

PLEASURE: A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Introduction

HERE CAN BE LITTLE DOUBT THAT THE Western Christian tradition contains a dark side which has at times presented a life-denying face to the world—though in some places more obviously than others.¹ Despite the claims to follow a Saviour who offers abundant life to believers (Jn 10:9–10), Christians have sometimes found it difficult to interpret this in anything other than a ‘spiritualized’ sense. Although lip service has been paid to the goodness of sexuality as part of the gift of creation (particularly in more recent years), and despite the widespread practice of giving thanks before meals for food and drink, Christians have not always felt able to enjoy these gifts in the freedom of the children of God. Indeed they have sometimes preferred the role of moral guardian and been more concerned to stem the abuse than to facilitate the enjoyment of God’s gifts. In this sense morality has taken precedence over grace.

At the same time, no one would deny that the Church has had cause to take issue with the abuse of creation and the misuse of God’s created gifts. The Church has felt called to play a prophetic role in its stance on ethical values and its concern for the dignity of human persons within relationships. While Christians may disagree on specific ethical issues, none would wish to silence the Church’s voice, at least in principle, on moral questions of importance for our personal and social lives. Those who are concerned with radical reform in the Church deny this point as little as those who are concerned to preserve the traditions of the past. Whatever our view, we know that the Christian community needs to speak out on ethical questions which have significance for the world we live in. It is part of our witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The issues may be different, the contexts changing, but the need of Christians to take a stand against that which exploits and devalues God’s good gifts is still keenly felt.

Moreover, as part of its prophetic witness, the Church has always believed that the gospel holds a place for abstinence in relation to God’s gifts. Celibacy, the abstaining from explicit sexual expression, has been a significant feature of the Catholic tradition from as early as the second

century,² while temperance, the abstaining from alcohol, has had an important place in certain forms of Protestantism. The same is true of the ancient Christian practice of fasting. While people in the Church today may want to question aspects of this kind of asceticism, including its motivation, there still exists the recognition that such self-denial is not in itself life-denying.³ On the contrary, self-denial can arise from the highest of motivations: it can mean sacrificing one good for the sake of another or it can be a way of standing in solidarity with others. For example, in the case of those working with alcoholics, the decision for temperance can be a powerful symbol of solidarity with those who have been victims of alcohol. Fasting can have the same function of solidarity with those who are hungry or it can be a way of focusing the mind more sharply on prayer.⁴ Similarly, a celibate life-style can enable the individual to live a life of openness to others, as a sign of the gospel, in a way which is different from (though not in itself superior to) other forms of Christian living. In either case, the ascetic implications of such decisions are ideally life-affirming rather than life-denying. The difficulty arises where one life-style is privileged over another, and those who have not followed the ascetic path are penalized for their decision, either spiritually or in the praxis of ministry.

The problem is not therefore that ethics has been taken seriously, since to do so is clearly part of the Church's vocation. Nor is it illegitimate for the Church to have encouraged the practice of abstinence and the ascetic ideal. Rather, as Christians, we have failed to recognize that there are more ways than one of distorting God's gifts. We know a good deal about the abuse of eating, drinking and sexuality. What we are not so familiar with is the other side of the coin: the 'abuse' which comes when we are afraid of God's gifts, when the pleasure and intimacy they bring is in some way threatening to our identity. It is a problem when Christians—and women in particular have suffered from this—cannot abandon themselves to sexual passion, despite its potential for self-transcendence, because of a narrow definition of self-control. It is a problem when we are so dominated by guilt and self-contempt that our lives bear no sign of the freedom and self-esteem that come from the gospel of grace. It is a problem when we live with an exaggerated concern with the morality of Christian living. All this is as much a distortion of God's creative gifts as outright abuse.

If we are concerned with the God of everyday living, the God who is as present in the pleasures and playfulness of human life as the pain, then we need to return to the sources of our faith. We need to reassess the past interpretations which have been handed down to us from our Judaeo-

Christian heritage. In particular, we can re-read the biblical text with the hope and possibility of finding something other than the dark face of God. Since our focus has been so much on the ascetic-responsibility pole of the gospel, the challenge is to devote our attention to the other aspect of the gospel, the permissive-freedom pole, which sanctions and sanctifies the pleasures of human life. If happiness and delight lie at the heart of our faith, they need to be recaptured—perhaps now more than ever before. We need to discover anew in scripture the God who is the creator of joy and the giver of joyful gifts.⁵

A biblical perspective: creation and redemption

The first thing we observe when we come to the Bible with an issue such as this is that the text has nothing immediate to say to our modern dilemma. The Bible, whether Old Testament or New, does not address explicitly the question of how to recapture the lost sense of God's presence within the everyday pleasures of life. Nor does it deal with a history such as ours in which pleasure has been, if not actually forbidden, at least frowned on and restricted. The New Testament in particular does not deal directly with these issues, because its concern is primarily an eschatological one, dealing with the 'new thing' that God has done in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Its focus therefore is on the radical response of faith to this eschatological event; moreover its theology comes from a community which is perched precariously on the edge of a hostile and uncomprehending world. This is a very different situation from our own in the Western Church, where the sheer weight of a materialistic and sexually-conscious culture presses very different questions on us. Nevertheless, in the dialogue between modern context and ancient text, what we can hope for is the inspiring and mysterious merging of horizons, the opening of new vistas, the sudden revelation of intersecting worlds. It is never easy to reach these points of commonality, but that they do happen and do exist is precisely what the canon of scripture is all about.

There are two preliminary points which emerge from a study of the Bible in relation to the pleasures of everyday life. In the first place—in a general way—eating, drinking and sexuality are implicitly part of the structures of creation. Food and drink are fundamental to creation and an essential aspect of God's creativity and the giftedness of the world (Ps 145:15–16).⁶ Even wine, though a product of human cultivation, is regarded as a gift of God and part of the natural celebration of life which God's creation calls forth (Ps 104:14–15; Eccl 10:19). In this sense both eating and drinking are linked with hospitality. They signify far more

than the satiating of bodily needs. They stand for community and intimacy, the interlocking of one human life with another in the bonds of family and friendship. In the same way sexuality is linked not just to procreation and the responsibilities of marriage but also to the joys of intimacy, bodily passion and self-transcendence. Although God transcends the boundaries of gender, nevertheless sexual differentiation is an important indication of human likeness to the divine (Gen 1:26–27). Like its divine counterpart, human life is creative and relational. In this view, the pleasures of the everyday are revelatory of the divine image. They reflect the divine energy for life, community and intimacy around which human life is created and sustained. In this sense, pleasure is implicitly God-bearing and God-revealing.

Secondly, and linked to this, human pleasure in regard to eating, drinking and sexuality is not only part of creation, but also part of the symbolic structures of redemption. It is no accident that both Judaism and Christianity have a meal at the heart of their understanding of God's salvation.⁷ Whether in Passover or Eucharist, the meal is the sacramental celebration of God's creation as it is renewed in God's redemptive love (Exod 12; Mk 14:1–25/pars.; 1 Cor 11:17–34).⁸ Of course, this salvation has suffering also at its heart in both traditions (the 'bread of affliction', Deut 16:3; the 'cup of suffering', Mk 10:38; 14:36). But suffering is not the whole story. The symbolism of the sacred meal points eschatologically to the final fulfilment of God's creation in the reaffirmation of covenant and community (Mk 14:25/pars.; 1 Cor 11:26). The riches of this hope and its partial realization within human experience is expressed in the Bible again and again through images of eating and drinking—images of extravagance and sumptuousness which reveal the generosity of God's salvation (Deut 16:11–12, 14–15; Amos 9:13–15; Ezek 47:6–12; Joel 3:18; Lk 15:22–24; Jn 2:1–11; Acts 14:17–18; 2 Cor 9:10).

The Old Testament imagery associated with exodus, wilderness and promised land is part of the same symbolism (Exod 3:7–8; Exod 16; Neh 9:14; Pss 78:9; 23:5; Deut 8:7–10).⁹ Food and drink—'a land flowing with milk and honey' (Exod 3:8)—express the divine consolations for a people once enslaved and oppressed, and now freed. More than that, the symbolism reflects the Hebrew view that by enjoying the pleasures of eating and drinking, one is entering into the full humanity-in-community which is the purpose of human life and of God's salvation.¹⁰ Here eating and drinking are closely bound up with notions of covenant. Precisely within these covenantal activities, Israel as the people of God acknowledges its joyful dependence on God's bounty, given in creation

and renewed in salvation. The renewal of this covenant relationship with God implies the acknowledgement by God's chosen people, through festival and the pleasures of daily life, that 'the earth is the Lord's and its fullness' (Ps 24:1; 1 Cor 10:26).¹¹

The messianic banquet

The fact that the pleasures of human life are grounded equally in creation and redemption can be seen in other ways too. The biblical image of the so-called 'messianic banquet', for example, belongs in the same category in the Old Testament. First Isaiah describes this eschatological banquet in sumptuous terms: it is to be 'a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear' and it will take place on Mount Zion (Isai 25:6-10a). In Second Isaiah, the same imagery expresses the hope-filled experience of the return of the people of God from exile (Isai 49:8-9; 51:3). There are echoes here of both creation and exodus in the imagery of restoration.¹² The period of exile, like the bondage in Egypt, is a time of poverty and abstinence, where food and drink are meagre and of poor quality. Restoration, on the contrary, is to be a time of abundance and richness. The food which is partaken of freely at the eschatological banquet is the best gourmet food available; the wine is of the highest quality and is drunk in large quantities.¹³ In later periods, the same symbolism takes on strong apocalyptic overtones (see 1 Enoch 62:14; 4 Ezra 6:49-52; 1 QS 6:4-6; 1 SSa 2:11).¹⁴

This type of imagery comes through powerfully in the New Testament.¹⁵ The 'messianic banquet' is reflected in a number of sayings and miracles in the gospels (e.g. Mk 2:19-20/pars.; Mk 6:30-44/pars.; Mk 8:1-10/par.; Jn 6). In the Synoptic tradition there is a particular focus on those who are invited to the eschatological feast. In the parable of the wedding feast, for example, Jesus' concern (without redactional additions) is primarily with the guest-list (Mt 22:1-14/Lk 14:15-24). The banquet is as sumptuous as ever; this time, however, it is not for the rich who are accustomed to the luxuries of good food and wine,¹⁶ but for the poor who no longer have to live with poverty and frugality. In Jesus' teaching, this theme reflects not only a concern for social justice; it points also to the fulfilment and happiness of human life as an integral part of the kingdom.¹⁷ The same is true for the Johannine story of the wedding at Cana (Jn 2:1-11). The extravagant quality and quantity of the wine point symbolically to the coming of the 'new' in Jesus. For the Fourth Gospel, the new life that Jesus brings is linked fundamentally to the old, yet transcends it in quality as water transcends wine. Once again eating

and drinking point to the eschatological abundance of God's revelation in Jesus.¹⁸ The difference with John's Gospel, however, is that the extravagance reflected in the Cana 'sign' is fully and firmly located within the existential realities of present existence. It belongs not only to God's eschatological future, but also—indeed pre-eminently—to God's present.

Jesus' table fellowship

Jesus' teaching on the right way to organize a feast or banquet is matched also by his practice. In the Synoptic Gospels, with their emphasis on food and drink as revelatory of the reign of God, Jesus, unlike John the Baptist, is often to be found engaging in the pleasures of eating and drinking. This is particularly so of Luke's Jesus but there is no reason to assume that this is only redactional (e.g. Lk 5:29; 7:36; 11:37; 14:1). Certainly Luke has a strong concern with hospitality and the symbolism of eating,¹⁹ but we may also assume from the evidence of the other gospels and the Q source that this was a feature of the historical Jesus and his ministry. It is markedly different from the desert preaching and life-style of John the Baptist (see Mk 1:4–6/pars.).²⁰ In this regard, Jesus' practice is in sharp contrast to that of John the Baptist who represents, in the following Q-saying, the ascetic pole of the gospel:

For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, 'He has a demon'; the Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' (Lk 7:33–34/Mt 11:18–19)

Whereas Jesus stands for the wedding dance in this passage, John the Baptist represents the funeral dirge (Lk 7:31–32/Mt 11:16–17).²¹ For the evangelists, therefore, John the Baptist testifies to one dimension of the reign of God (preparation, repentance, judgement), but the full reality of the kingdom (hospitality, abundance, salvation) is only revealed in the praxis of Jesus (see Mk 1:7–8/pars.; Jn 3:29–30).

In keeping with this perspective, many of the key events of Jesus' ministry, not surprisingly, take place in the context of a banquet. Scholars such as Jeremias have described this phenomenon of the Jesus-movement as 'table fellowship', which symbolizes God's embrace of those who are marginalized: the poor, outcasts and women.²² However, while modern readers recognize the theme of acceptance that lies behind Jesus' practice of table sharing, we tend to bypass the symbolism of the table. Eating and drinking, even at a human level, have potential to overcome barriers. Jesus' ministry shows a keen awareness of this

point and reflects both his self-understanding and his view of the kingdom: as the messenger of divine Wisdom (*Sophia*), he invites all to share the hospitality and nourishment of God. Jesus' eating and drinking in company with others, therefore—his self-indulgence in the eyes of many—is itself communicative of the joyful presence of God. To share in the feast in company with Jesus, with good food and wine, is somehow at the very heart of God's reign (Mk 14:25/pars.).²³

Sexuality and marriage

The same point can be made of sexual imagery in the Bible.²⁴ Marriage is a common metaphor for the relationship between God and the people of God, and is an attempt to describe the covenant bond in rich, relational terms. There is no coyness here, particularly in the Old Testament prophets (see, for example, Isai 54:5; Hos 12:12; Ezek 16:8–14; 23:4; Mal 2:14). The intimacy of sexual passion is used to express God's love and desire for Israel, a desire which is often disappointed and rarely requited with the same degree of passion and fidelity. In turns God is portrayed as a yearning and demanding lover, sometimes angry, sometimes disillusioned, but never able to reject utterly the beloved (Hos 2:2–6, 14–20). The use of marriage imagery to describe the relationship between God and Israel is carried through into the New Testament in Ephesians, where it describes the relationship between Christ and the Church: 'Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church . . .' (Eph 5:22–33; see 2 Cor 11:2–3). Once again we find a conscious re-echoing of creation themes (Eph 5:31). The relationship in creation between Adam and Eve, with its implicit sexuality ('bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh', Gen 2:18–25), is paralleled in redemption by sexual and marriage imagery.

It must be acknowledged here that this kind of imagery has been subject to considerable critique by feminist exegesis, and justifiably so.²⁵ The relationship between bride and groom, husband and wife, is described in these texts in patriarchal and androcentric terms. The notion of God as a faithful husband and Israel an erring and adulterous wife reinforces patriarchal stereotypes of female identity and sexuality (see especially the imagery of Ezekiel 16). Women are identified with sexuality and sexual waywardness, whereas men are associated with purity and divinity. The same is true of the parallel imagery in Ephesians. Although the Epistle challenges, at one level, the notion of male domination over female, it presents instead what has been described as a 'love patriarchy'. In this view, patriarchal structures of marriage are muted (male dominance/authority, female submission/obedience), though by no means dissolved,

by the demand for sacrificial love and self-giving on the part of the husband.²⁶ The marriage imagery of the Bible is clearly patriarchal, therefore, and to be used with caution in the modern context. Nevertheless this recognition need not obscure the implicit affirmation of sexuality on which the imagery depends.

Perhaps the best example in the Bible of such affirmation—and without the obvious patriarchal associations of other passages—is the Song of Songs. However much these poems have been interpreted as metaphors for the love between God and Israel, Christ and the Church, they derive their primary significance from human experience. The language of these poems is far from the contractual and ethical language of other discussions of human sexuality. On the contrary, they are a description of sexual passion expressed in sumptuous and often erotic imagery. They depict the yearning for the beloved and the fulfilment of love in explicitly sexual terms:²⁷

He brings me to the winehall,
Gazing at me with love.

Feed me raisin cakes and quinces!
For I am sick with love.

O for his arms around me,
Beneath me and above!

O women of the city,
Swear by the wild field doe

Not to wake or rouse us
Till we fulfil our love.²⁸

(Cant 2:4–7)

As we can see, the sexual passion of this and other poems is expressed mutually by both partners: the woman is as active in seeking out and praising her beloved as the man.²⁹ Moreover, the garden imagery which is prominent in these lyrical poems recalls vividly the narrative of Gen 2–3. Whereas gender becomes alienating and oppressive in the tragedy of the first garden (Gen 3:16), now in the Song of Songs the second garden symbolizes the union, intimacy and mutuality of male–female relations in the context of joyful human passion (see especially Cant 4:12–5: 1).³⁰ It is not insignificant that the Book of Revelation, with which the canon of scripture closes, also uses the same associated imagery of garden, marriage and joy to depict the apocalyptic fulfilment of God's reign (Apoc 19:7–9; 21:1–2, 9–10; 22:1–2).³¹

The body in John and Paul

There is one further dimension to this discussion which is of great importance in interpreting biblical attitudes to pleasure. Underlying these biblical motifs is a surprisingly positive attitude to the body and bodily existence. To explore the meaning and significance of the body in the Bible is beyond the scope of this article. Nevertheless, two brief points can be made. First, the New Testament, in particular, has been interpreted in parts of our tradition to imply a negative evaluation of the body. Such a misinterpretation arises partly out of Marcionite readings of the New Testament which fail to perceive the importance of the Old Testament in understanding the New.³² Indeed, without the Old Testament background, it is easy to fall into a highly 'spiritualized' exegesis or even Greek philosophical mode of interpreting the New Testament. When it is set within a full canonical perspective, however, the New Testament cannot be read in a dualistic fashion which separates the bodily from the spiritual. If dualism exists in the New Testament at all, it is eschatological rather than ontological. That is, it is concerned with the painful contrast between human suffering in the present and God's glorious future (already partially present), rather than the contrast between inferior matter/body and superior spirit/soul.

Secondly, this biblical anti-dualism is focused perhaps best of all in the New Testament writings of John and Paul.³³ John's theology of incarnation is based on an unqualified affirmation of bodily, human existence (Jn 1:14).³⁴ The divine being enters fully into the structures of human reality; the Creator becomes part of creation. In Johannine terms, the divine Word (*logos*) becomes human flesh (*sarx*). This means that the life-giving glory of God (*doxa*), God's loving presence, is now revealed through the human personality and body of Jesus; his human life becomes for us the 'symbol of God'.³⁵ Yet John goes further than this. The incarnation means that all reality now possesses the same symbolic potential. The material things of life can themselves imitate the divine Word and become symbols of the self-revealing God. Many of these images are focused on eating and drinking (see Jn 4:14; 6:35, 51, 53-54; 7:37; 15:1-5; 19:34). Human beings, within the structures of their bodily existence, have also the same potential. They too can image the divine being, just as they have been created to do (Gen 1:26-27).³⁶ In becoming children of God, through the labour of the Spirit of God, they rediscover their own identity as part of God's renewed creation (Jn 1:13; 3:3, 5). The body and physicality are not irrelevant within this symbolic world view. On the contrary, the body is the sphere of God's revelation: the divine glory reveals itself within the very structures of human life.

We find the same affirmation of the body in Paul, though within the context of a very different theology.³⁷ 1 Corinthians, for example, is concerned with the 'gnosticizing' tendencies of the Corinthian community who have an indifferent, if not negative view of the body. Paul's point throughout the Epistle is to assert the interrelatedness of Spirit/spirit and body.³⁸ He does so in a number of ways, such as pointing to the body of the crucified Jesus as central for faith and depicting the community as the temple of the Holy Spirit and the body of Christ (1 Cor 1:18–25; 3:16; 12:12, 27; see also Phil 2:7–8; Rom 12:5). However, in his discussion of sexuality and marriage, Paul also asserts the importance of the body of the individual believer (1 Cor 5–7). Over against the Corinthians who are advocating either sexual licence or asceticism, Paul argues that both responses arise out of an equally destructive indifference to the body (1 Cor 6:12–20).³⁹ For Paul, on the contrary, that body is valuable (and Christian ethics important) precisely because of its high destiny and calling (see also Rom 12:1; 6:12; 2 Cor 7:1).⁴⁰ The point is made most forcibly at the end of the Epistle where Paul argues that future, bodily resurrection is an essential ingredient of the gospel (1 Cor 15:12–49).⁴¹

A similar perspective is found in his discussion of meat offered to idols (1 Cor 8).⁴² Paul can see a place for abstinence but only if it arises out of a proper perspective on the body (1 Cor 6:12–13; 10:23). One may abstain, for example, from certain activities associated with the body—sexual expression, eating meat—but only out of a sense of eschatological urgency or a concern for those who are vulnerable within the community (1 Cor 8:7–13; 10:24–29; also Rom 14). What one cannot do is act as if the body were unimportant or even evil. On the contrary, the body—like all material reality—is the sphere of God's loving and saving activity. It possesses a joyful and glorious destiny and is to be loved and valued for that very reason. Here Paul sets out the basic Christian principle: 'glorify God in your body' (1 Cor 6:20). Any decision we make about the use of our bodies, therefore, has to arise out of a fundamental awareness that our identity, whether present or future, is bodily. This is the sense in which Paul speaks of our individual bodies—that is, our true selves—as the temple of the Spirit (1 Cor 6:19). Body and Spirit/spirit are interlinked in an authentic Christian spirituality, for John as well as Paul. For the New Testament writers, tied as they are to a Hebrew world view, the body, and therefore the pleasures of the body, are the sphere of the Spirit's presence and the place of God's final, eschatological revelation.

Conclusion

Sexual pleasure, and the pleasures of eating and drinking, are appropriate images for redemption, in both Old and New Testaments, because they belong to the foundational structure of creation and have the potential to be God-revealing. Moreover, the Bible also contains a basic affirmation of the body and bodily existence and avoids dualistic modes of thinking which denigrate the body in favour of the soul. As we have seen, the body is the locus of revelation and therefore an essential part of God's salvation. In no sense, therefore, can we derive a negative attitude to the body from the Bible. In no sense, if our theology is biblically grounded, can we hold a perspective which sees the pleasures of the body as irrelevant or evil. Not only is the body affirmed in relation to God, sexuality, eating and drinking are also understood as of value in themselves, with the capacity to symbolize God's salvation.⁴³ The image of the marriage feast, in particular, captures this metaphorical dynamic, especially as it is allied to the practice of the historical Jesus.

All this has important implications for the way we live our lives as Christians. A genuine theology of pleasure takes seriously the creative power of play and is based in the recognition of the world as the sphere of God's creative and redemptive activity.⁴⁴ This means a rediscovery of God's gifts in creation. It means also a challenge to our ethical neurosis: the assumption that we honour God's gifts when, and only when, we do not abuse them by overuse. God's gifts are equally 'abused' through neglect and fear. Moreover, a theology of pleasure challenges forms of spirituality which identify God only in suffering and painful human experience. Alongside this latter perspective, we need to develop a spirituality which sees play and pleasure as equally God-revealing. In the pleasures of eating and drinking, in the joy of sexual passion, we need to discover the God who is joyful and extravagant, the God of play and passion, the God of love and celebration. Our caution and timidity, as much as our moralism and hypocrisy, need to be challenged by such a spirituality. Where God's gifts are neglected out of fear and mistrust, God's own generous and life-giving self is neglected. We end up with a distorted image of God and a narrow, self-limiting understanding of human life.

At the same time, such a perspective challenges the Christian community in its pronouncements on these areas of everyday living. Where the Church speaks out against sexual, and other forms of abuse, it cannot do so in a one-sided way. We are called to present God to the world, not only as an ethical being who stands over against all forms of human oppression and all distortions of creation, but also as an

extravagant, joyful being, who stands for passion and intimacy which is joyful, self-affirming and self-giving. We need to be careful of presenting only God the moralist, the ascetic, the puritan, without giving a thought to God the lover and giver of abundant life. The Church, and Church agencies for that matter, need to be careful of this danger in their public statements. All too easily the God we give to the world is a moral guardian who is life-denying to any except the actual victims of abuse and oppression. This is a wholly inadequate and dangerously partial picture of God which gives preference to the divine moralist over the divine benefactor. We cannot place ethics over grace, right conduct over freedom or duty over love. The gospel begins and ends in the giftedness of life and the priority of grace; within this structure of reality, ethics must always take second place.

Sebastian Moore has suggested that it is precisely our inability to be both human and holy at the same time which constitutes our fallen human condition.⁴⁵ For some reason, human beings find it easier to choose either the path of denial and shun the 'pleasures of the flesh' or the path of profligacy and unreflective licence. As Christians, we need to be aware of the danger of assuming that being Christian means choosing the first and repressing the second; we need to reject the intolerable either/or between being Christian and being human. Only with a developed theology and spirituality of pleasure can we avoid these dangers. If Moore is right, it is precisely our inability to see holiness and wholeness as belonging together which leads us into problems and which is somehow at the root of our sinfulness. In this sense sin is primarily the divorce between Christian and human, between holiness and wholeness, self-denial and pleasure.

Finding God within the playfulness and pleasures of everyday living is not something we in the West have been encouraged to do. In many ways our ability to enjoy these pleasures has been stunted by an all-too-critical awareness of the dangers of abusing them. A truly biblical and theological spirituality, which places redemption within the framework of creation, encourages us to see the pleasures of the everyday in a new way. They are neither barriers to God and Christian maturity, nor are they merely indifferent. On the contrary, they have the potential to reveal an important and neglected aspect of the gospel. The pleasures of our daily lives—eating, drinking and sexuality—are gifts of God which are to be received with the same joy and freedom in which they are given. Pleasure and play are not antithetical to God. They are part of God's nature revealed in Jesus and communicated to us through the Spirit of joy and love. Just as everyday life is the sphere of God's

revelation, so everyday pleasure is an important way in which God's munificence is communicated.

NOTES

¹ For a sympathetic reading of the early centuries and their influence on Western Christianity, see Brown, Peter: *The body and society. Men, women, and sexual renunciation in early Christianity* (New York, 1988), especially pp 387–447.

² On this and the ideology behind it in the early centuries, see Brown, *op. cit.*, especially pp 33–64.

³ See e.g. Schneiders, Sandra M.: *New wine-skins. Re-imagining religious life today* (New York, 1986), pp 114–136 and Moloney, Francis J.: *A life of promise: poverty, chastity, obedience* (Homebush, NSW, 1985), pp 74–118. On the positive role of fasting, see Wimmer, J.F.: *Fasting in the New Testament. A study in biblical theology* (New York, 1982), pp 117–124.

⁴ So Wimmer, *op. cit.*, pp 50–51.

⁵ This perspective is summed up in the first answer of the Westminster Shorter Catechism: '[Humanity's] chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him for ever'. See the discussion of this in Sittler, Joseph: *The care of the earth* (Philadelphia, 1964), pp 91–98. Sittler argues (quoting Thomas Aquinas) that we confuse the categories of 'use' and 'enjoyment'. Wine, for example, is to be enjoyed and not used; love, on the other hand is to be used (in the service of others) and not merely enjoyed. 'Use' when authentic is always grace-filled; 'enjoyment' when grace-filled begins in delight of the Creator and extends to creation.

⁶ Jenks, A. W.: 'Eating and drinking in the Old Testament' in Freedman, D. N. (ed): *The Anchor Bible dictionary* (New York, 1992) vol 2, p 251. See also Ross, J. F.: 'Food', *Interpreters' dictionary of the Bible* vol 2, pp 307–308.

⁷ On sacred meals within Judaism in the first century CE, see Kodell, J.: *The eucharist in the New Testament* (Delaware, 1988), pp 38–52. On the symbolism of food in general within Judaism, see Feeley-Harnik, G.: *The Lord's table. Eucharist and Passover in early Christianity* (Philadelphia, 1981), pp 71–106.

⁸ See Jenks, *op. cit.*, p 254, on the Passover: 'Participation in the meal was tantamount to participation in the great Exodus event of redemption, for the Passover supper takes on a nearly sacramental significance'.

⁹ See Brueggemann, Walter: *The land. Place as gift, promise, and challenge in biblical faith* (London, 1977), pp 28–44, 47–53.

¹⁰ On the community aspect of table of fellowship, see Smith, D. E.: 'Table fellowship as a literary motif in the Gospel of Luke', *Journal of biblical literature* vol 106 (1987), pp 633–638, and Jenks, *op. cit.*, pp 252–254.

¹¹ Jenks, *op. cit.*, p 252.

¹² Brueggemann, *op. cit.*, pp 146–150.

¹³ See Jeremias, Joachim: *Jesus' promise to the nations* (London, 1958), pp 59–60, who also comments: 'That the act of eating and drinking may mediate the vision of God, is an ancient element of biblical symbolism which runs through the whole Bible from beginning (Gen 3:22) to end (Rev 22:17)'.

¹⁴ Jenks, *ibid.*

¹⁵ See Perrin, Norman: *Rediscovering the teaching of Jesus* (London, 1967), pp 161–164; also Barton, Stephen: 'Jesus and health', *Journal of biblical literature* vol 87 (1984), pp 268–269. See also Feeley-Harnik, *op. cit.*, pp 108–111.

¹⁶ According to Smith, *op. cit.*, pp 623–626, eating and drinking in a banquet is considered a distinctive mark of luxury in the ancient world.

¹⁷ On this, see Franzmann, Majella: 'Of food, bodies, and the boundless reign of God in the Synoptic Gospels', *Pacificia* vol 5 (1992), pp 17–31.

¹⁸ For the strong *Sophia* (Lady Wisdom) overtones behind John's Christology here, see Prov 9:1–6; Sir 6:19; 15:3; 24:19–22; Wis 16:20–21; 2 Esdras 1:9.

¹⁹ So Karris, R. J.: *Luke: artist and theologian. Luke's passion account as literature* (New York, 1985), pp 48–52; also Barth, M.: *Rediscovering the Lord's Supper. Communion with Israel, with Christ, and among the guests* (Atlanta, 1988), pp 71–74.

²⁰ So Smith, *op. cit.*, p 616.

²¹ On this, see Franzmann, *op. cit.*, pp 17–23, and Wimmer, *op. cit.*, pp 102–110. See also Karris, *op. cit.*, pp 57–65.

²² Jeremias, J.: *New Testament theology* (London, 1971), pp 114–121, 169, 223–227.

²³ See Koehnig, J.: *New Testament hospitality. Partnership with strangers as promise and mission* (Philadelphia, 1985), especially p 29: 'Jesus considered himself and his followers to be a kind of parable of how people live together from God's abundance. As the vanguard of a restored Israel . . . they extend a constant invitation to God's home and plenty.'

²⁴ On sexuality and marriage in the codes of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, see Frymer-Kensky, Tiva: 'Sex and sexuality' in Freedman, *op. cit.* vol 5, pp 1144–1146, and Babb, O. J.: 'Sex, sexual behaviour', *Interpreters' dictionary of the Bible* vol 4, pp 299–300. For Tabar, C. R.: 'Sex, sexual behaviour', *Interpreters' dictionary of the Bible Suppl.*, pp 817–820, the Old Testament betrays an ambivalence towards sexuality: the affirmation of its goodness exists alongside cautions against its dangers: 'The ancient Hebrews considered sex to be a gift of God, to be used both for procreation and for erotic pleasure. But as a result of the Fall, it was felt to have become, because of its enormous power, a potentially explosive and disruptive force . . . it therefore had to be guarded by a host of restrictions' (pp 819–820).

²⁵ See, e.g. Darr, Katheryn Pfisterer: 'Ezekiel' in Newsom, Carol A. & Ringe, Sharon H. (eds): *The women's Bible commentary* (London and Louisville KY, 1992), pp 188–189, Yee, Gale A.: 'Hosea' in Newsom & Ringe, *op. cit.*, pp 195–202, and Setel, T. Drorah: 'Prophets and pornography: female sexual imagery in Hosea' in Russell, Letty M.: *Feminist interpretation of the Bible* (Oxford, 1985), pp 86–95.

²⁶ Fiorenza, Elisabeth Schüssler: *In memory of her. A feminist theological reconstruction of Christian origins* (London, 1983), pp 266–270.

²⁷ See Tribble, Phyllis: *God and the rhetoric of sexuality* (Philadelphia, 1978), p 144, who comments that the Song of Songs 'speaks from lover to lover with whispers of intimacy, shouts of ecstasy, and silences of consummation'.

²⁸ Falk, Marcia: *The Song of Songs. A new translation and interpretation* (San Francisco, 1990), poem 8.

²⁹ Tribble, *op. cit.*, pp 161–162. See also Falk, *op. cit.*, pp 150–161, who shows how the garden imagery and the images of eating and drinking are sensuous and explicitly erotic metaphors for both sexes.

³⁰ Tribble, *op. cit.*, pp 144, 152–161, regards Genesis 2–3 as the 'hermeneutical key' to the Song of Songs.

³¹ On imagery such as this which goes right through the Bible, see especially Frye, Northrop: *The great code. The Bible and literature* (New York & London, 1982), pp 139–168. On marriage in the New Testament, see Scroggs, R.: 'Marriage in the NT', *Interpreters' dictionary of the Bible Suppl.*, pp 576–577.

³² On the Old Testament understanding of the body, see Wolff, H. W.: *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (London, 1974), pp 7–79.

³³ See also Franzmann, *op. cit.*, pp 26–28, on the freedom and ease which the historical Jesus has in relation to his own body and bodily contact by others.

³⁴ See Bultmann, R.: *The Gospel of John* (Oxford, 1971), pp 60–72, Schnackenburg, R.: *The Gospel according to St John* (Tunbridge Wells, 1968) vol 1, pp 265–273, and Thompson, Marian Meye: *The humanity of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia, 1988), especially pp 33–52. Against this interpretation of the Fourth Gospel, see Käsemann, E.: *The testament of Jesus. A study of the Gospel of John in the light of chapter 17* (2nd ed; Philadelphia, 1968), pp 9–13, 26.

³⁵ So Schneiders, Sandra M.: 'History and symbolism in the Fourth Gospel' in P-R. Tragan (ed): *Segni e sacramenti nel Vangelo di Giovanni* (Louvain, 1977), pp 374–375.

³⁶ See Painter, John: 'John 9 and the interpretation of the Fourth Gospel', *Journal for the study of the New Testament* vol 36 (1989), pp 31–61.

³⁷ On the body in Pauline thought, see Robinson, J. A. T.: *The body. A study in Pauline theology* (London, 1966).

³⁸ So Beker, J. Christiaan: *Paul the apostle. The triumph of God in life and thought* (Philadelphia, 1980), pp 164–176. Beker comments: ‘The Spirit . . . is connected with life in the body, with life for other bodies, and with eternal life as qualified by a body’ (p 172). See also Neyrey, Jerome H.: ‘Body language in 1 Corinthians: the use of anthropological models for understanding Paul and his opponents’, *Semeia* vol 35 (1986), pp 129–130, and Fee, Gordon D.: *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, 1987), p 266. This terminology must be distinguished from Paul’s use of ‘flesh’ which is often used negatively; it refers not to the body, but to fallen human nature.

³⁹ As Neyrey, *op. cit.*, p 141, points out, Paul’s attitude towards sexual expression in marriage is pragmatic. While this suggests that Paul has a negative attitude towards sexuality (as Neyrey argues, pp 138–142; see also Brown, *op. cit.*, pp 44–57), this depends on whether one regards 1 Corinthians 7 as expressing Paul’s theology of marriage, relevant for all situations. On the chapter as a whole, see Byrne, Brendan: *Paul and the Christian woman*, pp 15–29, and Wimbush, V. L.: *Paul. The worldly ascetic. Response to the world and self-understanding according to 1 Corinthians 7* (Macon, GA, 1987).

⁴⁰ See Byrne, Brendan: ‘Sinning against one’s own body: Paul’s understanding of the sexual relationship in 1 Corinthians 6:18’, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* vol 45 (1983), pp 608–616.

⁴¹ In Beker’s terminology (*op. cit.*, pp 173–176; also pp 23–26), this is part of the ‘coherence’ or core of the gospel which cannot be sacrificed in the dialogue with context (‘contingency’).

⁴² For a discussion of the issue of food as a parallel in 1 Corinthians to the issue of sexuality, see Neyrey, *op. cit.*, pp 142–149.

⁴³ See Franzmann, *op. cit.*, pp 29–31.

⁴⁴ According to Moltmann, Jürgen: *Theology and joy* (London, 1970), pp 65–75, religion and play are more fundamentally linked than religion and need. He comments that ‘religion does not belong merely to the realm of necessity as the groaning of the creature in bondage . . . but it also and more properly belongs to the realm of freedom as the play of remembrance, as an expression of joy, and as the imaginative hope of [our] basic and final humanity before God’ (p 75). See also Harvey, D.: ‘Joy’, *Interpreters’ dictionary of the Bible* vol 2, pp 1000–1001.

⁴⁵ Moore, S.: *God is a new language* (London, 1967), p 74: ‘This inability to be at once religious and real is the sign of [human] alienation from God’.