

## **“A more temperate approach to alcohol abuse”**

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### *Introduction*

Alcohol plays a part in the deaths of 7,000 Australians and costs the nation more than \$A7 billion every year. It contributes to countless motor vehicle, maritime and workplace accidents and instances of domestic violence and malicious damage. Cases of depression and suicide have been attributed to the misuse of alcohol. There have also been some recent worrying developments. Binge drinking has become popular among Australia's youth and instances of alcoholic poisoning are increasingly common, especially within the indigenous community. Although it contributes to the nation's ill-health and detracts from the country's economic performance, we are still inclined to make light of alcohol abuse and tend to downplay its effects.

A number of well-resourced public and private organisations are committed to medical research and law reform in relation to the use and abuse of alcohol. These groups cite the escalating costs of abuse to society, advocate strategies designed to curb problem drinking, and raise public awareness of what are deemed dangerous levels and patterns of consumption. Significant progress has been made since a consolidated national approach was adopted a decade ago. And yet, alcohol abuse remains a problem of terrifying proportions and horrific consequences. Clearly, more needs to do more. But one radical solution—total abstinence—is rarely promoted. Why? Two reasons readily come to mind. First, it is potentially too demanding. Second, it is allegedly illiberal. Both entail judgments about means and ends.

I believe there is a strong case for promoting total abstinence, sometimes known as 'temperance', as a serious strategy for dealing with an enormous problem. In addition to its practical merits, temperance embodies a proper regard for human dignity and genuine respect for human society. But it must not be advanced by coercive means or imposed by legislation. In being understood as a freely chosen personal discipline rather than an externally enforced collective restriction, its promotion need not conflict with honouring and upholding important principles of personal freedom and political liberty.

In this article I want to argue that alcohol abuse is a long-standing social and economic problem whose proportions and consequences have increased with time; that the initial Christian response of care and compassion was eventually marred and muted by authoritarianism and legalism; that the Churches have been embarrassed by their past actions and attitudes in this area of public life into withdrawal and inactivity; and, that the continuing corrosion of individual lives and the erosion of social capital by alcohol abuse demands that temperance be again promoted as a conscientious and courageous response to a pressing national issue.

### *The Origins of the Problem*

Human beings seem always to have had a fascination with alcohol and a predisposition towards intoxication. In primitive societies, different types of seeds, such as barley, were crushed with stones and left to ferment in a mixture of water and honey to produce an intoxicating liquid. By the year 2,000 BC, a beverage similar to what is now called 'beer' had become the most popular drink among the Egyptians who fermented lightly baked barley dough in date-water. It was a concoction also used for medicinal purposes. By the time of Christ, the fermentation of grape juice was an advanced science with various techniques in vogue for producing wine. The Greeks and Romans preferred wine to beer and planted vineyards wherever their imperial conquests took them.

In the Middle Ages, the most common intoxicant was ale, a strong brew of malt, yeast and water. With the introduction of hops into the process around the fourteenth century, the new beverage was called 'beer'. After a battle with ale, beer succeeded in becoming the preferred drink among the English. By the 18th century, the available range of alcoholic beverages had been expanded to include distinctive red and white wines, champagne, brandy, whiskey, cognac, sake, vodka, gin and a selection of beers as varied as the different national fermentation processes that produced them. Because the technological advances of the late 17<sup>th</sup> century meant that alcohol could be produced in greater quantities and for lesser cost, the eighteenth century witnessed a steady increase in alcohol consumption among all social classes.

There was now alarm at the effects of growing intoxication. In a letter to his son, Philip Stanhope, the fourth Earl of Chesterfield (1694-1773), observed that consumption of large amounts of alcohol over a prolonged period was 'frequently attended by fatal and permanent consequences, both to body and mind'. It also led to widespread anti-social and irresponsible behaviour which, in Christian countries at least, was antithetical to the expression and development of religious character and moral virtue. Alcohol was challenged as an alternative to water in the eighteenth century by coffee, tea and chocolate. But they were generally more expensive than the cheap gin which had become the favourite of the English working classes as they sought relief from the hardships of life in the new industrial towns and cities. Alcohol abuse had reached epidemic proportions in Britain by the 1790s. Over the next few decades, an alliance began to emerge among reformers, industrialists and clergy who were concerned with the escalating effects of abuse. The modern Temperance movement was born.

### *One Solution*

The English word 'temperance' is derived from the Greek word *egkrateia* meaning self-controlled or possessing moral strength to resist. For the apostle St Paul, temperance entailed a determination that nothing harmful to body, mind or spirit would be permitted to gain mastery over him. St Augustine described temperance as 'that action whereby the soul extricates itself from the love of lower beauty and wings its way to true stability and finds security in God'. Whereas the classical definition of temperance was self-control governed by reason, in the post-Reformation period it evolved into an antonym for excess. The 17<sup>th</sup> century political philosopher Thomas Hobbes held that 'temperance was the habit by which we abstain from all things that tend to our destruction; intemperance the contrary vice'. The 18<sup>th</sup> century English Christian poet, William Cowper, contended that:

The practical conclusion is, that while temperance, the virtue, is always a state of mind opposed to sensual gratification, and therefore grounded upon

recognition of the higher law; temperance, the right action, is obedience to the intellectual perception of those relations of fitness among things which we call the adaptation of right means to good ends. He, consequently, who drinks or smokes merely because he 'likes' it, or because it is pleasant or fashionable, acts upon an impulse that contains no element of intellectual law or ethical truth. What is neither good in motive, sound in sense, nor useful in result, can have no title to the sacred name of temperance.

Peter Fryer explains in *Studies in English Prudery* that concerted temperance campaigns began in England during the 1820s. The initial motivation was to see some restraint on the consumption of alcohol and its enjoyment in moderation. But this was abandoned after 1832 when the English Total Abstinence Movement began at Preston when seven working men led by Joseph Livesey signed a voluntary 'pledge of abstinence from all liquors of an intoxicating quality'. This became the temperance movement's new goal as its ideals and methods were exported to Scotland, Ireland and the United States. Livesey was personally committed to persuasion. But others in the movement felt this approach was inadequate. They proceeded down the path of legislative suppression and founded the United Kingdom Alliance in 1853. Its Declaration of Principles insisted:

that is neither right nor politic for the State to afford legal protection and sanction to any traffic or system that tends to increase crime, to waste national resources, to corrupt the social habits, and to destroy the health and lives of people;

that the traffic in intoxicating liquors as common beverages is inimical to the true interests of individuals, and destructive to the order and welfare of society, and ought, therefore, to be prohibited.

This reflected another change of emphasis. Whereas the movement's pioneers were concerned with the dire consequences of consumption, the second generation of campaigners challenged the morality of its manufacture and the ethics of its availability. The rigorists steadily gained influence and ascendancy. The movement now appeared more legalistic than humanitarian and this led to a public controversy that became acute when hard-liners sought to force their views on parliamentarians and the public. During a House of Commons debate on draft legislation designed to regulate alcohol manufacture and distribution, Livesey argued that:

the country is not prepared for prohibitory legislation, either positive or permissive. We have over-estimated our power, and under-estimated the drink power, and instead of devoting our time, and money, and talents to the spread of personal abstinence—genuine teetotalism—the Temperance people have been drawn away after this Permissive Bill till the sound of it seems to drown every other.

The Church of England Temperance Society, one the largest religious-orientated societies, tended to share Livesey's view. It preferred that individuals seek their own redemption rather than having it forced upon them. But the debate was not confined to Britain.

In Australia, the problem was no less acute and the potential solutions no less controversial. Alcohol had been a part of colonial life since the arrival of the First Fleet in

1788 when Governor Arthur Phillip granted 'each soldier a pint of porter ... every man had a pint of rum and each woman a half-pint'. Later, part payment for the first church to be erected in the colony was made with 20.5 gallons of Jamaica rum. Thereafter, public houses were very often the first buildings erected in any new settlement as the thirst for alcohol and the need for some relief from the deprivation and hardship of colonial life became stronger. While men and women may have sought solace in alcohol, drunkenness and alcoholism became debilitating social and economic problems which demanded some response.

The New South Wales Temperance Society was established in late 1832. It was an enlightened and compassionate movement which sought to help the victims of alcohol abuse including the drinker. This was reflected in its motto: 'Temperance is moderation in things innocent and abstinence from things hurtful'. The Governor, Sir George Gipps, agreed to be the president while Lady Gipps became a leading advocate of its charter. Five years later, the rival Total Abstinence Society was established and the same arguments were played out in Australia. Thereafter, temperance and abstinence were rival concepts. The organizations they spawned had different motivations and pursued dissimilar outcomes. For its part, the abstinence movement was concerned about undignified behaviour, especially in public; the inability of affected individuals to work; the squandering of hard-earned money leading to the denial of food and education to children; the sale of alcohol to minors; the increase of promiscuity allegedly occasioned by the employment of barmaids; the prevalence of domestic violence; and, the harmful physical effects of long-term alcohol abuse.

From the 1850s, there was a growing belief, strongly encouraged and enthusiastically promoted within the Churches, that the consumption of alcohol was the chief social evil to be confronted. Christian leaders argued that if alcohol was repudiated and prohibited its eradication and absence would result in a general reduction in social evils and lead to the betterment of all humanity. But by 1860, this optimism had faded. Moral suasion was overwhelmed by the appeal of statutory suppression which had become an option after Britain granted limited colonial self-government. The change of direction for the movement was heralded by the formation of the New South Wales Political Association for the Suppression of Alcohol in 1866. Thereafter, campaigners from across the political spectrum introduced bills into colonial legislatures which sought to regulate the supply of alcohol, reduce trading hours and to make the granting of new liquor licenses contingent upon the outcome of a community ballot known as 'local option'. In effect, towns or cities could prevent the opening of new public houses and bars by means of a referendum. This policy was later extended to give communities power to have existing liquor licenses cancelled without payment of compensation to the licensee.

Although it was a predominantly Christian movement in which the coming of the Kingdom of God and the enjoyment of its blessings were thought to be virtually co-terminus with the closure of saloons and rejection of the demon drink, the temperance cause had a solid core of non-religious supporters. Many were social reformers and humanitarians concerned with social welfare and the plight of women and children. Typical was E.W. Cole, the wealthy Melbourne entrepreneur and noted free thinker. In the booklet he published entitled *The Evils of Drink Traffic*, Cole contended that:

Intemperance cuts down youth in its vigour, manhood in its strength, and again its weakness. It breaks the father's heart, bereaves the doting mother, extinguishes natural affection, erases conjugal love, blots out filial

attachment, blights parental hope and brings down mourning age in sorrow to the grave. It produces weakness not strength; sickness not health; death not life. It makes wives widows, children orphans, fathers fiends, and all of them paupers and beggars. It feeds rheumatism, nurses gout, welcomes epidemics, invites cholera, imports pestilence and embraces consumption.

The anti-alcohol movement gathered strength after two major conventions were held in 1880 and 1888. They were attended by a range of organisations—the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the Independent Order of Rechabites, the Sons of Temperance—names reflecting their diverse origins but all proclaiming their complete opposition to the consumption of any alcohol. As a demonstration of solidarity, they formed alliances in each Australian colony and planned common action notwithstanding the divide of sectarianism which probably separated those with religious affiliations on practically every other issue. Under an Alliance banner, the opponents of alcohol would stand outside pubs and bars at closing time, distributing tracts and encouraging drinkers to attend various Churches the following morning.

Campaigners for legislative suppression had their greatest success in the United States in what became known as the 'Prohibition Era' (1915-33). By way of illustration, prohibition triumphed in the state of Michigan not because its citizens were persuaded by temperance theology, according to Larry Engelmann in *The Lost War Against Liquor*, but because many moderate men

voted dry in the expectation that the state would be a much better place to live in without saloons, breweries and distilleries. The leading scientists, medical authorities, athletes, law enforcement agencies, business and political leaders of the nation and the state had testified to the benefits of prohibition and so voters responded optimistically.

The Detroit *Saturday Night* interpreted the vote's meaning in a manner that practically emptied it of moral significance. The paper's editorialist remarked that the people had not voted against the consumption of alcohol but in favour of 'closing the saloon'. Nor had the people wanted to outlaw either the importation or the consumption of alcohol. They had voted simply against 'a way of distribution'. The newspaper went on to remark that 'there is a danger in Puritanism that refuses to recognise the limitation of law just as there is a danger in liberalism that knows no law'.

But after a decade of trying to implement and then enforce the policy, the results in Michigan and elsewhere did not support the continuation of prohibition. There was great debate about whether prohibition really had led to a decrease in crime and an increase in productivity. It appears that some improvement was made in both areas and that less alcohol was consumed. But more than half of the population was still drinking regularly and the lost tax revenue was considered insufficient to warrant the community disturbance caused by criminal resistance to the law. The sense of 'romance' which had come to be associated with alcohol consumption was another unintended consequence.

Local option was the nearest thing to prohibition experienced by Australians. But despite public campaigns, there was little evidence to suggest that attitudes to alcohol consumption itself had dramatically changed. Certainly, the Churches were unable to point to heightened piety as a result of Christian involvement in the temperance struggle. By the time of the Great Depression, it was apparent that a general

liberalisation of attitudes and beliefs had begun. The inflexibility of the temperance movement and the exclusive promotion of abstinence prompted opposition not only from the liquor industry but from those who resisted what they suspected was the desire of the Churches to increase the control they exerted over the social habits of ordinary Australians.

After the Great Depression and in the wake of the disastrous American experience, the movement entered a period of slow decline. While some sections of the Church remained committed to the cause, attitudes continued to change as new challenges to religious beliefs and sensibilities emerged. There were other issues, such as the fear of Communist oppression and the scandal of sectarian strife, competing for attention. After 1945 when the world was affronted by evidence of state-sponsored mass murder and genocide in Germany, China and the Soviet Union, alcohol was no longer viewed as something requiring close attention or special legislation. However, it took many years for the regulatory environment achieved by the temperance movement to be dismantled. The liquor industry remained tightly controlled until the 1950s when politicians were assured that public thinking had altered decisively. The abolition of post-war rationing and the post-1955 economic boom made all kinds of alcoholic beverages affordable and desirable. They were also commodities from which substantial public revenues could be raised.

When licensing laws were reviewed in the 1960s, neither the temperance movement nor the Churches were given any special standing or their views any privileged status during public enquiries which recommended legislative reform. Most State governments in Australia rejected claims that altering trading hours or access to alcohol would lead to significant increases in drunkenness or crime. Indeed, there was a counter-claim that liberalising the laws—getting rid, for instance, of the ‘six o’clock swill’—would encourage more civilised drinking habits. The swing away from trying to solve alcohol-related problems by extending state control on the availability of alcohol was accompanied by fresh emphasis on individual pathology and the part that it played in abuse. The problem was the undisciplined drinker rather than the demon drink.

Having declared the problem to be individual rather than collective, attitudes towards alcohol were deemed to be personal, and therefore, private. This definitional shift effectively removed questions relating to alcohol abuse from the public square. In any event, the Churches, which had been savaged for their lack of progressive thinking throughout the 1960s on matters of personal morality, were relieved to be freed of the expectation that they should comment on the availability and consumption of alcohol. The last time the nation’s largest denomination, the Anglican Church of Australia, sought to offer guidance to its members on this subject was a small brochure that was published in the 1970s as part of a series entitled *Issues and Answers*.

The brochure began by outlining the social and economic cost of alcohol abuse and suggested that community double-standards were partly responsible for the extent of the problem. The paragraph headed ‘A Christian Approach’ sought to distance the Church from the legacy of the temperance movement.

It must be admitted that where in past generations Christian people have based their teetotalism on the Bible, it is generally recognised today that the Bible does not in fact substantiate prohibition. There is no point trying to make out a case one way or the other from the use in New Testament times of wine or grape juice.

The brochure's unnamed author felt that 'there has been a swing towards 'social drinking' on the ground of Christian liberty, allowing others to be free to make their own choice'. However, there was an abiding need for 'a sense of social responsibility in this matter'. The brochure pointed to some basic biblical principles governing alcohol consumption including the familiar observation that the human body is a 'temple of the Holy Spirit'; that Christians are to be concerned for the weaker neighbour; that alcohol has little to do with enjoying the joy and happiness promised by Christ; and, that Christian social concern ought to be provoked by the plight of those exploited by the alcohol industry.

Finally and fundamentally, drinking is a moral issue. For the Christian, morality is living consistently with the conviction that Jesus Christ is the supreme reality of all existence. Christians, like their Master, are sensitive to those things which degrade human life, or hold it back from its highest potential. It is incompatible with Christian morality that men should be victimised by the excesses of anything as destructive as alcohol. Christians may disagree in good faith about the best way to solve the problems related to drinking, but all agree that whatever hurts God's creatures must be of concern to God's people.

The series might have been entitled *Issues and Answers* but this particular brochure offered little that resembled an answer. In effect, the Church had identified a moral issue but failed to say anything of substance beyond simply noting that it was complex and some conscientious response was required. Those seeking counsel were sent away empty. The Anglican Church was clearly bankrupt—and it remains so on this issue.

### *A Lamentable Silence*

Although the Australian Churches frequently have much to say about matters in which they possess no special knowledge or expertise, they have virtually nothing to contribute concerning a problem that cries out for spiritual insight and moral clarity.

I suspect this lame response to alcohol abuse is a continuing function of persistent unease about the objectives of the temperance movement and a lack of courage in the face of possible accusations of 'wowsersism'. There is reason to lament the actions of temperance campaigners (and most were Christians) who went beyond trying to influence attitudes by education, encouragement and example, and resorted to authoritarianism in demanding restraint upon actions via compulsion, regulation and law. The movement's leaders had no faith in freedom, liberty or autonomy. Whereas the original motivation was dealing with the consequences of alcohol-related behaviour, the movement became transfixed with alcohol itself. Neither the quantity nor the quality was a factor in the leadership's thinking which was distracted from ends by means. But this legacy does not demand a vow of silence.

In the space of a few decades Christians went from hearing that there was nothing to commend alcohol to being told it was not really harmful. As a spiritual virtue and a religious ideal, temperance no longer seemed to matter. Consistent with the tenor of permissiveness, the Churches easily and readily embraced the popular call to 'moderation in all things' including alcohol. This approach offended no-one and challenged just as many. The promotion of moderation was widely interpreted as

condoning practically anything. For many Australians moderation was defined by the medical profession as being not more than three standard drinks a day with at least two alcohol free days each week. A lack of moral courage was coupled with a reticence among Church leaders to interfere with anyone's desire to do whatever they pleased irrespective of the cost for them, their families or the communities in which they lived. But neither alcohol abuse nor its enormous consequences went away. Moderation presupposed a maturity that many people did not possess. What, then, might the Churches now say and how might the alcohol abuse problem be addressed?

### *More Temperate Temperance*

In my view, there is no Biblical basis for requiring abstinence or demanding prohibition. A knowledge of ancient agricultural practices and a careful examination of the relevant texts reveals that there were at least eight ways of preventing fermentation of grape juice although the product of each process is referred to in the Bible as 'wine'. Nine different Hebrew words in the Old Testament and four different Greek words in the New Testament are all translated into English as wine. The Greek word for wine is *oinos*; the Hebrew word is *yayin*. Both are generic terms that include both fermented and unfermented liquid.

*Yayin* is uniformly translated wine but refers to every stage in the maturation of the grape from its growth on the vine (Jeremiah 40:10, 12) to its fermentation for alcoholic beverages (Proverbs 23:31). Consequently, *yayin* is spoken of with both approval and disapproval and, therefore, cannot be used to establish a moral position with confidence.

The Hebrew word *tirosh* occurs on 37 occasions in the Old Testament and means fresh grape juice. Often listed with oil and corn as a three-fold physical blessing (such as in Deuteronomy 11:14), *tirosh* has been translated as wine although some leading authorities suggest it could also be translated as grapes, vine-fruit or must (meaning new or unfermented wine). Biblical references to it are descriptive rather than prescriptive.

The other commonly used Hebrew word was *shechar*. A word etymologically allied to 'sugar', *shechar* is commonly translated as 'strong drink' with its origins in such things as grain, fruit, honey and dates. The sense of this word is sweetness which forms the contrast apparent in Isaiah 24:9: 'strong drink will be bitter to them that drink it'. The prophet is here denouncing the consumption of *shechar*. In all but three instances, 'strong drink' is mentioned with either a warning or a condemnation. Where *shechar* is regarded slightly differently—Numbers 28:7, Deuteronomy 24:26 and Proverbs 31:6—there is nothing in the choice of words that resembles a sanction for its consumption in normal circumstances. To counter the argument that the writer's concern here is with abuse rather than use, there is nothing in this cluster of texts permitting even moderate consumption of *shechar*. The question of quantity does not arise. Both Hebrew words are used in the first verse of Proverbs 20: 'Wine (*yayin*) is a mocker, strong drink (*shechar*) a brawler, and whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise'. The remaining six Hebrew words are used in contexts which contribute little or nothing to the question of moderation versus abstinence.

The first two words translated as 'wine' from the original Greek texts into English appear in Luke 1:15. They can also be translated 'strong drink'. In Matthew 27:48 (and parallel passages in the other Gospels) the word 'vinegar' would be an equally accurate

translation of the Greek word for the liquid offered to Christ as he was dying on the cross. The third Greek word translated wine is found in Acts 2:13—the day of Pentecost. The disciples underwent an ecstatic experience which was associated with an outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the infant Church. Some bystanders accused the disciples of being full of sweet wine called *gleukos*; a beverage originally produced by the Greeks. The disciples deny the charge claiming that it was too early in the day for them to be intoxicated. Despite some attempts, it cannot reasonably be claimed from this text that the disciples' custom was to drink later in the day or that they ever consumed *gleukos*. Therefore, nothing of moral significance can be inferred from this passage.

The most disputed translation is the fourth word, *oinos*, which occurs 32 times in the New Testament. It is very similar to the Hebrew *yayin* with which it bears an etymological connection. The beverages covered by this generic clearly include fermented and unfermented wine. However, difficulties for the abstinence case arise in relation to 1 Corinthians 11:21 in which some of the Christians at Corinth are chastened for 'being drunk' at the Lord's Supper or the general exhortation in Ephesians 5:18 against 'becoming drunk with wine'. The force of the usage would seem to be a warning against excess rather than the promotion of moderation. The word drunk is better understood when used in contexts such as Ephesians 5 as 'surfeited', meaning a habit of over-indulgence or of gluttony.

In sum, the Biblical texts do not require abstinence or demand prohibition. But surely the Church can find something positive to say from its sacred documents? It is always difficult to develop a comprehensive position on the basis of isolated and unrelated Biblical texts. A better starting point is the doctrine of creation because it leads to a holistic view of the person. Christians hold that human beings are fashioned by God and bear the divine imprint. Their dignity arises from their origins in the outworking of divine love and in offering a unique insight into the divine character. The possession of reason distinguishes the human species from every other category of living thing and is integral to human identity and destiny. Anything that damages the body, mind or spirit disfigures the divine image and obscures the divine purpose. Anything that distorts self-control reduces the individual's capacity to respond to divine love while anything that diminishes the exercise of reason is an affront to human dignity. Severe intoxication—drunkenness—harms the individual, affects their behavior and destroys community. These things ought to be avoided out of respect for God, regard for oneself and because one is responsible to others. While preventing alcohol abuse is the end to be pursued, the means involve developing a capacity for self-control.

Ascetism—understood as training the physical body to be less demanding because its urges of all those experienced are the ones most easily satisfied—is the truest expression of temperance. Brooke Foss Westcott, Bishop of Durham from 1890-1901, has this in mind when he referred to temperance as:

sovereign self-mastery ... whereby the mysterious will of man holds in harmonious subjection the desires and passions and faculties of his nature so that no instinct is undisciplined, no passion is unrestrained, no faculty is unexercised ... Where self control is perfect, no impulse, however assertive, no feeling, however strong, no endowment, however conspicuous, finds play without the sanction of that central ruling power, throned in the soul, which represents the true self.

Temperance must therefore be promoted as a personal discipline. It cannot be officially imposed or enforced coercively. It is something independently chosen and freely exercised. Understood in this way, a decision to abstain from alcohol becomes a matter of obedience to a higher principle than a vexing choice between competing alternatives.

### *Return of the Wowzers*

I have never advocated enacting legislation to achieve moral ends or believed that virtue could be inculcated by government decree. My instincts are thoroughly liberal and predisposed to resist the intrusion of the State and its instrumentalities into matters affecting the individual and his or her actions. I no more want official endorsement of my religion than I want to see public campaigns against apostasy. Therefore, I remain an ardent opponent of the legislative suppression of alcohol and those attitudes that led to prohibition in the first three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. My strong preference is for individuals to choose to drink in moderation and, if they are so moved by religion, social compassion or medical good sense, to decide to abstain from alcohol altogether. But I am also deeply concerned about the broader consequences of alcohol abuse and believe it is wrong to remain mute and inactive in the face of so much human suffering.

Too many young people die on our roads. Their deaths are usually an unmitigated waste. After reflecting on my own experience of conducting funerals for teenagers killed in motor vehicle accidents in which alcohol was the prime contributing factor, I believe it is time for forceful advocacy of abstinence as a protest against alcohol's easy availability, excessive consumption and debilitating effects. Anyone who has been touched by alcohol abuse must be encouraged to at least consider abstinence as a conscientious and courageous response. If the word 'wowser' really is an acronym for 'we only want social evils remedied', then I am happy to be called a wowser.

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