earlier than expected" by the National Academy of Sciences, "warming over the past century has been generated by studies reported on 6 January 2000 that mandatory and voluntary contributions are nearly enough to head off global warming. There, Done That," A. Meadows, Dennis M. Meadows, Chelsea Green, 1999. *Life: Toward a Permanent Future*.
37. Jeremy Brecher, *Reconstruction from the Bottom*.
38. Jeff Gates, *Life*.
39. Jean Kilbourne, *Advertising and Persuasion: Why Women Buy* (New York: Free Press, 1999). Gambling is currently estimated to be the largest industry to have lotteries, while it is estimated that the online industry is one to ten billion dollars. Study Commission placed the nation's rolls of hard-core gambling shows such as *Deer* for diversions which, like instant wealth. See Phil
40. Walden Bell, *Confrontation, Its American History* (1992) 36 ff.

Jubilee: The Biblical Vision of Sabbath

, and Holly Sklar, *Shifting Fortunes: The*
United for a Fair Economy, 1999).

Psychological Portrait of the American Way
 39) 60.

Sin? (New York: Hawthorn Books,

"Linking" *Harper's* (September 1989) 19.

a Way of Life (New York: Oxford Uni-

San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1998).

Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin (Grand

New York: Paulist Press, 1989).

Adictian: A Bibliographic Essay on Addic-

The Nation (28 December 1992) 822.
 e, 131.

17.

The Addictive Organization (San Fran-

San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987).

Evaluating Daily Life (Philadelphia: New

nt, *The Paradigm Conspiracy* (Center

ropology of a Changing Culture (New
 el, *Poverty of Affluence*, 31 ff.

America (June 1990) 69 ff.

nsumer Society: The Spirituality of Cul-
 ff.

u: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced

31. For a trenchant critique of the ways in which commodity "fetishism" has colonized our unconscious see Frederic Jameson's *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1991).

32. Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*, 145.

33. McCormick, *Sin as Addiction*, 152 f.

34. This pendulum is almost exactly parallel to the "control/release" dynamic identified by Merle A. Fossum and Marilyn J. Mason, *Facing Shame: Families in Recovery* (New York: Norton, 1986) in their analysis of shame-bound systems (see also Susan L. Nelson's piece in this book). I have explored the national swing from grandiosity to depression in relation to the Gulf War from the perspective of social psychology (see Myers, *Who Will Roll Away the Stone? Discipleship Queries for the First World Christians* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994) 90 ff. Brandt has analyzed the same phenomenon in terms of American "business cycles" over the last century and a half in *Whole Life Economics*, 62 ff.

35. Brandt, *Whole Life Economics*, 60 ff.

36. Two of these examples will suffice. The *Los Angeles Times* reported on 23 February 2000 that "earlier this year, a blue-ribbon panel of climate experts commissioned by the National Academy of Sciences quashed most lingering doubts by calling global warming over the past 100 years 'undoubtedly real'" (A16). Most of the doubts have been generated by studies funded by the fossil fuel industry. Similarly, the *New York Times* reported on 6 January 2000, that despite strenuous public subsidy and encouragement, mandatory and voluntary recycling programs are not reducing the volume of trash nearly enough to head off serious crisis in the coming years ("Recyclers Are Saying: 'Bin There, Done That,'" A1). For overviews of current global ecological issues, see Donella Meadows, Dennis Meadows, and Jorgen Randers, *Beyond the Limits* (Post Hills, Vt.: Chelsea Green, 1992); and Bruce Brown, *Marx, Freud, and the Critique of Everyday Life: Toward a Permanent Cultural Revolution* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000).

37. Jeremy Brecher and Tim Costello, *Global Village or Global Pillage: Economic Reconstruction from the Bottom Up* (Boston: South End Press, 1994).

38. Jeff Gates, *Los Angeles Times*, 12 January 2000, B4.

39. Jean Kilbourne has been on the forefront of analyzing the cultural impact of advertising and commodity fetishism, particularly on women. See Kilbourne, *Deadly Persuasion: Why Women and Girls Must Fight the Addictive Power of Advertising* (New York: Free Press, 1999). Gambling is one of the fastest growing sectors in the U.S. economy, currently estimated to be a sixty-billion-dollar industry. All but a handful of states now have lotteries, while it is estimated that currently some fifteen million people gamble online, with industry analysts predicting that revenues from this sector will grow from one to ten billion dollars over the next three years. The National Gambling Impact Study Commission placed the number of compulsive gamblers at 5.5 million, more than the nation's rolls of hard-core drug users. Meanwhile, the recent explosion of television game shows such as *Do You Want to Be a Millionaire* reflect the insatiable public appetite for diversions which, like gambling, essentially play with money with the promise of instant wealth. See Philip Slater, *Wealth Addiction* (New York: Dutton, 1983).

40. Walden Bello, "Global Economic Counterrevolution: In the North-South Confrontation, Its Apocalypse or Solidarity," *Christianity and Crisis* (17 February 1992) 36 ff.

41. Structural adjustment includes "reducing the state's role in the economy, lowering barriers to imports, removing restrictions of foreign investment, eliminating subsidies for local industries, reducing spending for social welfare, cutting wages, devaluing currency, and emphasizing production for export rather than for local consumption" (ibid., 37). In other words, it means trying to unloose the manic phase of the economy and severely control the depressive phase. As social, economic, and political conditions have deteriorated among the poor the predictable result has been massive human displacement on a global scale. Perhaps, writes Bello, it is the homeless, the undocumented migrants, and the political and economic refugees "who most clearly perceive the truth about structural adjustment: it was intended not as a transition to prosperity but as a permanent condition of economic suffering to ensure that the South would never rise again to challenge the North" (ibid., 38).

42. Hall, "The Political Consequences of Misconceiving Sin," 8 f.

43. Ernest Kurtz, *A. A.: The Story* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988).

44. Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon, 1969) 6.

45. Brown, *Marx, Freud, and the Critique of Everyday Life*, 13 f.

46. Michael Lerner, *Surplus Powerlessness: The Psychodynamics of Everyday Life . . . and the Psychology of Individual and Social Transformation* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press International, 1991). See also Christopher Lasch, *The Minimal Self: Psychic Survival in Troubled Times* (New York: Norton, 1984).

47. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. by M. Ramos, reprint (New York: Continuum, 1992).

48. Augusto Boal, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, trans. by A. Jackson (New York: Routledge, 1992).

49. See J. Hunter, "Subjectivization and the New Evangelical Theodicy," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 21, no. 2, 39ff.

50. There are of course critics of the addiction/recovery model, from both the left and the right (see Peele, "Ain't Misbehavin': Addiction Has Become an All-Purpose Excuse," *The Sciences* [July–August 1989] 14 ff.; and *Utne Reader*, "Are You Addicted to Addiction," special issue [November–December 1988] 51 ff.). Feminist critiques of the Twelve-Step tradition should in particular be taken into account. Some women have objected to the program's emphasis upon Divine dependence, calling for "rational recovery." See Charlotte Davis Kasl, *Women, Sex and Addiction: A Search for Love and Power* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990); and Plantinga's interesting rejoinder in *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*, 142 ff). Others see the codependency movement spreading a "victim mentality" and the "politics of powerlessness." See Wendy Kaminer, *I'm Dysfunctional, You're Dysfunctional: The Recovery Movement and Other Self-Help Fashions* (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1992). Still others are concerned that the model ignores the gendered construction and social context of addiction. See Marguerite Babcock and Christine McKay, *Challenging Codependency: Feminist Critiques* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995).

51. Paul King, Kent Maynard, and David Woodyard, *Risking Liberation: Middle Class Powerlessness and Social Heroism* (Philadelphia: John Knox Press, 1988) 150.

52. Except, of course, the choice we make as consumers between products, which is made to be all-important. Even this is an illusion, however: "In the competitive capi-

talist system the consumer economic theory and in the the producer who is sovereign production plans (in "Bourgeois Behavior—The Way to a Human Participation in Development, have only the fiction of choice and finding alternative mark

53. A classic example of a domestic exonerated can be sophisticated nuclear weapons personal tax obligations—project do not consider involved generally feel no working the assembly line, missile silo—not even the see Barry Siegel, "Showdown and 15 August 1993.

54. Rubem Alvez, *Tor*

55. Dominique Barb *Brazil*, trans. by J. P. Brown (l

56. See Thomas Rat Liturgical Press, 1990); Davi (London: SPCK, 1977); and i

57. May, *Addiction and*

58. Alan Durning, "Li More Numerous During the

59. See Myers, *Who W Year of Jubilee.*"

60. See Mary A. Neal, *Facing Third World Peoples* (New More Plastic Jesus: Global Justice

61. David Batstone, "V Soul," *Sojourners* (January–Feb

62. See Susan Meeker-Society Publishers, 1995); and *native Process for Sustainable Cor* 1997). Three of the best sour are Alternatives for Simple Liv can Dream in Washington D.C

63. Marcuse, *Essay on I*

64. See, for instance, the Kalle Lasn, *Culture Jam: The Un bourne, Deadly Persuasion.*

the state's role in the economy, low-foreign investment, eliminating social welfare, cutting wages, devaluing rather than for local consumption" lose the manic phase of the economy and, economic, and political conditions result has been massive human displacement is the homeless, the undocumented "who most clearly perceive the truth a transition to prosperity but as a pre-are that the South would never rise

conceiving Sin," 8 f.

San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988).

1 (Boston: Beacon, 1969) 6.

Everyday Life, 13 f.

The Psychodynamics of Everyday Life . . . Transformation (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Christopher Lasch, *The Minimal Self*: London, 1984).

trans. by M. Ramos, reprint (New York:

Actors, trans. by A. Jackson (New York:

the New Evangelical Theodicy," *Journal*

addiction/recovery model, from both the addiction Has Become an All-Purpose and *Utne Reader*, "Are You Addicted to 1988] 51 ff.). Feminist critiques of the men into account. Some women have ine dependence, calling for "rational and *Addiction: A Search for Love and Power* itinga's interesting rejoinder in *Not the* codependency movement spreading a sness." See Wendy Kaminer, *I'm Dys-vent and Other Self-Help Fashions* (New erved that the model ignores the gen- n. See Marguerite Babcock and Chris- ritiques (Toronto: University of Toronto

l Woodyard, *Risking Liberation: Middle* a: John Knox Press, 1988) 150.

as consumers between products, which on, however: "In the competitive capi-

alist system the consumer is not the master he is made out to be in the paradigms of economic theory and in the ideology of day-to-day politics," writes Jens Harms. "It is the producer who is sovereign, with the technological structure determining the production plans (in "Bourgeois Idealism and Capitalist Production: Changes in Consumer Behavior—The Way to a Human Society," paper for the Commission on Churches' Participation in Development, World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1977, 12). Since we have only the fiction of choice anyway, to stop "choosing" (e.g., refusing brand loyalty and finding alternative markets) becomes the only genuine choice.

53. A classic example of how systemic irresponsibility is transformed into pandemic exoneration can be seen in the design, manufacturing, and deployment of sophisticated nuclear weaponry. Despite its impact on our economy—including our personal tax obligations—most of us not directly involved in this massive national project do not consider ourselves morally culpable. Yet those who are directly involved generally feel no greater sense of agency: not design engineers, nor those working the assembly line, nor those in the military bureaucracy, nor those in the missile silo—not even the policymakers. For a dramatic story of this phenomenon see Barry Siegel, "Showdown at Rocky Flats," *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, 8 August and 15 August 1993.

54. Rubem Alves, *Tomorrow's Child* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972) 202.

55. Dominique Barbe, *Grace and Power: Base Communities and Nonviolence in Brazil*, trans. by J. P. Brown (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1987).

56. See Thomas Rausch, *Radical Christian Communities* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1990); David Clark, *Basic Communities: Towards an Alternative Society* (London: SPCK, 1977); and Myers, *Who Will Roll Away the Stone?* 178 ff.

57. May, *Addiction and Grace*, 135.

58. Alan Durning, "Life on the Brink" The World's Poor Became Poorer and More Numerous During the 1980s," *Absolute Poverty* (March–April) 22 ff.

59. See Myers, *Who Will Roll Away the Stone*, 168 ff. and Myers, "God Speed the Year of Jubilee."

60. See Mary A. Neal, *A Socio-theology of Letting Go: The Role of a First World Church Facing Third World Peoples* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977); and Adam Daniel Finnerty, *No More Plastic Jesus: Global Justice and Christian Lifestyle* (New York: Dutton, 1977).

61. David Batstone, "What's Your Price: Ten Principles for Saving a Corporate Soul," *Sojourners* (January–February 2000).

62. See Susan Meeker-Lowry, *Invested in the Common Good* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1995); and Michael Kinsley, *The Economic Renewal Guide: A Collaborative Process for Sustainable Community Development* (Boulder: Rocky Mountain Institute, 1997). Three of the best sources for finding resources on all these issues and initiatives are Alternatives for Simple Living (www.SimpleLiving.org); the Center for a New American Dream in Washington D.C.; and *Yes: A Journal of Positive Futures*.

63. Marcuse, *Essay on Liberation*, 6.

64. See, for instance, the excellent work on youth, identity, and consumerism by Kalle Lasn, *Culture Jam: The Uncooling of America* (New York: Eagle Brook, 1999); and Kilbourne, *Deadly Persuasion*.

