

ADDICTS, RECOVERY, AND THE GOD QUESTION
HOW DO PERSONS WITH AN ADDICTION EXPERIENCE
“GOD” IN THEIR RECOVERY

By

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Certificate of Ethical Acceptability for Research Involving Humans

This is to certify that the Research Ethics Board has examined the research proposal:

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Faculty Supervisor:	Dr. Jody Clarke
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and concludes that in all respects the proposed project meets appropriate standards of ethical acceptability and is in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans (TCPS 2) and Atlantic School of Theology's relevant policies.

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Dated this 30th day of November, 2016 at Halifax, Nova Scotia.

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**ADDICTS, RECOVERY, AND THE GOD QUESTION: HOW DO PERSONS
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By, W. (Bill) Macintyre

Abstract:

This Phenomenological Research study is an examination of data revealed through the lens of persons with an addiction, who are in recovery. Through a series of one on one interviews, this study focuses on how persons with an addiction, who are in recovery have experienced God. The study as well, will provide perspectives of their individual journeys. The study has identified several themes based on the data which will offer an insight into the dimensions where the church in ministry to the addicted may be informed.

March 23, 2017

Introduction

Throughout my life, although at times not at the forefront of active thought, I had always been concerned about the plight of persons with an addiction. I remember back to my working life when having been trained as a rehabilitation coordinator, the stigma, which was attached to those persons who were then refereed to as addicts. Yes, there was an emphasis placed on trying to assist them, but their plight was seen by some as hopeless, a burden, and potentially a waste of time and effort. It could be said there was a, ‘we verses they’ analogy. In other words, persons with an addiction were viewed as being in a different camp.

When I began my studies at The Atlantic School of Theology, at the conclusion of my first year, I was approached by an individual via word of mouth to see if I might be interested in assisting as a spiritual advisor at a recovery house.

In reflecting on my work with individuals who were either in the throws of active addiction or who were attempting to recover, I came face to face with the effects of addiction. I experienced the the fall out addiction created, and the havoc it brought to friends and family. In some of the circumstances it was the coming to grips of dealing with the lives of survivors, who had lost someone in death, to addiction.

I became passionate, in trying to further understand what those persons who had achieved sobriety could share about there experience of God. What did that look like for them, how did, and what does that feel like? What could they share about their struggle with addiction which would help others, and the broader community?

This study therefore is not a study of the addicted, nor is it a study on Scripture but there is relevance to Scripture on the road to recovery, for persons with an addiction. This study is a focus on the experience of God as seen through the eyes of persons with an addiction.

Purpose and Relevance of the Research Question

Addiction is prevalent in our society. Many have been touched by what some professionals debate is a disease, either personally or by association. One does not have to look too far afield to see various advertisements, promoting the good life of partying, alcohol, gaming, and the like, always mindful, perhaps even protecting themselves by telling the viewers to do so ‘Responsibly’. Various media outlets contain many stories concerning the ill effects of substance abuse. Quite simply, addiction is taking its toll on our society. If we accept this premise, where does the church fit into this picture in our society. The Church calls forward those to minister, and to provide pastoral care. In ministering to God’s people, this includes everyone.

As relevance to my question, and what it might ask began to take shape. I remember meeting with a Pastor who shared a situation she had encountered which shed some light on those who might potentially be faced with ministering to persons or a community experiencing the effects of addiction. She described that she was fresh out of seminary, with her first parish setting being both remote and rural. Shortly after arriving in the community she was apprized of a families dire circumstances and was asked by the community elders to ‘deal with it’. She expressed that she had no training in addiction,

and had little infrastructure in her rural setting, no hospitals close by, and was in effect going to deal with the situation without a great deal of assistance.

In a world fraught with addiction, how are we to best minister to persons who suffer with an addiction ? With this in mind, in developing my research question for this study I wished to gather data partly as an endeavour to assist those who would potentially or who were ministering to persons with an addiction. Further, I was hopeful that the data gathered through the lens of the person with an addiction, would give us their perspective which would ultimately help us to help them, by understanding how they had experienced God.

Method

I have chosen to use the model of, Phenomenological Research,¹ for this study, to gather and access data from participants. I feel the phenomenological research method is best suited for this study as, “ *The product of a phenomenological study is a composite description that presents the ‘essence’ of the phenomenon*”². This style of research, with it’s intent being, to analyze the data by means of the participants experiences, will therefore allow participants, “ *to convey an overall essence of the experience.*”³ and as

¹ J. W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2013), 76-82.

²Sharan, B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research, A Guide to Design and Implementation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009),26.

³ J.W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications,2013),80.

John Creswell further describes it, “ *The exploration of this phenomenon with a group of individuals who have all experienced the same phenomenon.*”⁴

In determining what a good sampling of interview participants might be, I reflected on the following factors. If I chose to include and seek out those in active addiction to be part of the process, who might I actually be speaking with? Would it be the substance talking, or the person talking? If a person was in a detox phase of recovery, how cognizant would they be, and how reliable would the data be? In the latter two cases the data might be skewed based on their present situation or predicament. I, therefore chose to interview persons with an addiction who were in recovery.

In the selection of participants they all shared an essence of the same experience. The interviewees had all attended a 28 day abstinence based recovery program, at the same facility in fact, and had been sober for a minimum of six months. Several participants had several years and more of recovery. “ *Dukes (1984) recommends studying 3 to 10 individuals.*”⁵ The number of participants in this study, was five. The group consisted of two females and three males. The interviews were conducted on a one to one, face to face basis. The ‘recovery aspect’ of the individuals therefore, would comprise part of my actual research question. Because the desire of this study was to understand God through their eyes in recovery, this would be experiential in nature for each individual. The question had to relate directly to this experience. As such, the research question for this study was formulated:

⁴Creswell, 78.

⁵Creswell, 157.

To people with an addiction; “How do you experience God, in your recovery” ?

For many, God may be seen as a contentious issue. While attending the 28 day recovery program they were encouraged to seek out a power greater than themselves. In fact there are the existence of publications for the sole purpose of assisting persons striving for recovery to connect with God. One such book, *Came to Believe* [1989], expresses the dilemma of some, in making that connection when attempting to embark on a 12 step recovery program. In a section entitled, Changing Beliefs, we are apprized of this dilemma . “...it became apparent that all Twelve Steps were important to my continuing sobriety. But I was stymied on the Third Step, with it’s reference to ‘the care of God.’ ”⁶

With this in mind, at the onset of the interview to meet the participants where they were at, they were asked what type of terminology they would like to use when referring to God. Several of the participants were comfortable using the word, God. One individual preferred using, Higher Power. Another spoke of, The Divine. One individual opened up with, ‘that from which I came’, and then, he quickly followed up with the word Creator, and said, Creator, I love Creator.

Data Analysis

For persons with an addiction who are in recovery, based on several of the statements which

⁶Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. *Came to Believe* (New York: 1989), 103.

were made by the participants during the course of their interview, as well as several word tracks which were used, there appears to be distinct phraseology, or lingo for those in recovery. Some examples of this phraseology observed were, The Big Book, The Rooms, Using, and, Not Using, Clean, and so on. Following is a brief description of this 'lingo'

The Big Book:

Not a Bible in the sense as we know it. It is a book published by Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, which some in recovery call, their bible

The Rooms:

The many locations where recovery meetings are held, some of which take place in our churches, and community centres.

Using/Not Using:

Using:

Infers they are not in recovery, and are substance addicted.

Not Using:

Infers they are abstinent

Clean:

Referring to be free of substance abuse, or not being contaminated by substances

One of the interview questions which elicited a lot of discussion was, "Is there a way that you would describe your God? The respondents came at this question in different ways. Each shared a view, some starting back as far as they could remember. Some had been involved in church life, while others had not. Some had changed religious traditions, one

individual had done so many times. One individual had no exposure to God or religion in the home growing up, another identified as an atheist when attending university. Regardless of their level of experience with organized religion, whether they were churching or unchurching, each person had a description of God.

Several descriptions used by the interviewees were very personal to them. One person as she put it, in describing God had, “trouble really naming it”. She supplemented this with a further experiential description “its more of a feeling to me I think, its that inner peace, that serenity I think, feeling one with my surroundings”. One person’s description of God had a broader quality, as he described God in this way. “My God, I find, is quite huge”. Another individual spoke of experiencing, “my creator in every breath, and every smile and every tear of my existence. So my creator is around me at all times.”

Curiously, once they had shared their description of God, on or around this point in the interview, almost to a person they wanted to share where they had experienced disconnections and had encountered challenges in recovery. This became one of several themes. Several of the participants actually coined the notion of Dark periods, or Dark places. This was expressed by the participants in a number of ways. One began with, “I was very sick”. Another stated, “ I was kinda spiritually disconnected, I realize that I was going down a dark path. I found myself getting really emotional, and I thought I was literally gonna lose what few marbles I had left ” Another described, that she was, “ depressed and anxious, and they didn’t know what was wrong with me”. Given these types of encounters by the participants I will describe this theme as **Pain** . This pain being both psychological and spiritual. Persons with an addiction, are also persons who suffer

pain not only in active addiction, but who know real suffering in their efforts of trying to recover.

The respondents did not describe physical pain, although I am not discounting that this may have been experienced, the data however, did not reveal any physical pain which they may have experienced. The pain which they did describe were examples of painful feelings, a malaise, and as one person put it, he felt he was in, “a constant state of disarray.” Another told the story of where she had arrived at, in point in her life, when in the throws of addiction, and stated, “ I just wanted to die ” All of the participants interviewed shared, giving a glimpse of what were, their dark places, and their experience of pain.

The experiencing of pain, in the form of feelings and emotions is not unique for persons who are in active addiction, in fact they may be prevalent for those in recovery as well. Donna Cunningham, and Andrew Ramer, provide this view. *“There are certain predictable crisis in which particular long-suppressed emotions come to the surface...among them are anxiety, anger, and guilt...you can not predict exactly in what month of sobriety or abstinence they will come, but you can expect at some point they will”*.⁷

A question is often posed; Did God find me, or did I find God. One individual described they felt that in some way they were, “blocked’

⁷ Donna Cunningham, Andrew Ramer, *The Spiritual Dimensions of Healing Addiction* (San Rafael, CA: Cassandra Press, 1988), 115.

I will use a phrase that was mentioned by another participant, in that, they were “taking guidance”. In the taking of guidance, I would presume it reasonable that in doing so one embarks on a journey.

This journey presents itself in the form of a theme which I will refer to as **Action**. For those seeking recovery from addiction, part of this action involves the finding of a power greater than themselves. For several of the respondents based on their varied descriptions of God, for some God is still not fully defined. One stated, “ I would not necessarily call it a big man in the sky ”.

In recovery, finding a power greater than themselves can prove to be daunting for many. Charles Whitfield, makes several interesting contentions relative to the God experience. “*I noticed that many of my patients had a hard time with the spiritual stuff* ”. Whitfield also states that knowing, ‘the real self’ was a key factor for those on the journey of recovery. He refers to stage two work and further mentions. *By that time in their recovery they knew ‘the real self’, which I also call the ‘Child Within’. By knowing their Child Within they were free to experientially connect to God more easily. Our false self can’t know God authentically*”.⁸

I will comment on the importance Whitfield's contention of, ‘Our false self can’t know God authentically’. In addiction the substance has become paramount. Information which

⁸ Charles, L. Whitfield, M.D. *My Recovery, A Personal Plan for Healing* (Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, Inc. 2003), 5.

emerged and the many of the examples which the participants provided in this regard was rich.

“ I wasn’t living a spiritual life. The consequences of my choices were, that I suffered a lot.”

The next part of their action is based in a daily ritual, either as they expressed was in Prayer, and Meditation, or both for some. This part of the action phase, I believe is evidence of Transformation.

Prayer in many instances for the respondents was traditional in nature, ‘Thy will be done’ for example. Some others were recovery based, such as, the third step prayer, and perhaps a more familiar one, ‘The Serenity Prayer’. Prayers of praise and gratitude were not uncommon. Said one participant, “ I’ll sometimes pray when amazing things happen. I will sometimes be brought to tears when interacting. When there is an echo of the creator. I will sometimes have to pause, and pray, and give thanks.”

Meditation also formed part of this ritual in action. Father Leo Booth shares that, “*Addiction is escape. It is choosing ‘fantasy’ over ‘reality’... We need to escape from the prison of the physical body by the use of meditation...it is using silence to say yes...Meditation is part of the God-given gift of Spirituality...Meditation has much to say to the alcoholic, drug addict, and overeater... With meditation comes, acceptance, growth, serenity.*”⁹

⁹ Father Leo, Booth, *Spirituality and Recovery, A Guide to Positive Living* (Deerfield Beach FL: Health Communications Inc. 1989),83,84.

The relevance of Booth's contentions concerning the use of Meditation for those who described suffering in one form or another as a result of their addiction, was borne out by statements made by the participants. For the person who had arrived at the point and, "just wanted to die", she has this to say when recounting what mediation felt like for her, one day. "I envision there are roots growing out of me down into the earth, which connects me to trees, and people and animals, and then I imagine the light of the Spirit, light of God shining in through my head, and pouring through my body."

Not only is the action phase of recovery steeped in ritual, it's results on the participants are both real and powerful. They are in fact life changing. In what is known as the 12 step promises contained in the 'Big Book' of Alcoholics Anonymous here are several excerpts of the promises. "*We are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness... We will comprehend the word serenity and we will know peace. No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experience can benefit others... We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.*"¹⁰

This action, this transformation in recovery is participatory. It is about reconciliation, living, trusting in God, and helping others. In the helping of others this speaks to a tenant that we hold to, namely stewardship. It is the stewardship of one person with an addiction helping another person suffering from addiction. Their journey together in recovery has

¹⁰Alcoholics Anonymous, *The Story of, How Many Thousands of Men and Women Have Recovered from Alcoholism, Fourth Edition* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. 2001), 83,84.

been borne out in the form of groups. Many of the groups are provided with a safe space in which to recover, in the many basements, and rooms of our churches.

In his book, *The Pilgrimage Home* [1979] Gerald May, speaks to the concept of groups, in a section entitled, 'Alone and Together'. "*This combination of aloneness and togetherness appears again and again in contemplative practice . Simply stated, the paradox is that one is always and irrevocably alone in one's spiritual growth, yet at the same time one is always in the company of fellow pilgrims as well as in the company of the Divine.*"¹¹

The journey of individual spiritual growth, and the pilgrims being their fellow addicts in recovery, in the presence of the Divine as pilgrims, is congruent with the anonymous group process. In the pilgrimage together, one person described the beginning of her recovery and experiencing God in this way; " In the beginning it was through people, the rooms really helped me. The guidance I would receive, just the knowledge that I can't do it alone, my ways weren't working, and so I was taking guidance from other people who had walked a similar path as me."

As pilgrims, the journey of recovery takes the shape of one person helping another, in the hopes of realizing the 12 step promise's, and is another healing factor, that being, Step 5.

¹¹ Gerald, G. May, *Pilgrimage Home, The Contemplative Practice in Groups* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 27.

*“Admitted to God and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs”.*¹² Many in certain traditions would recognize this as a form of ‘confession’.

Scripture which speaks to this phenomenon is described in Romans 5: 1-6. *Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.[NRSV]*

Evaluation and Implications

In sharing their experience of God, a revelation of the participants journey was one which was painful at times. In their journey as was described by Gerald May as a pilgrimage was one of action. It was one too, of discovery. In their stories, and in their experience of Pain and Action is evidence of healing, and of transformation.

The theology which comes into view based on the journey of the participants is foremost a theology of the Cross. It is the relatability of God in the human form of Jesus, and human suffering.

¹² Alcoholics Anonymous, *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services Inc. 1953), 55.

Jurgen Moltmann, in his book, *The Crucified God* [1974], describes aspects of Jesus crucifixion and he states, “ *Because God ‘does not spare’ his Son, all the godless are spared. Though they are godless, they are not godforsaken, precisely because God has abandoned his own Son and has delivered him up for them.*”¹³

The relevance for persons with an addiction would fit the descriptions of abandonment and rejection. As one individual put it, “I just felt that if I stuck with that religion that I was going to hell for all the things I had done”.

In recovery there are numerous examples of the theology of Grace, such as *‘Peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ’*. This was evident in how respondents described feeling ‘connected’, in recovery. Many more descriptions included a, “peaceful feeling”, and the concept of, “some sort of force working in my life”. One in fact stated, “Well, God is the only reason I recovered”.

Both the location and geography of Christ’s crucifixion also came into view. By this I mean, Jesus was not crucified in a place of honour. He was not crucified in a sacred place built by human hands. He was not even crucified in the city of Jerusalem. The great Salvific event, the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ, occurred outside of the city gates of Jerusalem. In John 19: 17, we are told, *So they took Jesus and carrying the cross by himself he went out to what is called the place of the skull. [NRSV]*

¹³ Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1974), 242.

There is further reference to location, in Hebrews 13: 11-14, *For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest as a sacrifice are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood. Let us then go to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured. for we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come. [NRSV]*

There is much written concerning the transformation of people's who are on the move in the Bible. The participants in this study by virtue of their journey to find recovery from addiction, can be seen as seeking transformation. Instances where this transformation began, may be seen as one person emerged from a state of isolation, and aloneness which he described. "I used to curl up in a ball on a couch in the basement. I'd cover myself with my actual blanket, my mother gave me when I was a baby in the crib." This same person in describing his seeking out of God reiterated, "So I gladly kind of started to search, for some sort of a concept of God."

Another person's journey of transformation had beginnings for her, 'in the rooms', and in taking guidance, described feeling connected to a higher power when, "I was outdoors in winter, feeling that inner peace and serenity."

Transformation is further described in the various forms of action which individuals described. Prayer and meditation took on both healing, and spiritual dimensions. One person spoke of the words she had used in an extemporaneous prayer. "God please show me how to be the woman you need me to be today" . In an example of practicing mediation, one individual described it as a 'contemplative process' in this way. "I do

sitting meditation, but most of mine is reviewing the day ahead, and the day past, and contemplating what I've done, and if my actions have been appropriate.”

Where as clergy might we help in the recovery process ? One of our many roles is to carry the message, to spread the Good News, and to evangelize. It is seen as a responsibility. As Luther put it, we are charged, “ *to teach them...so it is up to you, dear pastor and preacher*”¹⁴

Over the past several decades, the numbers in the church pews in many regions have been declining. Many are working in churches that are strapped financially, or know of others in such circumstances. Some churches have amalgamated congregations, while others have closed their doors. Welcoming new parishioners would be a wonderful thing. Yet there are people outside the perceived gates, outside of manmade sacred structures, who are experiencing God, and for the most part, they are not prospects for us. If they are not prospects, one may wonder what might a spiritual partnership between the addicts, the church and clergy look like for us ?

Our own teachings tell us that God is everywhere. This therefore means even outside the gates. For many of those persons with an addiction who are in recovery, as the data revealed in this study, stewardship is being practiced every day, in the form of one person helping another person. If we are to truly care for, ‘the stranger’, a question which we may ask ourselves is; Can we respect their own autonomy?

¹⁴ Theodore, G. Tappert, *The Book of Concord, The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 339,341.

In beginning to ascertain what effect the various camps may have on each other, Steven Apthorp raises several points which he addresses to both clergy, and the church. “*Since the task of synthesizing the many demands of the ministry makes it unrealistic to expect the clergy to be drug experts, this raises the most pertinent question of all: ‘What then, is the minister’s role’ ?* Apthorp follows with several suppositions. “ *The primary task of the church in the community is to enable people to find direction and meaning for the whole of their lives...to relate them to God who alone is able to provide strength for the weak.*”¹⁵

In Matthew 11: 28, the message reads, *Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. [NRSV]*

Moving forward, we may ask ourselves, How do we help ? Or, how may we help embody Matthew’s message ? In respecting the autonomy of those who are outside the gates, how as a community may we be inclusive and accepting ? How might we commune with each other ?

I will now highlight several aspects which I believe this study identifies. The persons with an addiction who were interviewed, freely, deeply, and unabashedly shared what their experience of God was for them. They described the pain which they felt, and how this impacted their journey towards recovery. This journey has been a transformative one for them.

¹⁵ Stephen, P. Apthorp, *Alcohol & Substance Abuse, Second Edition* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1990),15.

From a description of factors they experienced in addiction and in recovery, such as isolation fear, and despair, and other dire circumstances, they began to become transformed. There was, and is, action on their part, through pray, meditation, and journeying in pilgrimage with one another.

As church, and as clergy, there are opportunities to connect with persons with an addiction. We may consider, or may continue to offer, safe spaces for healing, for those who are suffering or recovering from addiction. In the offering of these safe places we are able to contribute as a church and community to those seeking help, in their search for recovery and a connection with God.

The sharing of their stories, and of their experiences of God in their recovery, was of benefit in reaffirming my faith journey in learning to understand God, as they had experienced God, in their recovery. In continuing to discern on the findings of this study, I am mindful of a prayer popular to this who are in recovery.

The Serenity Prayer

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,

The courage to change thew things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

Amen

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Appendix A
Literature Review
GS 3000

W. (Bill) Macintyre

Addiction is not a new phenomenon, but it is one that is often reported in today's media. Beyond the familiar tales of Alcohol and Drug abuse, are stories of binge drinking by the young, and the emergence of new drugs. Fentanyl has been reported as being, a "Killer High."¹⁶

Anonymous groups, are now prevalent in our society, dating back to to the late 1930's. The book, Alcoholics Anonymous, "...*first edition, appeared in April, 1939*".¹⁷ Many of these groups meet in our churches.

We are answering a need, in providing a safe space in which healing may occur. Attendees at these meetings may not be be part of the parish where the meetings take place, nor members of that church's tradition, in fact they may be non churched. There are instances where clergy may have been, or will be approached by member(s) of the anonymous groups, meeting at their church(s).

¹⁶The Globe and Mail, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/investigations/a-killer-high-how-canada-got-addicted-tofentanyl/article29570025/> (accessed Oct. 12, 2016.)

¹⁷Alcoholics Anonymous, *The Story of How Many Thousands of Men and Women Have Recovered from Alcoholism, Fourth Edition*, (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc, 2001), p.xi.

In a world fraught with addiction, how are we to best minister to persons who suffer with an addiction ? In this review, it is my intention to seek out, and uncover themes in this regard.

In my phenomenological research, my focus will be “*to convey an overall essence of the experience*”,¹⁸ . This I feel will be achieved through a lens which focuses on the experiences of people with an addiction who are in recovery.

There is a wealth of resource material on the subject of addiction, ranging from statistical data to self help as examples. The beginnings of my search of literature however, did not immediately reveal a view from the addicts perspective, which is the intended focus of my study. Scholarly literature, seemed quite sparse in that regard. At times I was only gleaning sentences, or short paragraphs that I felt were related specifically to the nature of my study.

There were many streams of information pertaining to addiction which have been examined. Many offered the reader a view of what the markers of addiction were. Others were designed to be diagnostic in general. One such book, *Pastoral Care of Alcohol Abusers*, offered five case studies; “*The Depressed Teen, the Alcoholic Gambler, the Traumatized Veteran, the Grieving Older Woman, and, The Retired Drinker*. The last two chapters dealt with, *Twelve Step programs, and making Effective Referrals*”¹⁹ . Although

¹⁸Cresswell,J.W. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design* (Los Angels: Sage Publications, 2013), 80.

¹⁹Andrew J. Weaver and Harold G. Koenig, *Pastoral Care of Alcohol Abusers* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 5-49.

useful, how does this lend to ministering to those trying to make a conscious contact with God,

Other books and articles dealt with studies on prevention, building healthy team ministry, as well of the use of prayer as an intervention.

Still others, came in the form of what I will refer to as ‘how to books’. In Bucky Dann’s book on, *Addiction, Pastoral Responses*, there is an emphasis which is placed on “Therapeutic Positions”, such as Patience, Honesty, Withholding Judgment, Maintaining Personal Boundaries. All of these ‘Therapeutic Positions’ are useful tools for those ministering to the addicted. This approach seemed to be a matter of fact in nature, using what is referred to as “*recovery basics*”. These ‘recovery basics’, included subjects akin to a set of rules such as, “*avoiding people places and things, abstain from all mood-altering drugs, that few recover alone, and to deal openly with emotions.*”²⁰ Again all useful knowledge, but not a view through the lens of persons with an addiction.

I was hopeful the section entitled ‘Worship’ in Dann’s book would be more revealing vis a vis the addicted. It consisted of three pages, which touched on the following, “*Sermons are another means of speaking to the addicted...a significant need for a coherent Christian message that addresses the larger issues of pleasure, the body, the law, and sin. and, One final thought about worship, relates to the use of wine or juice.*”²¹ This book was another example of a ‘how to’ approach, from the preaching end, and not truly designed to understand the ‘God experience’, of the addicted.

²⁰Bucky Dann, *Addiction Pastoral Responses*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 42-48,83-85.

²¹ *Ibid*, 96,97.

Several statements which raised interesting questions to ponder, are presented by Kenneth Leech in, *Drugs and Pastoral Care*. He makes the following contentions; “*there is a tendency to equate victim and perpetrator...there is a need to distinguish sin from victimization.*” ...*what kind of God do we believe ? ...the view of God which is found in some religious groups working with addiction issues is often that of dictator and controller...it is important to stress that there is no specific ‘ministry to drug users’ ...the use of drugs raises specific questions and problems, but Christian ministry is to all people.*²²

There have been references in the literature which either point to, or refer to, the ‘twelve steps’ of the anonymous groups. Within the ‘twelves steps’, there is one in particular, which speaks to an area which may be pertinent to this study, that being; Step 11. “*Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood him. Praying only for the knowledge of his will for us and the power to carry that out.*”²³ Key words in this step are found in this portion of the step; God as we understood him. This raises a question. How is God understood by a person with an addiction, who is seeking recovery from their addiction?

There are differing opinions on the subjects of Spirituality and Addiction. In an article written by Lance Dodes M.D, for *Psychology Today*, *The Heart of Addiction*, Dodes

²² Kenneth Leech, *Drugs and Pastoral Care*, (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd Ltd, 1998), 99-100.

²³ Alcoholics Anonymous, *The Story of How Thousands of Men and Women Have Recovered from Alcoholism, fourth edition*, (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services Inc.2001),59-60.

makes clear his view on the subject. “ *Sometimes people, including people with addictions feel less distressed when they feel ‘spiritually’ at peace...* he further contends...*Addiction is not a spiritual problem. Indeed saying that, has caused a great deal of pain to many. Addiction is hard enough for people, without thinking they have shallow or demented souls.*”²⁴ These statements reveal interesting dimensions. On the one hand, Dodes states that, ‘Addiction is not a spiritual problem’. Yet prior to this statement he notes, ‘Sometimes people, including people with addictions feel less distressed when they feel ‘spiritually’ at peace.

Gerald G. May, M.D. on the other hand represents a different view. He states; “...*the energy of our basic desire for God is the human spirit, planted within us and nourished endlessly by the Holy Spirit of God. In this light the spiritual significance of addiction is not just that we lose freedom through attachments to things...of much more importance is that we try to fulfill our longing for God through objects of attachment.*”²⁵

For Father Leo Booth, there are several factors at work which he notes, as they pertain to spirituality for people with an addiction. “*Most times we are not in contact with our God-given Spirituality. We miss it, reject it, or ignore it...The key to recovery is Spirituality. Spirituality is seeing, appreciating, recognizing the beauty that exists within us.*”²⁶

²⁴ Lance, Dodes, M.D. *The Heart of Addiction*, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-heart-addiction/201503/spirituality-and-addiction> (accessed 17October 2106)

²⁵ Gerald, G. May, M.D. *Addiction And Grace*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988),92.

²⁶ Father Leo Booth, *Spirituality and Recovery*, (Deerfield Beach, Florida, Health Communications, Inc.1989), 25,48.

Heidi Schlumpf in her article, *Recovering Grace* addresses the issue of ‘Catholics suffering from addictions’ and relates the ‘major transformation’, experienced by an individual in recovery. “*Before I knew about God, I read about God, I heard about God. But in 12- Step groups, I met God. I experienced God.*”²⁷

Several of the themes which this literature review reveal, indicate a need to develop inquiry in an area of research study which I feel is yet to be fully developed. That being a focused study through the lens of persons with an addiction. In expanding on some of the themes which my literature review has uncovered, we may learn more on many fronts.

How have persons with an addiction experienced God in their recovery journey ?

Have there been major transformations, new images, a spiritual peace, or lack thereof ?

What does that look like, and feel like, for those persons with an addiction ?

How are we as a church and as ministers able to better understand the needs of those persons with an addiction ?

It is the intent of this study to develop further, this line of inquiry.

²⁷ Schlumpf, Heidi. "RECOVERING GRACE. (Cover story)." U.S. Catholic 68, no. 11 (November 2003): 12-18. Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost (accessed October 6, 2016).

Appendix B

Theological Review

GS3000

W. (Bill) Macintyre

This research project is not meant to define what addiction is or may be, but rather it is one with a goal of discovering how God is experienced by persons with an addiction.

Several initial questions came into view. How might persons with an addiction interpret, experience, or even reject God? How might clergy, or the church, view those persons with an addiction? How as well, might persons with an addiction, view the clergy, or church? How might one's embedded theology, or beliefs, influence this experience of God? In turn, how might those persons with an addiction view clergy, or church, based on whatever those beliefs may be? Therefore, what Theology will this reflect, and what contentious issues might emerge depending on the various camps; those camps being, persons with an addiction, clergy, and the church.

In beginning to ascertain what effect the various camps may have on each other, Stephen Apthorp raises several points which he addresses to both clergy, and the church. *“Since the task of synthesizing the many demands of the ministry makes it unrealistic to expect the clergy to be drug experts, this raises the most pertinent question of all: ‘What then, is the minister’s role’ ?”* Apthorp follows with several suppositions. *“The primary task of the church is to receive people as they are...The task of the church in the community is to*

*enable people to find direction and meaning for the whole of their lives...to relate them to God who alone is able to provide strength for the weak.”*²⁸

This view may raise questions for some. What does our community, or our perception of our community look like to us ? Who forms part of that community, and, Who does it comprise ? Are persons with an addiction part of our community, or merely disadvantaged individuals in our society ? How do we view persons with an addiction given the many stigmas associated with addiction in our, country, our cities, and our communities ? How then are we as Christians, ‘to help’, and what may that look and feel like for us ?

Alternatively, persons with addiction may also have a perception of clergy, the church, and community. The clergy, church, and community themselves may be subject to views by person’s with an addiction based on some of the same age old stigmas people may have of those involved in traditional religion(s). Clergy and the church therefore, may be viewed with some skepticism.

There are verses found in the Bible pertaining to addictive behaviour which might seem quite strong for persons with an addiction who may search for and attempt to find recovery, or solace in scripture. Here are a few examples which pertain to drunkards;

²⁸ Stephen, P. Apthorp, *Alcohol & Substance Abuse, Second Edition*, (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1990.), 15.

thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God

(1 Corinthians 6:10)

if anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. for God's temple is holy, and you are that temple

(1 Corinthians 3:17)

and do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit

(Ephesians 5:18)

If one were to look at the word debauchery for example, on the advice of the Ephesians verse which precedes with; do not get drunk with wine....

debauchery Gk: *asōtia* (from 1/A "without" and 4982 /*sōzō*, "save") – properly, what can't be saved (waste); (figuratively) prodigality, spiritual wastefulness due to excessive behaviour and the dire consequences it brings. (Strong's Concordance)

* Noteworthy at this point is a modern day definition of **debauch** which reflects the following: 1 corrupt morally. 2 make intemperate or sensually indulgent. 3 deprave or debase (taste or judgment)²⁹

In both ancient and modern day references to debauchery, the definitions may illicit feelings of judgment, and demonstrate a stigma attached to addictive behaviour which

²⁹ Joyce, W. Hawkins and Robert Allen, editors, *The Oxford Encyclopedic English Dictionary*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 372.

may be realized by some. This in turn may result in a reluctance of persons with an addiction to turn to, or utilize clergy, or the church, as a resource.

Tommie Lee Duncan explains this possibility based on one study, in hospital, many decades ago concerning to two hundred addicts who were asked if; *“They had ever consulted a minister about their problem of addiction. Not a single one answered in the affirmative. In one example, “Patients report that the church is not a focal point of community life...one conclusion drawn by some patients was, ‘their reluctance to go to a minister about their problem of addiction was engendered by fears that he would judge and preach”.* ³⁰

What is curious about this study are several factors which bear mentioning. Although conducted in the 1960’s this was at a time when Alcoholics anonymous had operated successfully for close to thirty years and was a well known commodity as an option to those who were labeled by society as, ‘drunks’. Yet, not one patient in this study, Not One, answered in the ‘affirmative’ when asked if they had ever, ‘consulted a minister’.

What reality, and what perception may scripture present to persons with an addiction ? As it pertains to recovery, scripture may be perceived as falling short for persons with an addiction. There are many entities which may lend themselves to that perception. The story or language of scripture, may not be perceived as promoting recovery for persons with an addiction. Therefore scripture, its story, and its language may, or may not, illicit

³⁰ Tommie L. Duncan, *Understanding And Helping The Narcotic Addict*, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.:Prentice-Hall Inc. 1966.), 67,68.

fear, or a perception of judgment, by society, by God, and possibly those who are seen as representing God, be it the clergy, church or community. How might persons with an addiction identify with scripture, and those who preach from that same scripture? In all of this; may persons with an addiction feel blocked in some way, from God ?

Some may argue that not all scripture is damning; the parable of the prodigal son, Jesus healing the man by the pool, the suffering of Jesus on the cross, and the forgiveness of God, may be examples which demonstrate this.

How might persons with an addiction perceive these contrasts in scripture? How might they be interpreted ? For some will scripture be seen as damning, saving, or, may they have other interpretations ?

Beyond the effects of what scripture may present, the stigma of addiction, has it's routes not only in the Bible, but in society as well.

These roots are traceable to various periods in history, I present a view from a chapter of Christopher's Cook's book, Alcohol, Addiction and Christian Ethics on, the subject of Drunkenness as Intemperance: and the views of Augustine of Hippo, specifically his concept of, 'the divided will'.

"In his Confessions, he wrote about two wills being at war with each other within himself...the division of the will results from the struggle within oneself between

*competing habits, emotions, and motivations...we can be good at all only by virtue of God's grace”*³¹

A similar view is described in the book, Alcoholics Anonymous; “*So our troubles, we think, are basically of our own making. They arise out of ourselves, and the alcoholic is an extreme example of self-will run riot, though he usually doesn't think so...Neither could we reduce our self-centeredness much by wishing or trying on our own power. We had to have God's help.*”³²

Yet in spite of similar views centuries apart, the battle of self will for the persons with an addiction is as true for them as was described in Augustine's time. The stigma attached to addiction was further fueled as seen by concepts of the Temperance Movement which has its roots in the 1800's. “*In 1785, in Philadelphia, Dr Benjamin Rush published An inquiry into the Effects of Ardent Spirits upon the human body and mind with an Account of the remedies for Curing Them...Rush's work was read by Dr Lyman Beecher, an American Protestant minister who in 1926 wrote and delivered, Six Sermons on the Nature, Occasions, Signs, Evils, and Remedy of Intemperance .*”³³

³¹ Christopher, P. H. Cook, *Alcohol, Addiction And Christian Ethics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 52-54.

³² ‘Alcoholics Anonymous’, *The Story of How Many Thousands of Men and women Have Recovered from Alcoholism, Fourth edition*, (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. 2001), 62.

³³ Christopher, C.K. Cook, *Alcohol, Addiction And Christian Ethics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 79.

From this movement one's will, and evil have been pointed to as the chief protagonist's. Yet there were differing opinion's by some within the movement. "*The temperance movement was divided between those who believed the primary means of combatting the evil of drink should be moral dissuasion, and those who supported prohibition*"³⁴

Despite the modern day knowledge which now abounds concerning addiction, this condition has not abated. Many more anonymous groups have emerged based on the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. Narcotics Anonymous, Gamblers Anonymous, and even Overeaters Anonymous are a few examples. Yet another challenge may beset those who are trying to adopt the twelve steps which others are now challenging. The challenge is coming form those who believe God has no place in a twelve step program. In fact this most recent challenge was reported via twitter recently. "*A Toronto man has taken Alcoholics World Services Inc. and The Greater Toronto Intergroup to the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario, alleging discrimination against atheists, agnostics and freethinkers.*"³⁵

With the many factors which have been presented so far, which may have some degree of impact for persons with an addiction, I am therefore hopeful this study will help to ascertain how in all of this, persons with an addiction experience their God.

³⁴Ibid, 80.

³⁵ Vice Canada, *An atheist is taking on alcoholics anonymous in a bid to get God out of 12 steps:* <https://twitter.com/vicecanada/status/790579048812519424> (Accessed Dec03/16)

In describing the Theology which this study speaks to, how may the various elements described in this paper be understood Theologically? To begin the Theology of Grace, is present in that, we are justified by faith. Yet what will that faith look like to the respondents in this study ? Will postmodernism and some of it's ideology permeate this faith ? Will the denominations of the participants play a role, and will denominational developments in their Theology become overriding factors requiring assessment ? With a desire to provide research data to clergy and the church this may shape Pastoral Theology as it pertains to ministering to persons with an addiction. In seeking to understand the experience of God for persons with an addiction I feel points strongly to the **Theology of the Cross**. I present the following statement for consideration;

*“Theologians of the Cross look on all things, ‘through suffering and the cross’. They in other words are led by the cross to look at the trials, the sufferings, the pangs of conscience, the troubles—the joys—of daily life as God’s doing and do not try to see through them as mere accidental problems to be solved by a metaphysical adjustment.”*³⁶

Persons with an addiction, as previously described in their *self will run riot* , may in all probability have experienced trials, suffering and pangs of conscience. Augustine’s concept of a ‘divided will’ and the two wills,’ being at war with each other within himself’, would be seen by some as describing the plight of the addicted.

³⁶ Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being A Theologian Of The Cross*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company,1997), 13.

Beyond the addiction itself are other factors, communal in nature. That being, for many individuals who do not suffer with an addiction, they themselves may experience challenges. There may be those who would like to help. Some may not themselves be able, or can not deal with people, who have an addiction. Others simply, will not.

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them (Genesis: 1.26). Given this premise, some may argue with this following statement.

If we are made in the image and likeness of God, therefore, Christ in some way, shape, or form, is with, or in the addict. In Bonhoeffer's book *Christ as Center*, in a section, the *Humiliated One and the Exalted One*, he asks a question, "*Who is the humiliated God-Man? ...he later states; The humiliated God-Man is the stumbling block for the Jews; i.e.; religious upright men. The historical ambiguity is offensive to them.*" ³⁷

The notion that in same way, shape, or form, that Christ is with, or even in the addict, may also be offensive to those in our modern day community. They may see the addicted as being responsible for their own demise, their wounding of themselves as being, self-inflicted. Lastly others may point out that such behaviour can in no way be associated with Christ, their actions may be viewed as a turning away from, or a rejection of Christ.

This brings me to my next point concerning the Theology of the Cross. If one agrees that God is made flesh in Jesus, and that Jesus died for us on the cross, for the forgiveness of

³⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1978), 106-109.

sins, I will refer to Jurgen Moltmann in a description of the experience of Christ, dying on the cross.

*“When God becomes man in Jesus of Nazareth, he not only enters into the finitude of man, but in his death on the cross also enters into the situation of man's godforsakenness. In Jesus he does not die the natural death of a finite being, but the violent death of the criminal on the cross, the death of complete abandonment by God. The suffering in the passion of Jesus is abandonment, rejection by God, his Father.”*³⁸

What then, of the question of abandonment, suffering, and rejection which many addicts attest to and may often blame for their predicament. Finding God may be an issue of mammoth proportions for persons with an addiction. Gerald May, offers an opinion on this possible phenomenon. *“ For me, the energy of our basic desire for God is the human spirit, painted within us and nourished by the Spirit of God. In this light, the spiritual significance of addiction is not just that we lose freedom through attachment to things, nor even that things so easily become our ultimate concerns. Of much more importance is that we try to fulfil our longing for God through objects of attachment.”*³⁹

The relationship between God, community, and the addicts, may be one where they may experience a sense of abandonment, and a rejection by God. The addiction, or ‘object of attachments’ as May puts it, and the basic desire for God for persons with an addiction

³⁸ Jurgen, Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/geneveith/2013/03/the-crucified-god/> (accessed 02Dec16).

³⁹ Gerald G. May, M.D. *Addiction and Grace*, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1988), 92.

becomes thwarted. How then are we to help those with an addiction make contact, or reconnect with God ?

I close with remarks found in a section of the NIV Recovery Devotional Bible entitled;
Jesus: Saviour of the addicted;

*“ For Christ, the way to abundant grace and forgiveness is through himself a way from all possible objects of attachment. ‘I am the way’ ; ‘Follow Me’ ; ‘I am the bread of life’ ; ‘I will give you the living water’ ; Whoever comes to me will never hunger’ ; ‘Come to me all who are weary and burdened’ .”*⁴⁰

⁴⁰ The Holy Bible,NIV. *Recovery Devotional Bible*, (Grand Rapids:Zondervan, 2015),1168.

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Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

My name is William (Bill) Macintyre. I am a graduate student, Completing a Master of Divinity degree at The Atlantic School of Theology.

You have been selected to participate in a research project.

For my study, I will be interviewing persons with an addiction who are in recovery, with a view to collecting data on how they experience God today ?

During the course of the interview, I will take notes and our conversation will be recorded. All information, written or in audio form will be held securely, and will be destroyed upon completion of this project scheduled to be completed by the end of April, 2018.

If you are willing to participate in this project, please read the following and indicate your willingness to be involved by signing your name as indicated.

- I acknowledge that the research objectives, methods and procedures have been outlined to me. Any questions I may have had regarding the procedures have been answered to my satisfaction.
- I know that I can contact the researcher at any time should I have further questions.
- I am aware that my participation in this study is purely voluntary and I am assured that personal records relating to this study will be kept confidential. I also understand that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time.
- All information obtained in this study will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous.

* This research has been reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Board of The Atlantic School of Theology.

By signing this consent form, you are indicating that you fully understand the above information and agree to participate in this study.

Participant's Signature _____

Date _____

Appendix D

Invitation to Participate

Date:

Dear

My name is Bill Macintyre. I am a student at the Atlantic School of Theology. I am conducting a graduate level research study under the direction of Dr. Jody Clarke, about how persons in recovery experience their Higher Power.

As some of you may be aware I have been associated with Crosbie House as spiritual advisor for the past two years. I am keenly interested in any and all avenues, which lend themselves to a healthy recovery. It is my hope that this study will contribute to this.

I will be conducting one on one interviews. I have been advised you have an interest in participating in this study. Ideally this interview would be conducted at Crosbie House between December 14-16 at a time which is convenient for you.

Would you kindly confirm your appointment with Molly McLean through Crosbie House, Friends of Crosbie email, or by telephone at 1-866-681-0613.

Sincerely,