

FROM ALIENATION TO INTEGRATION IN ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

FROM ALIENATION TO INTEGRATION IN ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS:
A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS USING
DIALECTICAL SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

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A Thesis
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree
Master of Arts

McMaster University

June 1983

MASTER OF ARTS (1983)
(Sociology)

McMASTER UNIVERSITY
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: From Alienation to Integration in Alcoholics
Anonymous: A descriptive Analysis Using
Dialectical Sociology of Religion

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NUMBER OF PAGES: vii, 262

ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses itself toward two interrelated tasks. The first task is to provide an ethnographic description of Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.), the meetings and the members. The second task is to describe A.A.'s methods using dialectical sociology of religion.

Excessive consumption of alcohol provides a variety of social problems and Alcoholics Anonymous has been an increasingly popular solution for those who wish to discontinue their destructive drinking habits. Sociological research on A.A. has, however, been limited; A.A.'s interesting combination of religion and self-help practices has not been combined under one theoretical paradigm. This thesis attempts to respond to that void, to describe A.A.'s effectiveness by combining the social and religious attributes of the program.

Alcoholism is conceptualized as a state of alienation, where anomie and normlessness combine with alcohol consumption to present personal and social problems. In Chapter Two, dialectical sociology of religion is outlined as a theoretical model that accounts for the alcoholic's transformation from alienation to integration as an A.A. member. The career model is utilized to organize the data

substantiating this theory of transformation, in Chapter Three. Chapters Four to Seven describe the four mechanisms of ritual, objectification, commitment, and myth which facilitate the transformation and Chapter Eight presents a critique of the data, the theory, and the work of this thesis.

Alcoholics Anonymous has become one of the most successful self-help groups ever. It has been able to change hopeless human beings into integrated members of society. An organization that can have such a drastic effect on human life warrants further sociological examination.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writing of this thesis was made possible through the help and support of several people. Dr. Hans Mol provided the inspiration for the topic, Dusky Lee Smith taught me how to work, and Jack Haas offered enthusiasm and encouragement. My neighbour, Eileen King, always had faith in me; my friend Morris Hendricks, introduced me to Alcoholics Anonymous; and my sons, Karl and Leon, loved me no matter what.

I owe a special thanks to the many faculty members, staff, and students who, during my years at McMaster, have made the experience of returning to school so enjoyable.

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INTRODUCTION

Alcoholics Anonymous has become a world-wide phenomenon.¹ In the early 1980's, Alcoholics Anonymous (hereafter A.A.) claimed a membership of one million people. Since its beginning in the late 1930's, A.A. has grown from two alcoholics who met in Akron, Ohio, to 40,000 groups distributed throughout the world. Figures for Canada indicate 56,672 recovering alcoholics and 3,349 groups.² In addition to this extensive fellowship, the A.A. program is a focal point for the treatment of alcoholism in a high percentage of the world's treatment centers, detoxification units, psychiatric wards, and general counselling services (Jones, 1972:238). These data are presented to provide a generalized picture of the size and scope of influence of the A.A. fellowship and program.

The causes of alcoholism have been a scientific conundrum. Psychologists have attempted to identify character traits predominant in alcoholics, and have found none: alcoholics as a group have not been found to have a common personality characteristic.³ Society has tended to view alcoholism as originating in the moral fiber of the individuals involved. Scientists have discovered that alcohol is addictive, that people drink because they become addicted.⁴

However, these efforts to analyze the causes of alcoholism do not solve the problem of why some members of society become alcoholics while others do not.

Efforts to explain A.A.'s success in facilitating recovery from alcoholism has met with equal failure.⁵ Most literature written about A.A. takes a psychological perspective, explaining how A.A. affects the individual's psyche.⁶ Gellman, on the other hand takes an organizational approach in The Sober Alcoholic, analysing A.A. at the group level. In The Sober Faith, Taylor describes A.A. as a type of religion and compares A.A. beliefs and practices to orthodox religious creeds and procedures. A.A. is more than an organization of faith (it describes itself as a spiritual program). Any explanation of A.A. would need to incorporate the physical, mental, personal, social and spiritual aspects of alcoholism and recovery in A.A. into one paradigm. This is the task addressed in this thesis, responding to a necessity for further research as identified by David Robinson, who has spent several years researching A.A.: "A.A. merits more understanding than the current state of knowledge about it affords..." (Robinson, 1976:98).

This thesis is directed toward two interrelated tasks. The first task is to provide an ethnographic description of Alcoholics Anonymous, A.A. meetings, and the people recovering in A.A. The second task is to describe A.A.'s success in the rehabilitation of alcoholics using dialectical

sociology of religion. Limited sociological research has been carried out on A.A. although it has grown into a substantial social entity. The use of the dialectical paradigm offers an opportunity to examine this theory while simultaneously organizing a sociological description of A.A.

In order to accomplish the tasks outlined for this thesis, this work has been divided into eight chapters. The first chapter explains the methodological approach used to collect the data and outlines the theoretical constructs used to organize and correlate the data.

Since dialectical sociology of religion is the main theory used in this thesis, it is reviewed in Chapter Two. The antecedents and exposition of 'identity theory' and the evolvement from 'identity' to the dialectical model are examined, focusing on the relationship between religion and change. Recovery from alcoholism is portrayed as a change from alienation to integration. This chapter reviews conceptualization of change within the dialectical sociological model of Mol's writing; the focus will be on the utility of this theory in researching the changing life of the alcoholic who is recovering in A.A.

The third chapter uses a career model to organize data describing the life of an alcoholic from early childhood, the first drink, adolescence and early adulthood, the turning point and recovery in A.A. Directed toward establishing alcoholism as a social condition of alienation,

anomie, and marginality, this chapter describes the alcoholic as beginning his career in a state of alienation and moving toward integration upon becoming a member of A.A.

The ritual of A.A. meetings, of personal, daily living, and of the A.A. fellowship are described and analyzed in Chapter Four. A.A.'s statements for a system of objectifying reality through the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions are examined in the next chapter. Following ritual and objectification, Chapter Six examines the dynamics of eliciting, establishing, and maintaining a sense of commitment from members. Chapter Seven outlines the myths and symbols pertinent to A.A.

In the eighth and final chapter, a critique will be presented of the limits of this research and of the methodological and theoretical constructs used. Sociology's three dominant traditions of structural-functionalism, symbolic-interaction and conflict theory will be used as springboards for an analysis of dialectical sociology of religion.

In summary, this thesis has been organized to elucidate methods and theory used, to present an ethnographic description of alcoholism as a social response to the problems of human existence, to analyse A.A. from a sociology of religion perspective, and to communicate a critical stance toward the work. Methodology, theory, and empirical data have been counterbalanced to describe Alcoholics Anonymous and to account for its success with recovering alcoholics using dialectical sociology of religion.

FOOTNOTES

1. In Box 459, A.A. reports "some activity in 110 countries" and direct contact with "more than 60 countries", Vol. 27, No. 2, p. 4.

2. These figures are reported in A.A.'s 1980 Public Information Reports.

3. See reports in Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Quarterly Journal on Alcoholism.

4. See Dunn (1965).

5. See Robinson (1979).

6. See Johnson (1973), Lovell (1951), Mann (1981), Ogborne (1981), Robinson (1976), (1979), Strachan (1971), and Stewart (1976).

CHAPTER I

METHODOLOGY

The bulk of the data for this thesis was provided by attendance at a wide variety of A.A. meetings in a Southern Ontario city. Meetings in Maritime Canada, Eastern U.S.A., and the Netherlands were observed to acquire an awareness of possible differences attributable to changes in geographical location. Access to the field presented no problems; neither a "bargaining stage" nor a "series of negotiations" were necessary. A.A. meetings comprise a public setting and "gate keepers" are non-existent.¹ I had written A.A. headquarters in New York, called World Service, and informed them of my intention to make a social-scientific study of their fellowship. They responded most graciously, sending me an extensive bibliography and welcoming me to the use of their archives.

Participant-observation was used to collect the data "...with an earnest intention of discovering and understanding the viewpoints of the actors..." (Junker, 1960:154). I started attending A.A. meetings nearly three years before this research project was started, after "not drinking" for several months.² An interest in social theory and A.A.'s spiritual solution for social problems prompted my decision

to study A.A. from the role of a complete participant, I did not drink; I was able to use my own life and relate to the process of "giving up the booze", making changes in my life and my attitudes toward life, completely assuming the role of a recovering alcoholic. In an effort to become able to provide "the vividness of what it is like" (Lofland, 1971:7), I have attended endless meetings, sometimes two a day, as well as gala A.A. conferences in posh hotels or day-long workshops in penal institutions. I have watched people change from crying, shaking, sick-looking individuals to healthy, smiling human beings. I have also seen health one day and painful sickness the next. I have seen how A.A. works. In Analyzing Social Settings, Lofland claims that "more immediate reciprocities are necessary. Indeed, in a wide range of emergent circumstances, it will seem highly peculiar if the observer does not volunteer his help."³ Participating in meetings, going on Twelfth Step calls, spending time with and listening to members of A.A. were the reciprocal activities in which I got involved.

Previous attendance at A.A. meetings facilitated "learning the ropes."⁴ Sanders (1980:168) describes four areas as being pertinent to learning the ropes: familiarity with the physical and social structure of the setting, feeling comfortable interacting with the subjects, using the language, and knowing when subjects are lying, being facetious or attempting to mislead. Time had allowed me to know the

settings, the language, and the subjects well. There were times when "marginality" was a problem.⁵ After the meetings, when others went to a coffee shop to talk and visit, I had to rush off to start writing out field notes when I would rather have 'gone native'.

In addition to the feeling of marginality, I experienced three other problems. Concerns for ethics, verification, and interpretations were very much part of my participant-observation activities. In his preface to The Rules of Sociological Methods, Durkheim's statement concerning the establishment of "only providional rules" provided reassurance (1964:xlif). White-Riley warns about the "countless ethical issues" inherent in participant observation (1974:119) and Junker reminds that there are ethical problems related to "turning information in society into data about society" (1960:135). The problem of ethics was dealt with at a meeting when I heard a member of A.A. say, "Don't say anything at these meetings that you don't want repeated on the street. Remember, all kinds of people come to A.A., you may spill your guts at these tables today and someone might get drunk tomorrow and blab it all over town" (J., m., 14 years).⁶ A.A. meetings are perceived by members as a public forum, anyone wishing to talk about private matters is encouraged to talk with a sponsor. As an added measure for dealing with the ethics problem, in this thesis, details presented in quotes have been screened

to conceal the identity of subjects.

The second problem concerned verification. It is discussed by Bruyn in the following statement:

Participant observers who are interested in defining their procedures must ultimately face the problem of verification. Verification is generally dependent upon checking two factors --the reliability and the validity of a work (1966:255).

Bruyn goes on to define reliability as meaning two or more people will perceive the same meaning, and validity as meaning that the reality of those studied is the same as that presented by the studier. This problem was solved by broadening the data base and adding interviews with eighteen members of A.A. and content analysis of material written by alcoholics, members of A.A., psychologists, and sociologists.

Having resolved the problems of ethics and verification, I was left with the problem of interpretation, the problem of bringing together theory and findings.⁷ A.A. describes alcoholism as a disease, a physical allergy coupled with a mental obsession. In Deviance and Medicalization, Conrad and Schneider outline the process whereby the medical profession adopted the disease model for alcoholism (1980: 136). This takes alcoholism out of the realm of social phenomenon. In her New Primer on Alcoholism, Mann, a member of A.A., unites social factors with physiological and psychological factors (1981:13). However, in Suicide, Durkheim defined social facts as being caused by "the social

facts preceding it and not among the states of the individual consciousness" (Larson, 1973:58).

Alcoholism as a Social Fact

In order to establish alcoholism as a social fact it will therefore be conceptualized as a state of alienation rather than a disease. Dennison, Prevet, and Affleck are some of the few writers who recognize the relationship between alienation and alcoholism. Together they wrote Alcohol and Behaviour and provided this description of alcoholism:

Highly alienated persons tend to adopt the use of alcohol to relieve tension, anxieties, and the fear of failure. Alienation is a state of estrangement from others. Feelings of powerlessness (my life is out of control), normlessness (no standards of behavior seem to guide my life), and social isolation (I am alone and no one wants anything to do with me) are associated with alienation. Alcoholics have been found to be suffering from a sense of howdowness and defeat (1980:88).

More recently, Melvin Seeman and Carolyn S. Anderson have also conducted research at the University of California to find a direct correlation between alienation and alcoholism (1983:64).

Although "alienation" was first brought to importance by Hegel, it was Marx who defined alienation in social terms. He defined alienation as a "historically created phenomenon" and claimed that its "origin and continuing basis in civilized society arises from the alienation of labor which characterizes all systems of private property from slavery to capitalism" (Mandel and Novack, 1970:7). He described alienation as:

...characteristic of the "lonely crowd", those aggregations of atomized city dwellers who feel crushed and benumbed by the weight of a social system in which they have neither significant purpose nor decision-making power (Ibid.:6).

In his book on alienation, Schacht presents a detailed explanation of the origin of the word and its growth and development in contemporary literature. Originally it meant "to take away, remove, make something another's, or cause something to belong to another", and it has come to focus more on the feeling part of man (Schacht, 1970:11). Seeman defines alienation as "powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation, self-estrangement and normlessness" (Geyer, 1980:10). Schaff would categorize this type of alienation as subjective alienation or self-alienation in response to Geyer's question about the role of environment in alienation. Schaff claims that environment can influence alienation but recognizes a type of alienation prompted by a personal, inner source. In Chapter Three, which outlines the career of the alcoholic, alienating aspects of the alcoholic's personality and environment are identified and described in more detail.

The Career Model

The career of an alcoholic recovering in A.A. can be presented as status passages where the alcoholic moves from alienation, to further alienation, and then to integration. Alcoholics Anonymous can be described as a buffer for alienation. The dictionary definition of career, applicable to

this study is "course, passage". In 1937, Everett C. Hughes described the study of career as the study of "the moving perspective in which persons orient themselves with reference to social order" (p. 443). A few years later, Hall, who was at McGill University with Hughes, made studies applying the career model to the medical profession. Hall made reference to careers as being influenced by a "web of institutions and informal relationships" and talked about "types of careers" (1949:243). Later, Becker identified deviant careers as being developed through patterns of "deviant behaviour" (1963: 102) and claimed the career model as useful in the "understanding and analyzing" of changes in individuals within organizations.⁸ In his article on Chicago teachers he introduced a spatial metaphor to his study of careers. Becker wrote about "mobility through a hierarchy of ranked positions, if a spatial metaphor be allowed..." (1952:470). He also discussed "the vertical" aspects of mobility in the same article. Haas and Shaffir define "career" as:

...the movement of individuals through the structure of society. The various stages signal people's changing status and identity...and enable them to see themselves as moving along a continuum. Objectively, a career consists of the passage through various statuses, roles, and positions. Subjectively a career is made up of people's perception of themselves as they move through different groups, organizations, and institutions (1978:19).

Following Becker's spatial metaphor and Haas' and Shaffir's reference to "continuum", this thesis adds a directional quality to the description of careers. It will be

shown that the career of the alcoholic, up to the point where he or she turns to A.A. and toward recovery, descends into deeper alienation. Then, once the changes of recovery begin, the alcoholic's career ascends toward integration. Status passages before the turning point are negative, in respect to the well-being of the individual, and later status passages are positive, directed toward integration.

Negative and positive are used in a directional rather than a valuative sense.⁸ This directionality is conventionally portrayed using a "V" diagram in research on alcoholism. The top, left-hand side of the letter marks the beginning of the career. The bottom of the letter marks the alcoholic at his worst, for us, the "turning point". And the right of the "V" is the integrating side (Taylor, 1977: 34).

Glaser and Strauss express a belief in the need for "more--and more explicit--study" of passages and recommend "explicit sensitivity to multiple properties of status passage" (1971:3). Although Glaser and Strauss list numerous properties attributable to passages, they do not consider directionality. Their property "reversible" comes closest to a directionally explicit term. This study will relate Glaser's and Strauss' properties of status passages to the various stages of an alcoholic's descending into and ascending out of alcoholism and alienation, adding the properties of "negative" and "positive".

The discussion of negative and positive status passages introduces the final aspect of the theoretical constructs to be used in this thesis, an explanation for the turning point and the change in direction. Mol's dialectical sociology of religion offers an explication for this change. In his theory of religion, Mol deals with the dialectic between alienation and integration. He uses the term religion "in a wide sense--as the sacralization of identity", and proposes the formation of a new identity as an important factor in the effectiveness of A.A. meetings (1976:1). A detailed analysis of how dialectical sociology of religion views the relationship between religion and change will be presented in Chapter Two.

Alienation and Identity

The alcoholic's negative career of alienation is seen by Mol as a lack of identity. Mol defines identity as:

a stable niche in a predictable environment; that which makes a person, group, or society whole; accumulated confidence in one's ability to maintain inner sameness, internal unity; a stable setting within whose boundaries a person or group can find sameness; the place into which an individual, group or society fits; the core-group of beliefs, values, and ideas of an individual or society;...'one's turf' (1983:117).

In Shaping Identity in Canadian Society, Haas and Shaffir also discuss identity. Their definition of identity, although not explicitly outlined, would appear to differ little from Mol's definition. However, the source of identity does differ. Haas and Shaffir claim that:

Identity is, of course, formed, maintained, and reinforced on a daily basis during and as a result of interaction with other people. Everyone develops a conception of the kind of person they are based on the way they imagine other people react to their behaviour (1978:11).

While Haas and Shaffir identify interaction with others as the source for identity, Mol claims that identity is reinforced by belief systems. He describes the reinforcement of identity by religion as occurring through four mechanisms: transcendental ordering or objectification, emotional anchoring or commitment, ritual or sameness of action, and dialectical dramatization or myth (1976:11-14).

In the career of an alcoholic, both Haas' and Shaffir's as well as Mol's theories of identity are used. The alcoholic, descending into alienation, acquires his identity through interaction with others. Then when he or she comes through the passage of the "turning point", he or she begins to take on the identity of a recovering alcoholic by means of the mechanisms described by Mol. The alcoholic ascends toward integration through the objectification offered by the Twelve Steps and the Twelve Tradition, the commitment to the fellowship, the ritual of the meetings, and the myth or content of A.A. history.

The data was collected through participant-observation, interviews, and content analysis. Alcoholism is conceptualized as being a social condition of alienation and the career model is used to demonstrate the validity of this

conceptualization. Dialectical sociology of religion is employed as the basic theoretical paradigm most adequately capable of explaining the dramatic change from alienation to integration.

FOOTNOTES

1. See Haas and Shaffir (1980:245) for the bargaining stages of negotiating access to the field. The term 'gatekeeper' is described by Bogdan and Taylor (1975: 30-32).
2. Phrases or sentences that are in quotation marks but not referenced, are common A.A. idioms or expressions.
3. Lofland names the following examples of reciprocities: rides, loans, messages, coffee brought, advice, opinions, defence, illegal goods held, lies in their behalf (1971:98).
4. This term came from Shaffir et al. (eds.) (1980:111-116).
5. Lofland defines marginality in terms of feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and fears about being accepted (1971:97).
6. Quotes made by members of A.A. are referenced by using the first initial, stating the sex, and noting the length of sobriety.
7. This definition of "interpretation" is from White-Riley (1974:51).
8. See Becker (1952:470). In Outsiders, he offers a definition for careers:
Objectively..a series of statuses and clearly defined offices..typical sequences of position, achievement, responsibility, and even of adventure, ..Subjectively, a career is the moving perspective in which the person sees his life as a whole and interprets the meaning of his various attributes, actions and the things that happen to him (1963: 602).
9. Use of these directional properties is portrayed in Appendix #1.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORY

In 1976, with the publication of Identity and the Sacred,¹ Hans Mol announced the formulation of a sketch for a new social-scientific theory of religion. After re-searching religion from a sociological perspective for nearly two decades, he claimed that this sketch would provide the "systematic, comprehensive, sociological approach of other social-scientific disciplines to religion", presenting one conceptual framework and updating "outdated categorization distinction of sacred and profane, and church and sect" (1976:ix).

In 1959, Mol had published his first article, marking the beginning of his examination of the relationship between religion and immigration, or religion and change. This interest in the correlation between characteristics of religion and of immigrants prevailed throughout successive publications, fluctuating between a concentration on changes in religion and religious institutions, and changes in social behavior. By studying immigrants in the U.S., Australia, and New Zealand, and the role of the church in changing societies in Western countries, Mol was able to make the hypothetical

statements about religion and change which resulted in the formulation of a theory which was initially titled "Identity Theory", and was later called "Dialectical Sociology of Religion".

Although the alcoholic does not usually change geographical locations when he or she adopts a sober existence, the process of affiliating with A.A. can be likened to a type of immigration. The alcoholic moves from pubs and bars to A.A. meetings, from thinking about the acquisition of the next drink to internalizing A.A. values and beliefs. Therefore an examination of the relationship between religion and change as portrayed in Mol's work has direct application to the transformation from alienation to integration as experienced by A.A. members.

In this chapter, the theme "religion and change" will be examined as it develops in Mol's thinking and writing from 1959 to 1983. The chapter has been divided into three sections to match the antecedents, exposition, and elaboration and application of the identity theory of religion. The first section will summarize the antecedents with reference to initial, tentative descriptions of religion's facility for wholemaking in a changing social environment. The second section will review the basic statements made about the means and mechanisms through which religion responds to change. The third section will outline the application of identity theory and elaborate on its evolution

to a dialectical sociology of religion. Throughout this chapter the emphasis will be on tracing Mol's perceptions on the relationship between religion and change and providing parallels in the life of an alcoholic recovering in A.A.

The Antecedents

Mol began his sociological study of religion with an examination of the relationship between two variables-- Christian religion and the adjustment of immigrants. From this beginning of hypothesis formation and theories of the middle range as illustrated by materials on conflict between ethnic identities, he continued with empirical studies of boundary penetration and new boundary formation of ethnic groups in New Zealand, the problems of meaning and adjustment for 18th century German and Dutch immigrants to the U.S., marginality, social relevance and cohesion for Christianity, competition, ecumenicity and identity for the Australian churches, denominational cohesion, and cross-cultural comparisons of Western religion. Each of these writings indicate an intense observation and examination of the interplay between religion and change.

In his first article, "Theoretical Frame of Reference for the Interactional Patterns of Religion and the Adjustment of Immigrants",² Mol claimed that no prior attempts had been made to systematically analyze the two variables, "Christian religion" and the "adjustment of immigrants".³ Since he was

breaking new ground both empirically and theoretically, he proposed a tentative frame of reference for analysis, recognizing that the relevance of this theoretical section depended on its tie with existing sociological theory and its ability to encompass and interpret sociological phenomena in the area of Christian religion. Mol established a set of hypotheses using religion as the independent variable.⁴ He predicted the functional structure of religion in the process of self-reorganization which occurs during immigration, through its indirect as well as direct symbols, assurances, and prescriptions, its favorable position vis-a-vis other institutions and its unchanging meaning core. He also set up hypotheses with religion as the dependent variable, and predicted the role of religion in the lives of immigrants who were absorbed into the new society by their degree of adjustment. These hypotheses were related to empirical situation of trusteeism in the Roman Catholic Church in New York in 1785, Dutch Reformed Immigrants to the U.S. in 1958, and the non-acceptance of compatriots as ministers to immigrants in North Eastern U.S. in 1932.

It was this study that became the point of departure for subsequent research. Differences within religions in their beliefs and theologies, their commitment to tradition, their orientation to class and their response to changes as displayed by their language usage in rituals were each identified as contributing or jeopardizing a religious

capacity to mitigate the strain of immigration. Each of these differences were examined in light of a religion's functional or dysfunctional capacities in situations of change. Mol concluded that religion resisted change and that the general hypotheses with religion as the dependent variable were less relevant than expected (1959:p.26).

Situations change and societies may change. Religion undergoes little change, but rather responds to change through its wholemaking capacity. This relationship between religion and change was established from the outset and has been consistently maintained throughout all of Mol's subsequent work. For the A.A. member, change is the desired outcome and it is the A.A. beliefs and practices that are expected to bring about the wholemaking or integration of recovery from alcoholism.

Mol started with an analysis of immigration as a situation of change:

Still on a most general level, it can be said that immigration is characterized by a tension-creating situation (both for the personality and for the social system) and that religion has an important tension-resolving faculty (again for both the personality and social system) (Ibid.:22).

These observations lead to his claim that religion functions positively:

But there seems to be the possibility that religion more than any other institution can function positively here because of its pre-occupation with the deeper sentiments of life,

its interest in the meaning of existence, and its anchorage in a culture-transcending frame of reference (Ibid.:25).

Having outlined his tentative frame of reference, Mol proceeded with an in-depth examination of the relationship between religion and change in Churches and Immigrants; of the religious factors in the adjustment of immigrants and the effect of immigration on the churches. This monograph, published in 1961, was directed toward a re-examination of the function of religion in changing situations:

At first sight most sociologists and psychologists would be inclined to assume that religious faith has some effect on adjustment. It is generally held that religious faith has an integrating function both on the personal and the social level, and why should the immigrant situation be different (1961:6)?

Through his examination of immigrants, Mol affirmed the position of religion on the side of integration. Function and dysfunction, integration and disintegration, stress and wholemaking are clearly juxtaposed in Churches and Immigrants. Culture shock, problems of integration into new social groups, distorted expectations, prejudice, and hostility are each described in relation to religious faith and religion's means for supporting personal and social well-being in a new environment, through fellowship, pastoral care, and beliefs and assurances.

In 1965 Mol reported on his survey of three hundred and ninety-seven Dutch immigrants in Christchurch, New Zealand. The survey was directed toward identifying changes in religious

behaviour and compared Catholics, Presbyterians, Reformeds, and others, their length of stay in New Zealand, their marital status, their income and their friends with their adjustment to life in their new country and their church membership and attendance. This survey provided the basis for a critique of theories of religion in an article later printed in Social Compass.

This article presents Mol's first statements on the relationship between religion and identity. He disclaimed socialization theory as an "adequate umbrella for religious phenomena" and wrote that socialization theory does not place enough emphasis on the content of religion (1979:33). He made the statement that religion responds to a basic need, the need for identity defense. He defined identity in terms of personal wholeness, and proposed that "the apostasy of migrants is fundamentally the result of their incapacity to feel part and parcel of an alien identity" (Ibid.:37).

From a tentative framework, through the application to empirical data, and an arrival at a theory to account for variations in religious behavior, Mol was able to formulate early conceptions of the relationship between religion and change, and identify the features of religion which had the potential to influence individual behavior. It was against this theoretical background, that Mol wrote The Breaking of Tradition, a section of his Ph.D. dissertation done at Columbia University in 1960. He took the factors of

evangelism vs. orthodoxy and age, recency of arrival and cultural distance to examine the behaviors of the Dutch Reformed clergy and the German Lutheran clergy as immigrants in the U.S. He examined their adjustment to new situations through such behaviors as dependence on the mother church, organization of a local synod, and language usage during services. In the conclusion of this book, Mol reiterates Max Weber's and Talcott Parson's theories that "the Puritan ethic provided the Archimedean point for the reconstruction of the existing order" (1968:67). Religion becomes firmly posited on the side of integration:

On the basis of our findings it appears that the possession of what Parsons calls the Archimedean point of the Protestant Ethic (its transcendental God and its conception of salvation) facilitates the reconstruction not only of the economic and scientific order, but also of secular habits and values when migration makes this necessary (Ibid.:68-69).

The last three books written in this period of time, antecedent to the exposition of indentity theory, demonstrate the relevance of the theoretical frame of reference proposed in his first article. As with the aforementioned articles and books, Mol's sociological frame of reference for religion did provide a theoretical construct to encompass and interpret sociological phenomena in the area of religion. Continuing with his examination of secularization, Mol offered a "sociologist's interpretation of the churches' dilemma in a secular world" in Christianity in Chains. He examined such variable as social relevance, cohesion, social needs,

symbolism, charisma, morality, organizational deflections, institutional loyalties, and tradition. He was able to diagnose "lack of cohesion of the average local Protestant congregation and its failure to be a Christian organism rather than a Christian organization" as the "most severe handicap of the church in carrying out effectively its God-given task" (1969:106). True to his evaluation of sociology as providing functionally relevant information, he proffered churches sociological knowledge that would not present a causality so complex that progress on the part of the churches described would be intimidated.⁵

In 1971, in Religion in Australia, Mol reported on a nation wide survey of religion in Australia. This piece of research marked the start of a sociology of religion in Australia and aimed to map the major interlocking patterns of the Australian religious scene. It traced the history of prominent denominations and accounted for individual practices of Bible reading and prayer, preceptions of churches, and their influence on life, and related a variety of factors such as level of education and church attendance. Several interesting findings were made: Australian women were more active in church and religion; except for Methodists, the more educated go to Church more often; and reinforcement by various institutions, such as church and school, increased chances of continued church involvement.

The Religion in Australia survey had followed a

comprehensive approach. It was followed by an increasingly comprehensive "country by country sociological investigation" of western religion. Western Religion provides a wealth of data ripe for further sociological examination, however, its potential has unfortunately been neglected. The seed of what was to become identity theory and then go on to mature into dialectical sociology of religion can be identified in this work and is especially concentrated in the introduction.

The potential role of religion is outlined:

As a tentative framework of approach we propose to look at some questions which arise from the dual potential of religion to meet fundamental personal and societal needs. For the individual it is well established that religion can provide a context of meaning for life; it can fulfil a variety of needs...but universally it has particular relevance in providing integrative frameworks in those life situations in which powerlessness, contingency and meaninglessness would otherwise appear as overwhelming (1972:11).

Mol continues by stating that for society "religion can function as a basis for societal cohesion and integration, by processes of symbolic legitimation and relativization of subordination of conflicting aims of individuals and sub-groups which may threaten cohesion" (Ibid.).

Moving from a purely structural functionalist position to a symbolic interactionist as well as conflict theorist position, Mol describes religion as providing stability in a constantly changing environment. Religion provides cohesion through its symbols and meaning systems in an environment of constant conflict and change. Religion

and change, identity and conflict, wholeness and breakdown, and integration and refraction are each sets of diametrically opposed concepts which begin to make up Mol's theory of religion. The acquisition of a comprehensive perspective on western religion through the editing of this book, enabled Mol to concentrate on a further examination of the relationship between religion and change. By 1976, he had written Identity and the Sacred, presenting a concentrated exposition of his conceptualization of a new social-scientific theory of religion.

The Exposition

At the time that Identity and the Sacred came out in print, Mol had spent nearly twenty years researching the relationship between religion and change. He had commenced with a set of hypotheses concerning this relationship, had subjected these hypotheses to extensive scrutinization in light of a vast source of empirical data and existing sociological theories of religion; he had formulated a variety of conceptualizations concerning the function of religion in society, man's need for an Archimedean point, identity or meaning core; and basic principles of the dynamics of human existence.

In Identity and the Sacred, Mol organized his first presentation of a theory of religion which incorporated his perceptions of religion and change into one comprehensive paradigm. This section will present a review of concepts

described, record comments proposed in a book review printed in the Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, and examine the simplification of these concepts as they were later presented in Meaning and Place.

In Chapter One, Mol presented his basic argument, clarifying terms and offering precise definitions of concepts used. He explained that religion, in his book, was to be "used in a wide sense--as the sacralization of identity" and expressed the hope that this definition would "fit the actual situation" and "facilitate the uncovering and description of the strategic elements of the field of enquiry" as well as "have a salutary effect on both the comprehensiveness and the truth value of the study of religion" (1976:1). In defining religion thus broadly, he had made his definition dependent on the words 'sacralization' and 'identity' and these are explained as the chapter continues.

Central to identity theory is the notion that man needs an identity, a sense of place:

There is impressive evidence that for a large number of animals in general and for the primates in particular the place they occupy is of fundamental importance. 'There are few exceptions to the rule that the need for identity is the most powerful and the most pervasive among all species' (Ibid.:1-2).

These strong statements on the importance of identity are supported by Robert Ardrey's work The Territorial Imperative. Within this thesis affiliation with A.A. is conceptualized as the adoption of an identity; one that is presented by the

A.A. program. The A.A. identity is described in Chapter Five, on objectification.

Mol clarified that identity may be "symbolically located in a great variety of forms"; that it may have "latent and primary sources" (Ibid.:2-3). At this early stage of his work, Mol also identifies the relationship between identity and change which becomes central to what is later called 'dialectical sociology of religion':

At this point I must elaborate my statement that man's enhanced capacity for adaptation has in no way modified his need for integration and identity. There is good reason to go somewhat further and suggest that there is a dialectic between adaptation and identity or between differentiation and integration and that religious organizations and orientations (but also art and play) are anything but impartial to this dialectic (Ibid.:3).

With the preceding statement, Mol makes his position quite clear, for him life consists of a dialectic between (as he states later) differentiation and integration or, the dynamic and the static. Change becomes a process oscillating from one side to the other of these dialectical relationships and religion is positioned on the integrative side, offering identity and stability--religion "always appears to modify or stabilize the differentiations it has been unable to prevent" (Ibid.).

Secondly, Mol clarifies his use of the term 'sacralization':

By sacralization, I refer to the process by means of which on the level of symbol-systems

certain patterns acquire the same taken-for-granted, stable, eternal, quality which on the level of instinctive behaviour was acquired by the consolidation and stabilization of new genetic materials... Sacralization produces immunity...protects identity, a system of meaning, or a definition of reality, and modigies, of structs of (if necessary) legitimates change (Ibid.:5-6).

Mol differentiated between the process of becoming or making sacred and being sacred to circumvent Durkheim's distinction between the sacred and the profane. He contradicted any allegations that "the sacred is on the way out" by stating that the sacralization process "may be interrupted and prevented from maturing, but they are not disappearing; they appear to be as viable as ever" (Ibid.:7).

In addition to clarifying definitions of what religion is, Mol explained his theory of what religion does. His conception of the function of religion was posited in a changing environment, concerned with survival--"a path of evolutionary progress" (Ibid.:8). After reviewing the way in which "the need for identity manifests itself, and to inquire about the mechanisms for its sacralization", Mol asserts that identity, order, and views of reality "are all intertwined" (Ibid.:8-9).

Central to this theory is, as mentioned, his inquiry into the mechanisms for the sacralization of identity; the mechanisms within religion which establish a sense of meaning and place. Mol writes:

There are at least four mechanisms of the sacralization process on both the personal and social level. Perhaps the most neglected

one, I call objectification. It is the tendency to sum up the variegated elements of mundane existence in a transcendental point of reference where they can appear more orderly, more consistent and more timeless (Ibid.:11).

After naming objectification as the first of at least four mechanisms of sacralization, Mol describes three others: commitment, ritual, and myth, theology, or religious symbolism. He explains that commitment is "emotional attachment to a specific focus of identity", that it is "precisely through emotional fixation that personal and social unity takes place" (Ibid.). He continues by describing commitment as anchoring "a system of meaning" and being "closely linked with consistency and predictability" (Ibid.:12). With respect to change, commitment was able to provide a stable, non-changing core within the individual psyche.

Ritual, as a third mechanism, was presented thus:

Ritual maximizes order, reinforces the place of the individual in his society, and strengthens the bonds of a society vis-a-vis the individual. Through repetitive, emotion-evoking action, social cohesion and personality integration are reinforced--at the same time that aggressive or socially destructive actions are articulated, dramatized and curbed (Ibid.:13).

Ritual, then, underscores objectification and commitment, and in the face of change "restores identity, particularly when disruption has occurred, for example, through death, or when rearrangements in marriage or family relations become necessary" (Ibid.).

Finally, myth, theology, and religious symbolism are advanced as the fourth mechanism for the sacralization of identity. The function of the myth was to provide "the fitting contour for one's existence, sublimating the conflicts and reinforcing personal and social identity" (Ibid.). Myths were described not as "explaining the inexplicable" or sugar-coating "the pill of harsh reality" but rather as presenting "binary opposition with instrumental symbolism" and stating "primeval reality", thereby becoming "more enduring" and reconciling" (Ibid.:14).

Mol recognized overlapping between these mechanisms but felt they were still "sufficiently differentiated to warrant separate treatment" (Ibid.:15). These statements concerning definition, clarification, and mechanisms were presented in the first chapter, and the following chapters of Identity and the Sacred consisted of an elaboration of the dialectic between differentiation and identity, the meaning and foci of identity and the mechanisms of sacralization.

What is Mol's position on religion and change as reflected in his theoretical paradigm? How does he perceive religion in relation to change? What statements does he make concerning the nature of change? In Chapter Two, Mol examined the evolutionary approach to religion and concluded that critics of religion had progressed from "gross arrogance" to a position of warranting "due consideration"

(Ibid.:29). He concluded that:

...a differentiation perspective of religion is incomplete when it is not counterbalanced by an identity perspective. The transcendental point of reference which facilitated the emergence of new economic, political, religious, and social forms would have been impotent, if it had not been for an accompanying emotional detachment...(Ibid.).

For Mol, change must be considered within the dialectical relationship between change and sameness, the exclusion of one leads to the exclusion of the other. Change is not possible within society unless balanced, matched, and juxtaposed with sameness. Religion, through the sacralization of identity, provides the sameness, the stable reference point from which change can happen. Change cannot be separated from sameness and yet continues to occur; without sameness, change is not possible. For Mol, this relationship expresses the basic axiom of human existence, this is his dialectical relationship.

The identification of charisma and conversion in Chapter Three supports the illustration of the dialectic between change and sameness. Mol criticized an emphasis on "the revolutionary innovative character of charismatic figures" (Ibid.:45). He steers away from perceptions of charisma and change and focussed instead on the sameness produced by a charismatic leader, on "his certainty and his capacity constructively to guide a change of identity by processes of emotional stripping and welding" (Ibid.).

Mol described charisma as conserving "social order through its "awe-inspiring centrality" (Ibid.:47). Similarly, conversion was described in terms of its consolidation of a new identity:

It should be granted that charisma and conversion are important mechanisms which consolidate change. Without them, the forces of marginality and rationality could have been a liability rather than an asset for human survival. Even so, their actual contribution lies not in the mechanism as such, but in their contribution to the consolidation and integration of assumptive worlds, now better attuned to changing situations (Ibid.:54).

Consistent with his definition of identity and change, identity maintains an internal position of sameness with conversion, in the face of "changing situations" (Ibid.).

From change to sameness to change, Mol portrays existence, with reference to charisma and conversion and its other myriad experiences, as oscillating from one to the other. Since he focusses on religion in his research, on the sameness side of the dialectic, one would have a tendency to label his theory as being 'conservative'. However, Mol, cognizant of this possibility, states:

To account for change and to check the conservative bias we have adopted a framework of countervailing processes: an inexorable tendency towards conservation and integration is cross-cut by a similar inexorable tendency towards change and differentiation (Ibid.:262).

He continues by identifying the conditioning forces behind the unyielding dialectic between conservation and change:

Change is facilitated by culture contact, military conquests, trade, death, scepticism, and man's feverish search for independence from, and mastery of, his physical environment, etc. Stability is facilitated by social control, daily routines, customs, habits, like-seek-like motivation, play, art, sacralization, etc. (Ibid.).

With these statements Mol clearly established the relationship that was to become, at a later date, the axiomatic foundation for a dialectical sociology of religion. He had placed religion "squarely on the stabilizing side of the dialectic" (Ibid.). He concluded Identity and the Sacred with the following description of religion:

Religion, we have said, stabilizes a system of meaning, reinforces a definition of reality, sacralizes identity. Its relevance therefore lies both in the interpretation of existence, for example, in the dramatization of the dialectic of sin and salvation, and in the healing or reconciling of a fragile identity--for example, social action among the disprivileged (Ibid.:266).

He also made the prediction that in the changing future and with "an increasing degree of otherness", the responsibility of religion in the face of change was to balance conservation with differentiation; to "re-establish social authority necessary for the safeguarding of pivotal social values" and simultaneously "involve sufficient individualism and personal motivation" (Ibid.).

When Richard Fenn reviewed Identity and the Sacred for the Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion in 1976, he described the book as "puzzling", "complex", and

"challenging". He claimed that Mol:

wants to demonstrate that pessimistic views of the future of religion in advanced or complex societies are mistaken. Such view, he argues, rely on too narrow a concept of religion, on a static perspective which focusses more on institutions than on processes, and on "crutch concepts such as secularization" which are employed to explain religious change and shifting foci of the sacred (p. 67).

Concentrating on these concepts of religion, Fenn ascribes the term "functionalism" to Mol's conception of religion. This presents him with problems when he tries to understand Mol's description of charisma. Fenn states that:

The major thrust of the book, therefore, is in the elaboration of such terms as identity, meaning, myth, commitment, conversion, and charisma (p. 68).

Fenn overlooks the larger framework within which these concepts were examined, the portrayal of life's dialectic, and man's need for a sacralization of identity.

Perhaps in response to Fenn's accusation of complexity, supported by similar perceptions from others, Mol wrote a simplified version reiterating ideas in Identity and the Sacred. Mol reversed from the deductive reasoning used in this book to inductive reasoning in his next book, which was "geared to intelligent laypersons", titled Meaning and Place: An Introduction to the Social Scientific Study of Religion (1983:vii). Using the examples of the Australian Aborigines, Dutch Reformed and German Lutheran immigrants, the Jonestown mass suicides, the Hare Krishna movement, Chinese and Maori

myths, Muslim morality, and various examples of secularization, Mol described religion as a reinforcer of identity through the process of ordering called objectification, and through commitment, ritual, and myth. He adds morality as a system of oughtness and an examination of the relationship between secularization and objectification, enriching the dialectic with systems of transcendental ordering.

In Meaning and Place, Mol reviewed the task of the social scientific study of religion. He stated that:

somehow religion as a universal phenomenon (there has never been a culture or a society without it) has to be organically and consistently related to this large context of existence (Ibid.:101).

He continued by describing the dialectic of that existence:

The very pulsating (expanding and contracting) of the universe seems to be a result of the changing balance between radiation (expansion) and gravity (contraction). Force and matter in physics, reaction and structure in chemistry, variation and heredity in biology, change and order in the social sciences essentially follow this principle of two forces (one differentiating, the other integrating) holding each other in a moving balance (Ibid.:101-102).

Mol's theory of the dialectic between change and sameness is clearly presented, clarifying the tension between the two, the oscillation from expansion to contraction, change to order. Within this schema of differentiation and integration, man's sense of meaning and place are crucial:

Both meaning and place fit in this larger context as ways to advance and solidify the niche of the human species in the ecosystem ... Meaning, as already seen, is a more

exclusively human asset in the struggle to solidify the place of the species in the ecosystem (Ibid.:103).

Meaning and place, or identity, do not come easy to man--as exemplified by the term 'struggle', as will be demonstrated in subsequent chapters of this thesis, with the portrayal of the alcoholic's efforts to adopt a sober identity. Identity necessitates sacralization. Objectification takes on a transcendental quality:

Yet the transcendental aspect of religion grew in importance only when the culture and society in which it was embedded became more complex... And when the diversity of the items to be ordered increases, the straddling canopy has to stretch and become more abstract. Order becomes cosmic rather than terrestrial, as the earthly can hardly become adequately meaningful in terms of its own components (Ibid.:105).

Commitment becomes hedged in emotion, ritual "retraces the grooves", and myths go deeper than "logical evidence and causal relations" (Ibid.:107,109). For Mol, religion does not simply serve a function, among the many functions served by other institutions. Instead, religion becomes an intrinsic aspect of man and society. In the face of change, aligned with time, religion, along with art, play, and sport, becomes a necessary ingredient for human survival.

The Application and Elaboration

Once the basic theory of religion as an identity reinforcing phenomenon had been outlined in Identity and the Sacred, and simplified in Meaning and Place, it could be

applied to a body of empirical data and submitted to a process of elaboration. Following the presentation of 'identity-theory', Mol wrote and edited two books which elaborated on this theory. In Wholeness and Breakdown he concentrated on the nature of human existence and the position of religion in that schema while reviewing some of his basic ideas. In the introduction to Identity and Religion he elaborated on religion and its place with respect to units of society, boundaries, and social changes over time. In addition to elaborating on 'identity-theory' Mol wrote several articles re-examining the concepts proposed in his theory; placing them in the larger context of sociological theory generally. Finally, Mol applied the 'identity-theory' model to religion in Australia, New Zealand and Canada. Each of these volumes of research will be examined in this section, ending with an outline of Mol's most recent piece of writing, an address to the International Religious Studies Conference on Religions and Change to be held in New Zealand, in August, 1983. It is in this article that the author most succinctly and precisely states his views on the relationship between religion and change as expressed in his dialectical sociology of religion, 'identity-theory'.

In Wholeness and Breakdown, Mol presents a gradual systematic buildup of his ideas on the dialectical nature of human existence. This book presents the substance of five lectures delivered at the University of Madras, India. In

the preface, he explains his intent to examine sociology of religion in a general context:

Yet the increasing complexity of modern societies seems to make sociological specialization necessary ...

It is this increasing complexification of all that exists which actually forms the basis of these lectures. What problems does complexification resolve? How does the complex prevent itself from succumbing to the lurking chaos of diversity? How does it all hang together? (1978 (b), p.v.).

After identifying problem areas for society as having been exacerbated by 'complexification', Mol claims that these questions need to be examined in the context of other disciplines, in the context of physics, biology and philosophy and proceeds to do so. He narrows the perspective of this examination by postulating that 'complexification' has two faces, with one face "towards change or breakdown of a now defunct wholeness" and the other being a "conservative" face (p.vi). Mol clarifies this choice:

The dialectic between wholeness and change should not be regarded as an objectively existing model, clearly discoverable and applicable by anyone with sufficient faith in objectivity. It is one of many possible ways of looking at things (p.vii).

He adds that he has "a good strategic reason for choosing this perspective"; --"the wholeness/breakdown model is to my present way of thinking more adequate than others I have tried" (Ibid.). In the first five chapters of this book, Mol elaborates on his dialectical approach, leaving religion to

the sixth and last chapter.

Mol presents a review of traditional interpretations of nature focussing on opposites and their antithetical resolutions, he describes the dualism of life and its homeostasis, and outlines the adaptation of human behavior, of the individual to society. He maintains that culture exists of a dialectic between "expressive and instrumental symbolism" (p. 74), providing further evidence for the validity of the dialectical perspective. In chapter 5, Mol offers an excellent description and definition of the word dialectic:

The word 'dialectic' comes from the Greek dialegesthai which means to fight with words, to make opposing statements. 'Dia' in this composite term points to the division, dichotomy, opposition between the speakers. 'Legein' points to the conversing or communicating by them. Ideally the process of communicating in this manner leads to give and take. And eventually, if everything goes well, the debate is resolved. (p.75).

In this chapter, he continues by reviewing theories of society proposed by Comte, Spencer, Parsons and others, claiming advantages to the use of the dialectic perspective in social analysis.

After summarizing his argument, Mol concludes with a review of historical religion, concentrating on India, China and on Christianity. He reiterates that "religion strengthens the wholeness and takes the brunt out of change", and that "sacralization is the process by means of which man has pre-eminently safeguarded and reinforced this complex of orderly

interpretations of reality, rules and legitimations" through the mechanisms of sacralization (pp. 93-94). Mol is able to identify this dialectical balance between wholeness and change or identity and difference within Indian religion and the Maoist religion of China. He lists numerous dialectical relationships in Christianity: sin and salvation, charisma and conversion.

His concluding statements assert and repeat his two basic statements about religion and change; of a "tendency towards wholeness and the opposite tendency towards change or breakdown" and of religion as being a "redoubtable means of culture to safeguard its meaning system" (pp. 113, 115).

Finally he states:

The advantage of the model of thinking here presented is that it seems to fit the existing data of our world. In addition it is a roomier model than the one which assumes that the rational individual is the pinnacle of creation. It is roomier because it allows the non-rational, or feeling an equally important place as the rational. It also does not confine the larger social whole to the merely epiphenomenal status of the individual. The model also does greater justice to interaction and interdependence than the simpler mechanistic, linear way of thinking about nature, life and society (Ibid.).

In Wholeness and Breakdown, Mol concentrated on an elaboration on the dialectical perspective. In Identity and Religion, Mol presented, in the introductory chapter, an elaboration of his dialectical perspective, analyzing the relationship between individual, group and society, between unity and diversity. He expounded on the concept of identity

as "a sense of stable niche", "found in beliefs, faiths and ideals", essential to man and related to group identity (1978 (a), p. 2). Mol's re-examination of the relationship between members, groups and larger society was probably prompted by:

an underestimation of the boundary construction of social, group, and personal identity which most of the authors in this volume feel to be salient for the understanding of religious phenomena (Ibid.).

He also made some very interesting statements about the relationship between the individual, the group, and society to change. He described the survival of biological units as dependent on integrating and harmonizing their "internal diversifications" (p. 4). He added that "This means that stabilization of function is just as necessary for survival as change and adaptation", strongly emphasizing the dialectic between wholeness and breakdown (Ibid.). Furthermore, he stressed this dialectic by stating:

optimal functioning is the result of unresolved tension or constant dialectic between change and stability, or differentiation and integration. Progress seems to depend on each side of the dialectic maximizing the functions and minimizing the dysfunctions of its side without actually succeeding, because that would mean that the opposition has atrophied (p. 5).

With this statement, Mol defines the relationship between sameness and change in such a way that, as he claimed later in the same paragraph, each is dependent on the other. Integration without differentiation, stability without change

and, as he stated more strongly in his subsequent work, change without religion are impossible. And if not impossible, the lack of one in the face of the other, diminishes both.

In light of this dialectical relationship, Mol summarized his ideas in a schematic outline using two diverging lines representing:

the historical dialectic between integration and differentiation; abstraction and complexification; and sacralization and secularization. It represents the uneasy balance between the basic, opposing, but also complementary forces which guarantees both progress and order by preventing the petrification of order and the berserk of progress (p. 7).

Having established this dialectic between integration and differentiation over time, Mol was able to make a further postulation:

that the basic dialectic (conflict as well as complementarity) between integration (identity) and differentiation (change) takes place on a variety of levels. In a simplified form these levels may be placed on a continuum from personal identity to group identity to social identity (p. 9).

For Mol, identity exists at three levels: personal, group and social. These identities exist within a symbiotic interaction or dialectic; each of these identities may experience conflict and congruence with each other. However, Mol added that:

It would be wrong to assume that identity-integration or identity-disintegration are entirely consonant with the patterns of conflict or congruence at other levels of identity. There are forces internal to each level (e.g. need for order, and 'being on a

similar wavelength') or external to all levels (e.g. disaster or modes of skepticism) (p. 10).

The dynamics of change exists not only between these units but within and around them as well. Within the schema of forces and pressures, tensions and changes, religion reinforces boundaries, facilitating stability and identity. For example, religion has traditionally reinforced family. Religious ideas and organizations have tended toward maintaining family cohesion through attitudes toward sexuality and divorce.

With the elaboration of his basic ideas in Wholeness and Breakdown and Identity and the Sacred, Mol was prepared to challenge some basic sociological interpretations and apply 'identity-theory' to various sets of empirical data. One of the fundamental sociological concepts Mol challenged was marginality as "an undesirable state of affairs".⁶ After reviewing the function of marginality in innovation, creativity, scientific process and the function of commitment in maintaining order and integration, Mol was able to modify Weber's claim concerning Calvinism's independent effect on modernity and state that:

the dialectic between integration (stability, identity) and differentiation (change, mastery) was reconciled by the Calvinist/Puritan/Pietist Ethic by absorbing and even 'sacralizing' marginality rather than by the latter's elimination and suspension. To therefore treat Calvinism as the barbinger and justifier of modernity makes eminently good sense.⁷

Mol was also able to critique and present an alternative to Durkheim's interpretation of the religion of Australian aborigines.⁸ Mol challenged Durkheim's claim "that Australian totemism stood at the origin of all religion and that its function was to reinforce social solidarity".⁹ He summarized Durkheim's argument and Frazer's argument (which was refuted by Durkheim) and said:

Neither Durkheim's nor Frazer's view is correct. The relation between individual and group is dialectic rather than subsidiary. Neither personal nor group totems are derivative (Frazer) nor optional (Durkheim). They exist coincidentally ... The potential for conflict between the totems is obvious, but it can be transcended by a more general, objectified order, called The Dreaming, which overarches the systems of totems.¹⁰

Mol analyzes The Dreaming, asceticism, sacrifice, initiations, and beliefs about territory to support his notion of a dialectic between the individual and the group. His theory of a dialectical sociology of religion provided a better 'fit' (as Mol so often chooses to express) between the data and perceptions of Australian aboriginal society.

Upon re-examining time and transcendence, Mol again demonstrated the superiority inherent in the dialectical framework when 'fitted' with primitive and modern social settings. In 1964 Mol had written an article discussing "the present as a reflection of the future". In this article he examines 'earth-bound pragmatism' and admonishes Christian churches to "transcend their functionality", and re-assert

their human relations or "internal braces" rather than cohering to earth-boundedness and perceptions of the "present in terms of the present".¹² Nearly twenty years later, when Mol again addresses himself to time and transcendence with the support of the dialectical sociology of religion as a perceptual framework, he is able to sharpen his perceptions on this relationship and clarify previous suggestion concerning 'internal braces':

To locate order in a transcendental rather than immanent point of reference has the indubitable advantage of an ever-present, constantly articulated blueprint of unity counterbalancing the ever-present, constantly experienced diversity of the mundane.¹³

Dialectical sociology of religion, is able not only to accommodate transcendence, but also presents the concepts of meaning systems as "less dependent on here (space) and now (time) and allowing for the incorporation of change in the here and now ..."¹⁴ The dialectical framework provides a more elastic model; one where time may be accommodated on the 'long- or short-run' as economists would say. Change has been incorporated into the model and religion may be examined in time-specific compartments.

After these initial experiments with applying 'identity-theory' or dialectical sociology of religion to various micro-sociological situations, Mol re-applied this theory to his previously-accumulated empirical data on religion in New Zealand and Australian history and then proceeded to organize

a fresh set of data on religion in Canada. The Fixed and the Fickle, The Firm and the Formless, and Faith and Fragility each record these applications. Religion and identity are outlined for New Zealand by describing the Maori in pre-European times, the charismatic movements involving the Maoris from 1830 to the mid 1900's and changes in Maori culture following extensive contact with Pakeha denominations. Throughout The Fixed and The Fickle, Mol traces the changes in social structure and religious affiliation. Change in the social environment, with exposure to Pakeha culture for example, results in change in religion, with the latter portrayed as responsive to the former.

Before Pakeha-contact, the Maori had a system of objectification involving their canoes, their land and their chiefs. Through commitment, ritual, and myth the Maori made sense out of change and provided manageability to temporal dislocations (1982 (b), p. 7). With Pakeha-contact Maori identity was disrupted by the diseases, technology, and ideas the Europeans brought with them. At this time it was the charismatic leaders who spearheaded religion's response to change:

Maori charismatic leaders made an important contribution to the forging of a new identity after the shattering of the old one. They all jumped into the breach to repair the damage. They were all full of fervour. They all had millennial dreams. They all built bridges between the Maori and Pakeha world, even if they advocated Maori independence. They were all catalysts (p. 28).

Catalysts for what? They were catalysts for facilitating the adaptation of a new identity to replace the old, disrupted identity. In this case, Mol clearly states his conceptualization of the relationship between religion and change. Change may be brought about by external factors, that is economic, social or material factors. Simultaneously, changes may occur within religion to accommodate these external factors. For the Maori, part of their culture, their veneration of chiefs, was embellished with aspects of the foreign influences, to reinforce a sense of identity albeit a new one, in the face of a changing environment. Exposure to Pakeha culture and the slow integration of Maoris into mainstream New Zealand society is repeatedly counterbalanced by religious adjustment on the part of both groups. The emergence of "major Maori denominations or Maori sections of Pakeha denominations" exemplify this counterbalancing process (p. 53).

A similar procedure of describing Aboriginal society in pre-European times and the changes in aboriginal identity following European contact was used in The Firm and the Formless. It is in this book that Mol most lucidly describes the four mechanisms which allow religion to preserve wholeness by firming up or affirming structured and delineated identities (1982 (b): 1). In his description of objectification, Mol elucidates the use of this mechanism in Aboriginal society through a critique of the work done by Frazer, Durkheim,

Freud, Radcliffe-Brown, Lévi-Strauss and Stanner on totemism. He continued by describing the other mechanisms of commitment, ritual and myth originally used to sacralize Aboriginal identity before European contact.

With regard to religion and change, Mol demonstrated, as he did with the Maori of New Zealand, the breakdown of Aboriginal identity following European colonialization and the reconstruction of Aboriginal identity once the European became established in Australia. Mol described Aboriginal adaption of European identity sets within their own:

The reconstruction of Aboriginal identity could not fail to take over elements from the very civilization which destroyed it. The conquered had to come to terms with the conquerors if they were to survive at all. They borrowed bits, rejected others, and were greatly aided by the steadily increasing twentieth-century freedom to bring their own house in order (p. 73).

He continued by describing "the missionary, sectarian, and secular elements which were built into the new identity" (Ibid.).

In both descriptions of Maori and Aboriginal adaptation to changing influences, Mol clearly defined religion as accommodating and responding to change, taking up any 'slack' to provide security and identity. Religion responds to change by changing when necessary. These changes are facilitated through charismatic leadership of internal influences, as with the Aboriginal leaders around Don McLeod (Ibid.:84-85).

A parallel for members of A.A. can be drawn here. As with the Maoris and the Australian Aboriginies, the A.A. beliefs will be shown to accommodate the changes from drunkenness to sobriety, from alienation to integration. The program provides security and identity, as will be discussed later. A.A. breaks down the old anomic identity of the 'drunken, no-good bum' and presents a new identity of the physically allergic alcoholic.

Religion and identity in Canada, as described in Faith and Fragility, offers more examples of the accommodation made to change by religion. This book presents a wealth of situations in which religions respond to political, social, economic, and ideological influences. Consistent with our previous approach to Mol's work, this compendium on Canadian religion and identity can be examined by concentrating on the abundance of situations exemplifying the relationship between religion and change. The impetus toward stabilizing change which is central to religion is described for the Eskimo:

Birth and death, as well as sickness, the visit of a stranger, the introduction of steel knives and guns, abundance and scarcity of game, abnormally good and unusually bad weather, in short, all change tended to upset the Eskimo status quo. They were therefore incorporated in a stable frame of reference so that their effect could be contained. All religious expressions contributed to this containment (1982 (c):19).

Again, for the Canadian Indian, religion offered a stabilizing

influence:

All Canadian Indians believed in spirits occupying both inanimate and animate objects. Through interaction with these spirits Indians strengthened their personal niche in the social and physical environment. Yet the beliefs, the commitments, the rites, and the myths also strengthened collectivity and ecosystem vis-a-vis the individual. Religion was the prime mediator between the various Indian identities, whether ecological, social or personal (Ibid.:147).

In more contemporary examples, Mol attributed the success of burgeoning sects and cults, including Alcoholics Anonymous, to social changes. With the prevalence of anomie, Mol claimed an increase in alienation:

The widespread alienation of individuals from both the social system and its subsystems is symptom, cause and consequence of the prevailing anomie. It is a symptom in that impassiveness of the great majority expresses a lack of commitment to any overarching meaning-system (Ibid.:179).

Anomie and its subsequent alienation, therefore, are the social changes which prompt individuals toward a renewed involvement with religion. This chapter can scarcely do justice to the countless examples of the relationship between religion and identity, and change presented in Faith and Fragility. Suffice it to say that for Canadians, as with all human beings, change is continuous, and religion, in a variety of ways, offers a sense of meaning and place, a sense of stability.

In August 1983, Mol presented a paper at the International Religious Studies Conference on Religion and Change.

The paper provides an opportune source for further elaboration on concepts of reality, society, and religion within the dialectical framework.¹⁵ Within this paper, Mol stated most clearly the basis of his theory. He began with a review of dialectical sociology, applied dialectical sociology to religion, and then identified several features of the relationship between religion and change as highlighted in the dialectical approach to religion. It is these sections of the paper which are most relevant to the analysis within this chapter.

In "Religion and Social Change", the title for the aforementioned paper, Mol presented the following statement describing the dialectical character of reality and society:

...as reality has both unitary (identity promoting) as well as differentiating (change promoting) characteristics, a dialectical sociology assumes that the two are symbiotically, or dialectically related. It works with a model of society (or even existence in general) in which identity and change are the main girders, each compensating for major potential, adaptive defects of the whole. In other words it assumes (and with good justification!) that perfect identity/stability is as maladaptive as perfect change/instability and that in a viable society each prevents the other from achieving purity (Ibid.:2).

Again, Mol described human existence as a composite of change and sameness, as an oscillating dialectic with each extreme necessitating the other. With reference to his perceptions of the relationship between religion and change, it is this dialectic that is the central focal point for his theory.

Directly related to conflict and order, or flux and stability, is religion:

...religion modifies the conflicts brought about by change and agonizingly (like a mother hen) protects what bears the seed of destruction with itself. Each level of identity (or systems and subsystems, such as person, family, group, tribe, society, nation), can acquire its own pattern of sacralization and thereby aggravate the tension between each of them (Ibid.:4).

Dialectical sociology of religion therefore examines "the consolidation of each level of identity" and "the modification of tension between levels" (Ibid.). Religion, within the dialectical framework is able to accomplish these two tasks through all four mechanisms of sacralization previously outlined, through religion's ability to reconcile tensions and conflicts between social units, through the values religions defend and condemn, and through religions either accommodating secular influences or embarking upon sectarianism (Ibid.:7-13).

Conclusion

The main theme in the life of an alcoholic who becomes affiliated with A.A. is "change". When Mol began his sociological analysis of immigrants and religion, he established a set of hypotheses concerning the relationship between religion and change. Out of these hypotheses grew identity theory. With application and elaboration, identity theory was transformed into dialectical sociology of religion. It is this theory that directs the conceptualization of alcoholism as a state of alienation.

Throughout his work, Mol has consistently maintained the position that social existence is in a constant state of differentiation and integration. Religion is on the integration, wholeness, or stabilization side, providing an Archimedean point or a sense of identity through the four mechanisms of sacralization: transcendental ordering, emotional-anchorage, ritual or sameness of action, and dialectical dramatization or myth.

This theory of change and its account for the role of religion provides an excellent conceptual framework for the examination of such human action as conversion, church involvement and the formation and growth of sects. It also presents heuristic devices that facilitate a descriptive analysis of Alcoholics Anonymous. By identifying ritual, objectification, commitment, and myth as mechanisms for reinforcing identity, dialectical sociology of religion provides a sound theoretical paradigm than can readily be utilized in examining A.A.'s effectiveness.

FOOTNOTES

1. The subtitle of Identity and the Sacred is "A sketch for a new social-scientific theory of religion".
2. This article was published in the Spring of 1959 in R.E.M.P. Bulletin, 7 (2), pp. 21-43; R.E.M.P. being a magazine directed toward research of European migration problems.
3. Ibid., p. 21.
4. These hypotheses are explicitly stated in the article mentioned above, pp. 21-24.
5. In "The Dysfunction of Sociological Knowledge", Mol makes the accusation that complex causality can hinder doing anything to alleviate mending of social ills.
6. See "Marginality and commitment as hidden variables in the Jellineck/Weber/Merton theses on the Calvinist Ethic", Current Sociology, Vol. 22 (1974), No. 1-3, pp. 279-297, p. 279.
7. Ibid., p. 295.
8. See "The Origin and Function of Religion: A Critique of, and Alternative to, Durkheim's Interpretation of the Religion of Australian Aborigines", Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 1979, Vol. 18, No. 4, pp. 379-389.
9. Ibid., p. 379.
10. Ibid., p. 381.
11. See "The Present as a Reflection of the Future", Quadrant, No. 32, Vol. VIII, No. 4 (1964), pp. 60-62.
12. Ibid., p. 62.
13. See "Time and Transcendence in a Dialectical Sociology of Religion", Sociological Analysis, Vol. 42, No. 4 (1982), p. 320.
14. Ibid., p. 322.

15. See "Religion and Social Change: A Dialectical Sociological Approach", A paper presented at the International Religious Studies Conference on Religion and Change, Wellington, New Zealand, August, 1983.

CHAPTER III

THE CAREER

The conceptualization of alcoholism as a condition of alienation can be verified by examining the career of an alcoholic. From reports of alcoholics who recover in A.A., childhood is usually identified as the early beginning stage of alienation. After the first drink and a false sense of integration, the career continues negatively and deeper into alienation; it could be defined as a career of deviance. Through conversion and commitment to A.A., the career takes a sharp turn into a set of positive stages, and into integration. Each of these stages will be outlined in this chapter.

Childhood: The Beginning of Alienation

In their talks at meetings, members of A.A. generally identify their childhood and early adolescence as the first stage of their alcoholism:

I have to tell you a little about my childhood because I believe, in looking back, that I had problems then already. As a kid, I had feelings and attitudes which, with alcohol poured on top of them, were going to cause me a lot of problems (S., female, 7 yr.)

This first passage marks the beginning of alienation. Through

their interactions with persons and institutions, the passagee begins the process of alienation. Persons and institutions take on the capacity of agents. Through interaction with these agents, the passagee takes on an identity of alienation.²

A.A. members believe people are "born with the allergy", that the negative status passages are involuntary.³ The choice of whether or not to drink is voluntary, but once the choice is made to drink, the following passages are believed to be inevitable for the alcoholic.

When I was born my parents didn't look into my crib and say, "What a cute little alcoholic", but I was born sensitive to alcohol. I didn't set out to become an alcoholic but my chemical makeup was such that, once alcohol was introduced into the system, all hell would break loose (M., male, 22 years).

Passagees who become members of A.A. often believe they are born as alcoholics but whether or not they were also born with a propensity for alienation is not clear.

In his stages of a medical career, Hall lists "generating ambition" as the first of four stages (1948:327). Members of A.A. disclaim having an ambition to become alcoholics but identify the first stage of alienation within their being. Early feelings of alienation support Geyer's claim that the "alienation process is supposed to start very early..." (1980:85).

Descriptions of feelings of alienation differ with individuals:

I had feelings that I could never admit to myself even, until I came here. I had fear, I lived with fear. I felt nervous and insecure. Here I'd lived and was living a fairly successful life. I'd become a doctor. I'd gone to John Hopkins and specialized. I was professor at a university and yet I didn't feel good about me. I wanted to be included, to be a part of everything. And yet I never fit (B., male, 12 years).

Another person might place more stress on feeling out of place:

I had feelings as a kid that I never talked about to anyone. I felt like I didn't belong, like I'd been dumped into the wrong family. I thought for sure there'd been some mistake at the hospital and I wasn't even born in a hospital. These goons who were supposed to be my brothers and sisters didn't have anything in common with me (T., male, 14 years).

Others describe their alienation in terms of "feeling superior to everyone around me" (J., female, 4 years) and/or feeling overly dependent on others and alienated from self:

I depended on other people to make me happy. That got me in a lot of trouble. I would blame other people if I did not feel happy. I used to choose to be with people who would make me feel bad if I wanted to get bad feelings, and choose to be with people who would make me feel good when I wanted to feel good (C., female, 3 years).

Feelings of "inferiority", "inadequacy", "isolation", and "not belonging" are common to alcoholics (Mann, 1981:24).

From his own experiences, Stewart (1976:39) describes alcoholics in the following way: "Alcoholics grope for that unity, that at-oneness, in their distaste for the unanonymous world, where there is more conflict, more separateness, than harmony and communion."

The first stage of alcoholism and alienation occurs during childhood and early adolescence, it has a temporal property. It starts with feelings of fear, insecurity and isolation. How does it get started? Literature on alienation, careers, and passages identifies means and agents. Members of A.A. are able to name some of these means and agents. S. (female, 7 years) saw her family as agent:

I was born in the Maritimes, the youngest of five children. The sister next to me was 8 years older. I had elderly parents and grew up in a very protected environment. Every thing I did, the others thought it was terrific. And then I went to school and got out in the real world, what a shock!

On the other hand, E. (male, 1½ years) saw family experiences as means:

I never felt good in my home. We were really poor and I felt unwanted and there were reasons for that. I don't know exactly why, but me and a younger sister were put in a foster home when we were little. I was about four or three and my sister was not yet a year. I ended up going back home later but we never saw my little sister again.

For E., the trauma of childhood led to anxiety, "a constant companion to alienation throughout the years of growing up, as well as in adulthood" (Geyer, 1980:86).

In his article "Alienation from Interaction", Goffman outlines four ways in which alienation can occur in the setting of a conversation (1957:47-60). A participant who is too self-, other, or interaction-conscious, and too pre-occupied with externalities, will be handicapped in his

interaction with others. He may focus his attention on the self, other, the interaction or the environment to the extent that he is unable to relate to the other. Anyone who claims to feel ill at ease with self and others, as expressed by members of A.A. will tend to experience negative reactions in the conversational setting, and further alienation. Goffman describes alienation as happening,

At the same time, however, he drives a wedge between himself and the world that could become real for him. And the gap that is created in this way he fills with that special kind of uneasiness that is characteristically found during conversation (1957:59).

Preoccupation is described as reinforcing alienation during conversations or social interaction with others. This problem is compounded when the alienated person is also drinking, as will be discussed in the next section.

Negative interactions will reinforce negative thoughts and feelings, members of A.A. call them resentments. Resentments carry top priority with A.A. members. Many of them are formed in childhood and they take on the coercive power that Durkheim talks about in Rules of Sociological Methods,

These types of conduct or thought are not only external to the individual but are, moreover, endowed with coercive power, by virtue of which they impose themselves upon him, independent of his individual will (1964:2).

With conversation and social interaction as the setting, various agents contribute to the development of alienation. Family, church, and school present the "primary reference group" which are named by Haas and Shaffir as being

important to self-image formation (Haas, 1978:21). In the case of the childhood of the alcoholic, this image consists of a negative identity.

Family members have a powerful influence on alienation. In her book, The Magic Bottle, Bruant describes the beginning of alienation in her life:

The mental twists that led up to my drinking began many years before I ever took a drink for I am one of those whose history proves conclusively that my drinking was "a symptom of a deeper trouble". When I was seven, through the separation of my parents, I went to live with my grandparents whom I hardly knew. Later, by mistake, I found out that I had been adopted and that became "the final blow" (Bruant, 1978:37).

Bruant continues with: "For days I was numb, unnaturally quiet for me, mulling it over in my mind" (p. 38). Similarly, a member of A.A. states:

I was always kind of shy and scared. When I was a kid, my dad shot my dog and put him down a gopher hole. I never talked to him much, ever again. Now I look back and understand that my dog was eating chickens, but at the time I felt mad at my dad for killing my dog. That ended our relationship (M., male, 22 years).

Church and religion can also be described as sources of alienation.⁴ J. expresses her alienation brought on by the church:

When I was a kid, I hated to go to church. I thought my parents were crazy to believe in God. What proof did they have that He existed? I'd never seen him. And then the church told me that I should be good, and not do such and such. Well, I always found that it was easier and more fun to lie and cheat and steal (J., female, 4 years).

Another member of A.A. describes the alienating effect of religion with these statements:

I was brought up believing that God was a punishing God. That scared me. I resolved the problem by sort of making a pact with God, I wouldn't bother him as long as he didn't bother me. I set out to do whatever I liked and make my own rules as I went along (G., female, 7 years).

Alienation brought on by the church lead to the anomie expressed by both J. and G. Merton wrote that the discrepancy between goals and possibilities leads to anomie. For the alcoholic, the state of alienation is closely related to anomie.

Family and church are not the only institutions which act as agents of alienation, schools can also be included.

E.'s experiences provide this example:

When I went to high school we had gym for the first time in my life. We were supposed to buy gym clothes but my family was too poor. The first time I went to school, the gym teacher asked me where my gym clothes were. I told him I didn't have any. Then he took me to the lost and found and made me wear a pair of size 11 shoes and an old pair of gym pants. All the guys laughed at me. I hated that. I never went back to school, I went and got a job (E., male, 1½ years).

This happened to E. in his early adolescence. School had a similar alienating effect on Burns: "In college, all of a sudden I was nowhere. Things didn't make sense. I couldn't understand why, but nothing added up, and nothing went anywhere or even pointed anywhere" (Burns, 1980:35).

Childhood can be described as the first stage in the

career of an alcoholic, experiences of childhood come to shape and influence subsequent stages. Various agents reinforce the alienation. Family, church, and school, the predominant institutional contacts, posit feelings of alienation in the passage. The person who goes on to recover in A.A. starts with feeling "not good" about his or herself, and then introduces alcohol into the system in the next passage.

The First Drink: A False Sense of Integration

The second stage in the career of an alcoholic is the shortest; it is the occasion of the first drink. It may happen in late childhood or in adolescence. Some members of A.A. had their first drink in their twenties or thirties. The first drink is usually experienced in a social situation. It may lead to good feelings or problems. By many, it is discovered as a crutch to alleviate feelings of alienation. The first drink can be perceived as a falsely positive status passage, it provides a false sense of integration.

Why do people take that first drink? Becker claimed that impulses, desires, and curiosity along with social influences and motivation prompted marijuana smokers in their first experiences with marijuana (Becker, 1963:42). These psychological motives may be complicated by social pressures in the case of alcohol. High school students undergo peer encouragement or pressure to drink or believe that drinking provides proof for adulthood (Dunn, 1965:23). E. describes how peer influence got him started:

Every night I went out with this bunch of guys and they liked to drink. I figured they'd think I was a sissy if I didn't drink. I drank to be one of them, to be a man. I drank just as much as they did. The only thing was that I got sick (E., male, 1½ years).

Studies of teenage drinkers verify a relationship between the drinking habits of individuals and their friends.⁵ B. was prompted by curiosity and peer pressure:

My dad had these fancy bottles in his liquor cabinet. One day my girl friend was over and she bugged me to try some. I was amazed at how good it tasted and how good it made you feel (B., female, 8 years).

Another woman provided the following reason for starting to drink:

For some reason, I was always attracted to men that drank. They looked to me like they were really living exciting lives. I hated squares. I thought people who drank were more fun. So, of course, when you hang around with drinkers, you eventually start drinking, just like they do (J., female, 4 years).

Drinking usually starts in a social setting and it starts as a social drink; no one has any intention or knowledge of getting drunk or sick or into trouble (Mann, 1981:9). Referring once again to Becker's observations about marijuana users, alcohol does not need a "social interpretation of a physical experience" (1963:42); --the effects of alcohol are not ambiguous. Alcohol is a powerful drug, and once introduced into the blood stream, has noticeable effects on the heart, lungs, skin, sense, and muscles. It is able to provide a psychological change;

That first drink made me feel good. Alcohol did something for me. I was no longer afraid, and shy, and nervous. Suddenly I could dance better and I became better looking. I thought I was wittier, I could tell funnier jokes. I could make out with the girls (B., male, 12 years).

As described by B., alcohol has a relaxing effect. The warm feeling of alcohol replaces feelings of loneliness and meaninglessness (Stewart, 1976:46). The relaxation and comfort stimulate confidence, shyness and insecurity disappear. Alcohol is discovered as a crutch to counteract alienation. It provides a solution for a variety of problems. Burns, who recovered in A.A., explains how alcohol solved his problems:

Drinking for me, right from the start and for many years afterward, was not a problem; it was the answer to a problem--actually the answer to a number of problems. I had always been shy and uneasy with people and had had to work hard to overcome this trait; my popularity had been built on top of it and in spite of it. But with a few drinks in me, I was not uneasy with anybody, I felt good, without having to work at it (Burns, 1980:35).

Burns goes on to say that drinking took away his worries and his fear of the future.

A social drink, in a social setting, as a solution to social problems, provides a positive experience for some drinkers. In the career of the alcoholic, this is usually a brief, falsely positive passage.⁶ In many cases, the first drink may start out positive and then quickly turn negative:

I could have qualified for the program from the first day I took my first drink. I got

drunk and went into a blackout. Since blackouts are advanced stages of alcoholism, I should have come to this program right then and there (A., female, 3 years).

And M. reports a similar experience:

My first memory of drinking was at a dance held in a school house. It started out lots of fun. My friends seemed to play better than ever. I have some memories of fights breaking out later, and I remember getting very sick. At that time I just figured I needed to learn how to drink properly, although I guess I never did (M., male, 22 years).

Many drinkers report becoming aware of the problems brought to their life at the time they first drank:

When I was 16 we mixed elderberry wine with rubbing alcohol and warmed it up to give it more "pezaz". Drinking that stuff made me feel good, I didn't usually feel good within. Whiskey or alcohol made me feel like I could climb mountains and be witty and bright. I just never knew when to quit. I could not say "thank you, no" and go home for supper. I became undependable (J., male, 35 years).

N. reports:

The way I drank when I started was how I ended. The first time I drank, I ended up in a jail and that was how it went for me from then on, every time I drank I ended up in some kind of trouble (N., male, 1 year).

For the alcoholic, even when the experience ends negatively, the first drink becomes the discovery of a crutch. Alcohol itself becomes an agent, shaping and influencing this and subsequent passages. The drinker identifies alcohol as having a potential for positive influence, denying alcohol's negative effects. Through its chemical composition, alcohol is in reality a depressant. Although a drinker may feel

'high' after the first several drinks, depression follows with more alcohol, or the next day with the hangover. A false sense of integration has been induced through a drug that is perceived, wrongly, as providing cheer and comfort. Alcohol becomes the springboard for further alienation.

Further Alienation: The Crutch Begins To Cripple

After the first drink, most alcoholics start on a career of deviance.⁷ Alcohol, once a crutch, begins to cripple. Alcohol's physical effects interfere with relationships and activities. Alcoholism starts with a drink which turns into a habit to become an addiction. Where alienation may have been personal and brought on by the social, it now becomes social, reinforced by the psychological as well as the social. Problems with health, family, job, and perhaps the law, create this social alienation. At the end of this negative passage, the alcoholic is often totally alone, with only his bottle for solace. He or she has become an "outsider" (Becker, 1963:1).

Alcohol is addictive. The liquor industry spends millions of dollars each year advertising the benefits of drinking on social occasions (Dunn, 1965:34). Encouraged by the media, pressured by peers, and driven by his or her own impulses and desires, the alcoholic begins to drink socially. However, for the alcoholic, social drinking turns into problem drinking.⁸ As drinking continues, more alcohol is needed for the same effect and a craving for alcohol can

develop. The temporality of this passage varies with individuals. Although, generally, what begins as a fun experiment, ends in problems and disasters for the alcoholic who concludes his or her status of alienation in the fellowship of A.A. The following story, told at an A.A. meeting, expresses the alcoholic's attitude toward alcohol:

I was never a social drinker. Too much was never enough. I'll tell you a story that shows how it was for me. An alcoholic is walking along a beach and finds a bottle. When he rubs it, a genie comes out and tells him he can have three wishes. He asks for a bottle of good whiskey that will never run dry. "Poof." It happens. He tries it and sure enough it's good whiskey and the bottle stays full. Then the genie says, "You have two more wishes." The alcoholic says, "I'll take two more of those" (J., male, 35 years).

For the alcoholic, the use of alcohol leads to a loss of the ability to control amounts consumed. With the excessive drinking, problems with relationships at home, on the job, and with associates develop. Drinking becomes a problem in three distinct areas: personally and socially, functionally in the area of jobs, and legally with respect to driving infraction and family matters. In this passage alcohol has become a powerful agent, and the passagee eventually loses control over his or her status.⁹

Through his or her drinking, the alcoholic descends into deeper isolation. Goffman's four ways for producing alienation in interactions apply especially well to the alcoholic at this stage.¹⁰ Goffman started by identifying self-consciousness as one of the attributes which can interfere

with communication and exacerbate negative results.

Alcoholics describe themselves as becoming extremely self-conscious:

As an alcoholic I was self-centered to the extreme. If I went to a football game and the team went into a huddle--I thought they were talking about me (J., male, 2 years).

Goffman listed interaction-consciousness as well. Again, alcoholics, once on their way to recovery, recognize their self-consciousness in this area:

Sure drinking interfered with my business. I used to have important business men like the architects, come on the job to see what we were doing. I'd have to take a drink first. I figured they wouldn't want to do business with someone who was drinking so early in the morning so I'd stand a few feet away from them so they couldn't smell the booze on me (M., male, 22 years).

And finally, the pre-occupation with drinking which is brought on by the alcohol addiction, leads to other-consciousness and external distractions. These intensify the alienation process. One alcoholic describes his pre-occupation with alcohol in the following way:

I loved money and I loved sex, but even when we were talking about those things, I'd be thinking about a drink. My mind was like it had two bands like on a radio. With one band I would involve myself with what was going on around me and with the other band I would always be thinking about booze. Where will I get the next drink? How much is left in the bottle? When will the liquor store close?
(C., male, 17 years)

These examples present the personal alienation process. As the alcoholism and the alienation progress, agents and

situations become more complicated.

One book which offers an excellent description is written by Dennison et al. (1980). They describe problem drinking as permeating the life of the alcoholic:

Problem drinking occurs when drinking causes physical, psychological, or social harm to the drinker or others. Problem drinking manifests itself in the form of dangerous or disruptive behaviors that occur during, after, and as a result of drinking. Some of these behaviours may include legal complications, domestic quarrels, and personal conflict (p. 11).

Physical problems begin because alcohol has a toxic effect on the body. Illness, seizures, and finally cirrhosis are examples of the problems experienced by most practicing alcoholics. The physical effects of alcohol may impair driving, stimulate aggression, or immobilize and isolate. Alcoholics who come to A.A. list a wide variety of alcohol related problems as occurring in their lives at this stage of concentrated negativity. Drinking increases the "feeling bad" feeling which, in turn, is expressed toward others. Alcohol, although it does not have aggressive pharmacological properties, is a social lubricant, stimulating an alcoholic to "talk more, more loudly, and aggressively" (Dennison, 1980: 24). One alcoholic describes a more violent outcome of alcohol abuse:

Drinking sure caused a lot of problems for my family. I did things that I'm not proud of. I wouldn't have done them if I didn't drink. When I drank I'd start looking for a fight. If anyone looked at me the wrong way, I'd belt

them one. And if I couldn't pick a fight at the hotel, I'd go home and belt the old lady, as I used to call her then. I'd wack the kids around too (D., male, 4 years).

In A.A., members say that "for everyone who has a problem with alcohol, ten other people are affected." They also say that "alcoholism is a family disease." These beliefs express the effects the alienated alcoholic has on those around him or her, especially family. Either through the aggression or the isolation, the alienation touches others as well as the alcoholic. J. expresses the results of alienation on his family life:

All I ever did was go to work every day and come home via the liquor store. I'd sit in the basement and watch T.V. The only ones I talked to at home were those two dogs, the black and the white, on the scotch bottle. I thought I was being a good husband because I put a roof over their heads and food on the table. I just didn't think any further (J., male, 3 years after 7 years of sobriety and 9 year relapse).

The alienation of the alcoholic interferes in relationships, as described by J., and leads to further alienation. It becomes difficult to maintain and accept personal contact and responsibility and decisions are made to avoid them, as reported by A., (female, 7 years):

I had a good job with the government in the Maritimes but I decided to move. I didn't want to be stuck at home looking after two elderly parents. I wanted to drink and live an exciting life. So I left home to come here. Drinking made it hard for me to handle any kind of responsibility.

The job is also affected by the alcohol. In addition

to family problems, most members of A.A. tell about problems at work:

I was a bright young engineer. Any one with a problem would come and see me. And I wanted to keep up the image. But on the inside, I had fear. No one can describe the fear. No amount of burning up adjectives can describe my deep fear. So I drank. Well it takes too much energy to keep up two fronts and finally one broke (J., male, 35 years).

Problems at work often lead to threats of job loss if drinking continues. They may also lead to referrals to alcohol treatment centers.

There are two aspects of this passage of further alienation which are important in the career of the alcoholic. In the first place, to the outside world, the alcoholic himself appears to be one of the chief agents actively involved in this passage. It is the alcoholic him- or herself who decides when to drink, how much to drink, and the many other facets of his or her behaviour. However, these perceptions are modified once alcohol is recognized as an addictive drug and as an auxiliary agent.

The second aspect of this passage concerns the battle, so to speak, that begins between the alcoholic and other agents. Employers, family doctors, friends and relatives begin to vie for top agent position. Efforts are sometimes exerted toward convincing the alcoholic that he or she has problems and that it is in his or her best interest to become involved with solutions. The employer may threaten termination

of employment unless treatment is taken. Friends may make suggestions and family members may isolate. The doctor may suggest going on antibuse, a drug which causes extreme illness when mixed with alcohol. The doctor may also suggest psychiatric care. At this stage of the alcoholic's career, he or she may hear about Alcoholics Anonymous.

The final stage of this passage occurs when the alcoholic, confronted with the label of "alcoholic" or "problem drinker", has to come to terms with acceptance of the label, by either denying it or taking positive action and dealing with the drinking problem in a variety of ways.

B. decided to go for psychiatric help:

For sixteen years I went to psychotherapy, I became a professional mental patient. There were two things about me that were absolutely true. I drank too much and I was very nervous. We thought that if we could cure the nervousness, I could become a normal drinker (B., male, 12 years).

Similarly, E. went for help:

I tried to get everybody off my back. I lied at the Psychiatric hospital and told them I was thinking of committing suicide. I must have put on quite an act 'cause then they let me in. When they put me on antibuse and told me to quit drinking, I signed myself out (E., male, 1½ years).

Both men identify the long drawn-out process of coming to recognize for themselves that alcohol is a problem in their lives.

By the end of the drinking stage of the career, the alcoholic has become totally alienated. Living to drink and

drinking to live, little else has meaning other than alcohol. The alcoholic becomes self-centered in his or her struggle to maintain the alcohol supply. He or she drinks alone, lying and sneaking drinks. Mann describes the alcoholic as "needing to have drinks before doing anything", having a "loss of sense of time" and being "totally disintegrated" (Mann, 1981; 51, 52).

From his own experiences, Stewart writes about this stage of the alienation:

Eventually the ego-bound alcoholic retreats into a self-sufficient shell. He is false in his loneliness, without contact that nourishes his meaning. In withdrawal, he lives in a vacuum--not in the past, not in the future, and certainly not in the present. Real time stands still. Only the ticking of a clock, monotonous, boring, measures out his hours. That real personal time, inside, where he feels free and integrated, is empty (1976:46).

R. experienced similar feelings toward the end of her drinking:

I had spent so many nights sitting in front of that T.V. getting plastered that I really didn't know any other world existed. The only communication I'd had with my kids had been to stomp on the floor to tell them it was time to go to bed. I looked a wreck and felt a wreck. Nothing had any meaning except just to be left alone to go on drinking (female, 9 years).

To the outside world, the alcoholic would be perceived as experiencing a variety of crises. However, to the alcoholic, the only response to problems with health, family, or job, is to have another drink. The "disease of denial", as A.A. calls it, limits recognition of the occurrence of any crisis. Stories by members of A.A., of their inability to acknowledge that alcohol is a problem in their lives, are

baffling. Trips to jails, detoxification units, and hospitals may have little influence in convincing the alcoholic to seek help. The alcoholic, "self-willed to the extreme", may continue to maintain that the problems happening in his or her life can be attributed to other:

I never once thought there was anything wrong with me. If only that so-and-so hadn't reported me to the police, if only I'd eaten that day, if only Beth had agreed to do the driving, if only the cop had been more tolerant, I would never have ended up in jail. That judge should have had some compassion. These were the kinds of thoughts that went through my head whenever I got into a jam (J., female, 4 years).

These are the thoughts of a totally alienated person.

Using Glaser's and Strauss' properties, this status of further alienation is inevitable for the alcoholic once drinking starts. It is also irreversible, according to A.A., "once an alcoholic, always an alcoholic". This passage is voluntary, to the extent that the passagee chooses to continue drinking. It lacks clarity since the alcoholic is usually unable to see what is happening to him or her, and it is experienced alone, although others become involved and a battling between agents may ensue. Legitimation may be incorporated by judges, doctors, employers, and others when the passagee is labelled "problem drinker" or "chronic alcoholic" but the decision to 'quit drinking' is left within the realm of the passagee's power. During this time, alcohol, as an addictive drug, also has agent status. It is able to stupify the passagee and pressure for continued drinking. How does

an individual, on the negative path of self-destructive drinking, either stop or change the direction of the passage? Society expects human beings to be rational, and provides for individual freedoms. With alcohol as agent chances for change are minimized. The individual who experiences total subjugation to an obsessive-compulsive habit such as drinking, has little if any free will. Added to this, the sense of alienation provides a wall against social intervention. It is within this dismal setting the next passage occurs, the turning point.

The Turning Point: The Crisis

Alcoholics Anonymous describes the turning point, when an alcoholic "hits bottom" and decides to "do something about his or her drinking", as a miracle.¹¹ When seen in the light of an intensely alienated background, the turning point is an interesting phenomenon. This passage is described, in the sociology of religion, as conversion. It involves, in this study of alcoholism, the turning point when the alcoholic decides to stop drinking and go to A.A.

From the experiences of individual members, A.A. identifies a mystery around this passage. Members of A.A. prepare for and put effort into facilitating this passage, yet make no attempts to explain why or how it happens. Most large urban centers in North America have a central A.A. organization called "Intergroup" and it is Intergroup which may operate a twenty-four hour answering service and a central

office or may place a small stamp-size ad in the local newspaper asking, "Are you a problem drinker?"--all as efforts to reach out to those needing their help. Another way A.A. may reach out to the public is through sending out "public information", informing high school students and members of service clubs of the existence of a fellowship for recovering alcoholics.

Many alcoholics, in turning to A.A., had to overcome not only their desire to continue drinking, but also their stereotypes of Alcoholics Anonymous and its members.¹²

J. reported:

I didn't want to go to A.A. I figured I wasn't that kind of an alcoholic. I thought alcoholics were the guys with the big rain coats and the rubber boots or the running shoes that slept outside and lived on the skids and I wasn't that bad (J., female, 4 years).

Similar misconceptions are expressed by S.:

I knew I was an alcoholic because I couldn't quit drinking or stay quit but I didn't want to go to A.A. because I had heard they had something to do with God and I didn't want to have anything to do with church and such. I was scared of what they'd ask me to do (S., female, 6 months).

On the other hand, others express total surrender:

I didn't care what I was getting into. I just wanted to quit drinking and I'd heard that's what you did once you were in A.A. If they'd asked me to stand on my head in a corner for several hours everyday, I'd have been ready to do it. Anything, just so I wouldn't have to keep on drinking (J., male, 2 years).

In a survey carried out by A.A. World Service, the following percentages were given for findings on contact sources for those who come into the fellowship: "30% came in through family who were members of A.A., 16% doctors, 12% through radio, T.V., and other media, 7% through literature, 5% clergy, 6% through employers, 4% friends, 10% counselling services, 4% hospitals, and 6% came into A.A. through social organizations."¹³ Glaser and Strauss would describe these agents as recruiters who have succeeded in idealizing the passage "to persuade him to embark on the passage if he either seems reluctant to begin the passage or wishes to withdraw..." (Glaser, 1971:2).

The turning point is facilitated by a break in the wall of alienation. Somehow, someone or something is able to reach in and stimulate the alcoholic to change. One member had been on a drinking spree when his wife left him. At that point he was ready to co-operate with his sister-in-law and go to his first meeting (L., male, 2 years). Another man lost his job and, as a result of financial problems, had to quit drinking for a few days. For him, those few days were just enough "to come out of the fog caused by the self-destructive drinking long enough to reach out for help" (J., male, 35 years). A third member, after having had a depressing Christmas, went to visit a friend who was a member of Al-Anon, an organization for the friends and relatives of Alcoholics. This friend asked her, "J., do you think you

have a problem with alcohol?". When J. answered, "No, but my husband does", she was taken to her first meeting, and after several months was able to see she did have a drinking problem herself (A., female, 7 years).

None of these examples of the turning point as experienced by members of A.A. seem exciting or dramatic when considered at face value. Only when they are considered in the light of the alienation experienced by the passagee or of the resistance previously presented by the same passagee, do these experiences acquire their true perspective. Although agents may have beseeched or cajoled passagees previously, it is only at this point that the negative direction of the career changes about to a positive direction.

Some stories about turning points are quietly dramatic. E's experience fits this description:

I woke up one morning after a weekend of drinking and looked in the mirror and said, "E., you've got to quit drinking." I had seen an ad in the paper many times about problems with drinking, so I got that ad and called the number. Within half an hour two men from A.A. came to see me. I got mad at my wife afterward because I thought she had told them all about me, that's how much the things they talked about were exactly like me (male, 1½ years).

Bill Wilson, one of the co-founders of A.A., attributed his turning point to the following experience: he believed that finding God would solve his drinking problem and he said,

"If there is a God, show me. Show me. Give me a sign." As he formed the words, in that very instant he was aware first of a light, a great white light that filled the room,

then he suddenly seemed caught up in a kind of joy, an ecstasy such as he would never find words to describe (Thomson, 1976:223).

This highly dramatic experience became the turning point in Bill's life.

There are, therefore, two different types of turning points. One type follows, using Hall's model in his article on the medical profession, a process of gaining admission or taking steps to enter A.A.¹⁴ The other, more dramatic, type could be classified as a conversion. This type of turning point will be discussed below.

The non-dramatic gaining of admission to A.A. may come as a result of alcoholics coming "to their recognition scene through a build up of crises that crash through their almost impenetrable defense system" (Johnson, 1973:1). For some, the turning point may occur under coercion, "this is especially true of people who attend a few meetings under court orders" (Sadler, 1977:207). Part of the turning point may include reading A.A.'s pamphlet called "Twenty Questions". This pamphlet uses criteria established by John Hopkins University Hospital to indicate a drinking problem. The passagee may encounter this pamphlet through an acquaintance or a professional and experience enough awareness to change. Answering 'yes' to three or more questions about homelife, work, self-confidence, the craving for alcohol or the feeling of remorse after drinking may be enough to convince the individual to take positive steps about his or her drinking problem.

Any turning point, especially one involving a complete turn in directionality from negative to positive, could be described as a 'conversion'; "a break between the past and the present" (Mol, 1976:51). Conversion is part and parcel of religious jargon and fits into the category of phenomenon that are "intractable analytically" and present problems for sociologists.¹⁵ Mol, in his social scientific theory of religion, offers the following definition of 'conversion':

It is the means by which a new perspective becomes emotionally anchored in the personality, which is unified in the process. The convert feels that he has obtained a new identity, and very often he strengthens his new assumptive world by repeating over and over how evil, or disconsolate, or inadequate he was before the conversion took place. Conversion then is the adoption of a new orientation, a re-ordering of positions and values (Ibid.).

Perhaps sociologists tend to put conversion in the religious category to overcome their inability to explain that which the passagee him- or herself is not able to express. In his discussion of passages, Hughes describes people as "not always" having a choice but still being "aware that they are entering" a passage (1937:405). However, some turning points in A.A. are described as taking place without choice and without awareness.¹⁶ Burn's description of his own experience provides an example of the turning point just happening, without rational guidance:

Then I contacted a man in A.A. and asked him for help. I cannot explain to this day what it was that changed my mind, why one day I

became ready where before I was not. I know "grace of God" is not an expression which satisfies the skeptic (I know because I myself am a skeptic by nature), but that is all the explanation I have ever had... (1980:22).

For some this conversion happens in a blackout or after being in A.A. for a while:

The first three months I was in A.A. I don't remember any of it. I drank before and after every meeting. I don't remember hearing anything. I know I went because my wife told me later. One day I just got up and decided I wasn't going to drink just for that day (R., male, 9 years).

B. had a similar experience of conversion after a period in A.A.:

At first when I was in A.A. I just kept on drinking. What changed it? I didn't want to drink any more, or be drunk any more, just for me. I had to do it for me. I met this fellow at a treatment center who was quitting at 84 and I asked him why he'd bother to quit at that age. He said, "I don't want to be drunk any more." And that made sense to me (B., male, 12 years).

From its very beginning, A.A. has believed that "hitting bottom", a turning point, or conversion needs to take place.¹⁷ They describe the alcoholic as needing "to become teachable". He or she has to reach a point where personal and social contact is possible. "I had to get to the point where I was willing to ask for help and receive it", is the way one member of A.A. expressed this change (J., male, 3 years).

The Newcomer: The Beginning of Personal Integration

Once the alcoholic experiences the turning point, he

or she enters the passage of a newcomer in A.A. Sociologist conceptualized identity as a learned set of symbols and ideology, learned either through interaction with others. And yet, that experience, where the alcoholic goes to his first meeting and feels right at home, or feels he or she belongs, is an aspect of developing identity which is unpredictable. The following are statements made by members of A.A. concerning their feelings as newcomers at their first meeting:

I came to A.A. and I began to feel good. I felt part of, like I belonged (B., male, 12 years).

And:

The first time I came to an A.A. meeting I felt good. Someone shook my hand at the door and smiled at me and told me to come on in. Nobody had shook my hand or smiled at me for a long time. Most people didn't want me coming into their place. I almost cried, it felt so good (J., male, 3 years).

R. puts it this way:

When I got here, I knew I was in the right place. I couldn't stand all yous people. I figured yous were phoney, or else you were drinking on the side. I didn't like how clean you looked, I didn't figure you were really alcoholics. I figured I was the only alcoholic in the place but I believed you people could help me and that's why I stayed (R., male, 3 years).

A female member of A.A. describes her feelings at her first meeting:

For the first time in my life I felt comfortable. I just knew you people liked me even if I didn't like myself. I usually go into a room and just

kind of feel bad about people but when I came here I felt different, I just knew I was at 'home' (J., female, 4 years).

"Feeling at home", "feeling good", "feeling comfortable" all indicate a spontaneous sense of oneness, a sense of identity with the larger group. While the alcoholic has come to the meeting feeling estranged, alien, rootless, and isolated from other, these feelings change with the first meeting. Parallels can be drawn between the change in feelings with the first drink and with the first meeting. The main difference is that the changes with the first drink were induced by an addictive chemical while the changes with the first ^{AA group} drink are socially induced through the A.A. fellowship.

With their first meeting, alcoholics move from conversion to commitment, entering a re-socialization process, learning about their alcoholism, the program and themselves as members of families, employment situations, and society. They are stripped of their old identity as practicing alcoholics.

M. reports:

Boy, was I relieved to learn I was not a bad person trying to get good but a sick person trying to get well, that alcoholism was a disease. I knew about my crazy uncle who had killed himself. I was told that all I had to do was to not drink and go to meetings and everything would be alright. All I had to do was present the body and that was all I could do at first (male, 22 years).

As well as learning that alcoholism is a disease, the newcomer is also taught not to take the first drink, "When you get hit by a train, it's not the caboose that kills you, but

the engine" (Ibid.). He or she is expected to stay sober and just "keep coming to meetings". Basing their beliefs on science, A.A. claims that it takes "nine to eighteen months for alcohol to leave your system" and therefore anticipates that newcomers will "not be able to use the steps, only the slogans, or mini-steps, and rise on the back of the fellowship." One alcoholic describes the process:

When I first came in I was told to use the slogans, first things first, work out right relationships at work, home, and social; easy does it, and I quote R.B., an alcoholic is a person with both feet planted firmly in mid air, so take it easy. I was told to keep an open mind which means we have to become teachable. When we were drinking, no one could tell us anything, but now we need to become ready to listen and learn (P., male, 14 years).

By spending time with others who are not drinking, perhaps choosing a sponsor to talk to about more personal issues, and by sitting in church basements instead of hotels, the alcoholic achieves his first periods of sobriety.¹⁸

Many of the properties identified by Glaser and Strauss are relevant to this status of newcomer.¹⁹ The passage is repeatable. Some people get a year of sobriety and then get drunk to return to A.A. and get nearly another year before they become ready to work the steps as well as "stay sober on the fellowship". Going back to drinking is threatened as an inevitable passage if the newcomer does not attend enough meetings. Returning to drinking recognizes the reversibility of newcomer status. While the passages of

alienation are experienced alone, the passages of integration are experienced collectively. "You are no longer alone" is a slogan that expresses this collectivity. Those who come into A.A. as newcomers together may attend meetings together. Often they are unemployed and free to attend several meetings a day and, depending on the size of the urban center, may see each other on a regular basis during this passage.

One of these passage properties that are especially relevant to A.A. is the amount of discussion and oral concentration on the passages, "passages themselves are continually discussed by participants" (Glaser, 1971:2). This is certainly true in A.A. Lengthy comparisons are made of life before and after A.A. The past is inventoried and re-examined, and future concerns are expressed. Some of this discussion is curtailed by A.A.'s belief in life being lived in "24 hour, day-tight compartments."

Glaser also identifies ceremonies, "when the passage itself is not too desirable, but the achieved goal is" (1971: 91). In A.A. a big to-do is made of three, six, and twelve months sober. Anniversaries are held every year after the first, giving the passage "special legitimation by one or more authorized agents" (Glaser, 1971:4). Not all A.A. groups have similar practices with respect to birthdays, as they are called, but often pins are given out. Most members do receive a medallion with the A.A. triangle within a circle symbol and the letters "A.A." and the words "unity, recovery, and service"

within the circle. The medallion may have the name and the "dry date" printed on the back: the "dry date" being the day after the day the alcoholic had his or her last drink.

Parties are held to celebrate that first year of sobriety. Cards and presents may be provided by the celebrants' acquaintances and relatives. This celebration is one of several means by which a commitment to the fellowship is elicited. The celebrant may have his or her first chance to say a few words to the fellowship in public. For example:

I would like to thank everyone who has helped make it possible for me to stay sober for 365 days. I never thought it could be done, but with your help, I made it. I would like specially to thank my family, my wife, who stood by me through all the troubles. This last year hasn't been easy but my worst days sober were better than my best days drunk (D., male, 1 year).

Or from A.:

I'm so nervous up here but my sponsor said I should say a few words. Thank you people in A.A. for this medallion. I know it's not a reward or a medal but my sponsor says it's a reminder of who I am and where I come from (A., female, 1 year).

During that first year in the fellowship, the newcomer may have been asked to stack chairs or make coffee, as a means of getting involved and becoming part of the fellowship. He or she may have been asked to take part in meetings, maybe even speak. The speaking or witnessing is recognized by A.A. as a cathartic experience:

I've been asked to speak tonight and I'm

really nervous. You should hear my knees knock. Anyway, I owe my life to A.A. so I'll do anything I'm asked. My sponsor tells me I'll feel a whole hell of a lot better after I've told you a little bit about myself. Some of these things are not easy to talk about but here goes. (A., female, 1 year).

Speaking is also a way to deepen commitment to A.A.

The newcomer may have gone to an A.A. conference where some of the better A.A. speakers are 'show cased' along with banquets and dancing by a large group of sober alcoholics. For some it may be their first time dancing sober. The newcomer may have established a relationship with a sponsor, or even become someone else's sponsor. Helping others is viewed as the best way to help yourself--"you can't keep it if you don't give it away." In hearing themselves convince others, alcoholics reinforce the ideas in their own minds.

A wide variety of problems may be experienced that first year. A.A. suggests medical attention to those who come into the program. Then too, the newcomer may need psychiatric attention. Members of A.A. do not set themselves up as experts in the recovery process, only human beings helping each other. Since A.A. is informally organized, newcomers may experience a lack of professional attention, and, encountering the shortcomings of A.A. members, may have problems their first year in A.A. Entry into A.A. may be a problematic experience for some.

Most newcomers, with entry into A.A. start on the road to personal integration. Starting to feel better about

oneself, making a commitment to a larger social unit, and beginning to relate to others become the first stage of a set of positive passages. Finances and family may still be a problem as some alcoholics initially replace their addiction for alcohol with an addiction to meetings (Robinson, 1976:98). But a start has been made. "God" may still be a problem, but Good, Orderly, Direction is beginning to provide a few positive changes. A shift in direction from negative to positive has been made and contact has been secured with a set of ideas and a group of people who are able to further the positive directionality.

The Relapse: Waiving Commitment

Entry into A.A. does not mean that the continuation of a positive direction for the career of the recovering alcoholic is inevitable. The passagee may experience a slip, a temporary, negative passage; commitment is waived and behaviour is inconsistent. The slip or relapse may occur for a variety of reasons, may continue for various lengths of time and may or may not be followed by a return to A.A. A.A. acknowledges that only 25% of those who come to A.A., get sober their first year in the program. They say 19% take 2 to 5 years, 8% take 5 to 10 years, and 8% take more than ten years.²⁰ A small percent have taken more than thirty years of coming to A.A., and then relapsing, and returning before they get one year of sobriety.

Rudy carried out a study of slipping in A.A. groups in

England and found that 57% of his respondents had "slipped at least once and 18% had slipped five or more times" (Rudy, 1980:727). He decided that slipping enhances group solidarity; "slipping as deviant behaviour, serves a function in A.A." (p. 731). Since slipping is a common occurrence, A.A. has a set of concepts formulated to deal with this phenomenon. One concept is the slogan, "Keep Coming Back"; a participant is reminded that the only requirement for membership is a "desire to stop drinking", and as long as he or she has that desire, he or she is always welcome.²¹ Then too, A.A. considers the alcoholic as powerless and as having, at times, "no defense against the first drink".²² Glaser and Strauss describe persons as voluntarily making passages; for A.A. the slip may be caused by a voluntary act but is generally considered an involuntary response to "people, places or things".

In describing commitment Becker talks about "side bets" being made to reinforce commitment (Becker, 1960:36). These side bets may be made by a number of agents.²³ One agent could be the passagee himself, when he has "a greater desire to get drunk than to stay sober":

I thought I would have myself a little "slip" --and if that didn't work (and I was prepared to believe it might not), I figured I would return to A.A. and be a "success" again on the Program like I had been before (Burns, 1975:37).

Ogbourne, on the other hand, accuses A.A. of being an agent: "An alternate explanation, the one favoured here, is that prophecies about the inevitability of loss of control following

any break from abstinence becomes self-fulfilling" (1982:202).

Members of A.A. assert anywhere from none to a number of reasons for their relapses:

And the truth, strange to say is usually that he has no more idea why he took that first drink than you have...in their hearts they really do not know why they did it (Alcoholics Anonymous, 1939:23).

M. had a relapse after being in A.A. for four years:

I was visiting a customer who had just bought a house from me. We were sitting in this fancy recreation room and the customer offered me a drink. It was Christmas or New Years so I took a drink. On the way home I bought a bottle and right away I could see trouble coming. At some group I'd seen 'slip' spelt this way--Self-pity, Laxness of program, Improper thinking, and Pride. I started getting fully involved with the program the next day (M., male, 22 years).

One explanation for relapses or slips involves those who come to A.A. for reasons other than to quit drinking, their own side bets. They may have been sent by a judge after an alcohol related legal incident, they may have come to appease a spouse or relative, or they may come thinking they would learn about controlled drinking. They did not come to A.A. solely to quit drinking for good:

I came to A.A. 'cause I'm a trucker and I was charged with "driving while intoxicated". I figured if I went to A.A. for a while, then when I got before the judge I could tell him I was in A.A. and he might take it easy on me (J., male 3 years).

When J. did come before the judge he still got his license suspended for several years. He went back to drinking but returned within a year, ready to make a long term commitment

to sobriety and to A.A.

N. used problems with another member of A.A. as an excuse to drink:

I was living with a girl who was also in the program. I had taken my fifth step (sharing a moral inventory) with her and she blabbed it all over. I got so upset that I went out and got drunk and ended up at the lodge (female, nearly a year).

F. went back to drinking for similar reasons:

I can't afford to let other people bother me. I came here to quit drinking and I had to learn to get spiritual in order to stay quit. I can't afford to criticize other people, thinking what they should or shouldn't be saying or doing. I know if you do that and get mad, you'll get drunk. I did that ten years ago and now I'm finally coming up for one year of sobriety (male, 1 year).

All relapses do not involve only drinking, some are serious mental relapses where the passagee contemplates or attempts suicide, or has him- or herself admitted into a psychiatric hospital after a period of time in the A.A. program. Many members of A.A. experience problems after their first year as newcomers. As A.A. would say, "They're coming out of their alcoholic fog and they're starting to see the world around them."²⁴ R. provides the following description of what happens at this stage of the career:

That first year, you're on a free ride in the arms of the fellowship. Then you start to sober up and you've got to start working the steps. That's when the going gets tough so only the tough get going, the rest fall into mental or physical relapses. There are several levels of sobriety: physical, mental, emotional,

spiritual and contented sobriety. You have to work constantly to progress from one to the next. Alcoholism is a progressive illness and the recovery is progressive too (R., male, 12 years).

The relapse is a reversible passage, temporarily the passagee returns to alienation. Members are taught that relapses are possible for anyone at any time, and return to A.A. as quickly as possible after a relapse is recommended. Another set of crises may draw the passagee back to A.A. and a positively directed career.²⁵ Some do not return to A.A. Those who do may express these feelings:

I'm just coming back. I was working and got home late at night too tired to go to meetings. Last Saturday I had my last drink. Today I was at work and too up-tight to go on so I told my boss I was sick so I could come to this meeting. It's nice to see some of the same faces that were here when I left. I hope you people will let me come back again (T., male, 3 days).

And:

I'm glad to be back. It feels like home here. I love yous people. I don't have to be lonely here. My definition of lonely is when you have no one you can trust to tell your inner feelings to or you can cry to them. I get all my answers here. If I have a problem I go to a meeting and I may not hear about my same problem but someone will talk about something that is an answer for my problem (E., male, 1½ years).

A.A. acknowledges but discourages relapses: "You may have another drunk in you but who knows if you've got another recovery." Slippers do serve a recognized functional purpose. A.A. members claim that:

Whenever someone goes back out I say "But for the Grace of God", and "I'm glad it's not me". I reminds me what kind of an illness we're dealing with, that I can't become complacent, I've got to stay active or it could be me (B., female, 2 years).

Another member makes the following comments:

God I hate it when I see someone go back to drinking. After a few weeks they look so bad. I know a woman who went back to drinking and she lost everything, house and kids. She ended up in a psych ward after she had been doing so well. That's what would probably happen to me - I'd go nuts. I always did get crazy when I drank and they say it's worse once you've been dry for a while (J., female, 4 years).

People do go back to drinking, some for a day, some for years. Then they come back to A.A. to start all over. Some come with wounded pride, others come with anger toward other members. Contrary to the first time they came in, this time they know better what they're getting into and what they are committing themselves to.

Maturing in A.A.: Social Integration

For those who stay with A.A. or return after a relapse, the long slow process of social integration occurs at the stage of the alcoholic's career. A.A. members see their maturity as having stopped just before or when they began drinking. "I started drinking as a teenager and I was really little more than a teenager mentally when I came into the program" (S., male, 4½ years). In this passage of maturation in A.A., the passagee undergoes social integration. He or she

becomes an active and involved family, fellowship, and community member. Skills are learned to handle problems which, before A.A., would have meant "hiding in the bottle". A.A. becomes a way of continuing the socialization process that was interrupted through alcohol.

Alcoholics describe themselves as people who "normally would not mix" (Alcoholics Anonymous, 1939:17), however, within A.A., the alcoholic ends his career of deviance and begins a career of integration. Mann, a member of A.A. describes the first stage of this passage:

Working together with a group brings him fully back into the human family. As he takes a more and more active part in A.A., he is integrating himself into a social pattern, sometimes for the first time in his life, more often for the first time in years...he begins to feel some importance as an individual and his self-respect slowly returns (Mann, 1981:177, 184).

The alcoholic begins to feel and live the A.A. program. Through the Twelve Steps and the A.A. philosophy, which "is a way of life and a design for living" (Ibid.:163), a clear system of objectification is provided. For the first time in his life, harmony is possible. "The way of integrity is not found in a break from any part of our lives but in creating harmony among all the parts that belong to each of us" (Stewart, 1976:49).

Staying sober for several years and achieving enough mental and emotional sobriety to allow for some balance in his or her life, presents the alcoholic with a new status.²⁶

With this new status of recovering alcoholic, comes new expectations and responsibilities.²⁷ The alcoholic, through his amends, reintegrates himself with family and acquaintances, and perhaps with a religious community. Once the alcoholic feels more secure with physical sobriety, he or she attends less meetings, leaving more time to be with a family which had been neglected during drinking and early A.A. days. A. describes this change in her life:

I'm beginning to see that I don't need to go to a meeting every night. There are nights when I have to just stay home with the kids. I lost my kids when I was drinking and now that I've got them back, I have to start taking more of an interest in them. Maybe it's O.K. for single people to always hang around A.A., but I've got kids to look after (A., female, 2½ years).

Social integration involves learning to live and cope. As S. puts it:

We've got to do more in this program than not drink, we've got to make some changes in our lives in order to stay sober and be happy. One thing I did when I first came into the program was fool around with women. I had to learn to quit that (male, 4 years).

Members come into the fellowship and quit drinking. After a period of time they are encouraged to start dealing with other character defects; lying, cheating, stealing, greed, anger, lust, resentment, and pride are some of the defects suggested for removal. In addition to "cleaning up your act", members are expected to "clear up the wreckage of the past" by making amends and restitution. V. tells the

following story about making amends to S., an old-timer in A.A. with thirty-plus years of sobriety:

I was telling S. the other day, that I once worked for him in his restaurant when I was still performing. I told him I used to steal his vanilla flavoring and lemon extract and drink it. He said he would accept my apology when I paid for it (male, 8 years).

Making amends is intended to make the passagee feel better about herself and smooth out her relationships with other people. C. told the following story at a meeting. It portrays the benefits of the amend-making process:

I had a couple of fines to pay to the police. This weekend they started really bothering me so Saturday afternoon I went to the police station to turn myself in. The policeman at the head desk said, "Why don't you wait until you get picked up." I told the cop I wanted to get it off my chest so they booked me and I stayed and had a good weekend with good meals. Later on that week I met a cop on the street and I waved him to pass in his car. Boy! did that feel good to get that out of the way (C., male, 3 months).

During the social integration passage, the alcoholic learns how to live without alcohol, takes action to smooth out relationships and becomes an integrated member of society. Involvement with A.A. becomes intensified in terms of types of involvement and balanced with other time commitments. Chairing meetings, active participation in a group, and making Twelve Step calls by "carrying the message of recovery through the Twelve Steps" to other sick and dying alcoholics, are generally the tasks carried out in A.A. at this stage.

The alcoholic may even start attending a church to

satisfy a "spiritual hunger". "Each person is assumed to have his own approach to religion, and it is considered strictly his own business" (Mann, 1981:178). The alcoholic is expected to develop some form of faith, but sets of beliefs in a religious sense are left to the discretion of the individual.²⁸ For some, A.A. becomes their church, others return to the church of their youth or seek out another.

Once settled in A.A., confident in physical sobriety within the twenty-four hour time span, having resolved social emotional tensions through changes in attitudes and through making amends, the alcoholic is free to partake of life as any other human being. Family, job, and society may continue to present a variety of problems but the alcoholic, through his or her clear-headedness and system of objectification of the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions and communication at meetings, is able to manage; to live as any other member of society.

The Final Passage: A.A. as a Career

Once an A.A. member has become socially integrated, he or she may choose to continue with a career of service in A.A. Service to A.A. and to fellow alcoholics is stressed at meetings. Recognition of A.A. as having played the key role in facilitating recovery may combine with the drive for service, to keep the alcoholic committed to his involvement with A.A. This may be expressed as B. puts it:

I owe my life to A.A. I couldn't quit drinking and yet booze was killing me. If I didn't have A.A., I wouldn't have anything, no kids, no house, no car. I'd have nothing without sobriety and I wouldn't have sobriety without A.A. So "First Things First", I put A.A. first in my life (B., male, 4 years).

R. became aware of his responsibility early in the program:

After several months of driving me around to meetings, I became a very proud person and offered P. some money for gas. I took a ten dollar bill and stuck it in his jacket pocket. He took it out and stuck it in my shirt pocket, and said, "You know how you can repay me, R.? You can do the same for others for the rest of your life." And I'm quite happy to pay back that debt for the rest of my natural life cause if it weren't for men like P. and others like him, most of us wouldn't be here (R., male, 12 years).

A.A. as a career is centered around the group. Group membership becomes the pivotal point for local, regional, and international A.A. participation, "it is not so much who you are or what you are, it is the group you belong to that counts" (J., female, 4 years). In 1944, Bales was the first sociologist to write about A.A. He predicted that a spontaneous movement such as A.A. would have a tendency, with time, to become institutionalized. He believed that "great clarification, regularization, and finally formalization and rigidity" would occur in A.A., both within the structure and the function.²⁹ Time has proven Bales right. Shortly after his comments, the Twelve Traditions were formulated to regulate groups. These traditions grant groups autonomy, set God through the group conscious as the highest authority, set "carrying the message" as the prime purpose and rule anonymity

as important. The groups, through intergroup and regional assemblies carry out their local affairs and establish communication with World Service in New York. This generally speaking, is the forum for a career in A.A.

At the individual level, free from group affiliation, members give service by helping each other:

I became an active member of Alcoholics Anonymous. I began taking an interest in and helping people who had come into A.A. after me. It was a tremendous feeling to be able to give something to someone else (Burns, 1975:20).

Simply getting involved with Twelve Step work and sponsorship may become a career. M., after many years of sobriety still spends much of his time involved with meetings and members:

It says to "practice these principles in all our affairs". I try to be and live like the hole in the doughnut and let God decide what I should do today. Length of sobriety does not count cause you can have a mental, emotional, or spiritual relapse. I think it takes you the rest of your life to work the steps. There is always something new in it for me (M., male, 22 years).

As described earlier, the A.A. organizational level is predominantly the group.³⁰ Career in A.A., at the organizational level, could therefore be considered as being restricted by "various agents" (Glaser, 1971:4). Whether or not one is nominated, elected, or appointed to become a representative for the group at Intergroup or General Service Assemblies is decided largely by the group and is outside of the passagee's control.

At the local level, Intergroup may establish a Central

Office, depending on the size of the urban area. The Central Office, through a hired worker, would order A.A. literature and printed matter for distribution, take Twelve Step calls during the day and hire a telephone answering service at night, keep and mail out meeting minutes and generally serve the fellowship. Intergroup may also run day-long workshops to keep the fellowship cohesive and informed. It co-ordinates a public information service, training and organizing speakers to inform the public about alcoholism and A.A.'s way of treating it. Many urban areas have annual conferences with speakers who have travelled from other parts of North America. These are organized by Intergroup.

Guidelines for the operation of Intergroup and A.A. as a whole, are agreed upon in New York at the annual General Service Conference. Here regional delegates come together to review financial and policy reports, by-laws, and serious deviations from the A.A. traditions.³¹ The agenda for this conference is arranged by the Board of Trustees which is composed of members and non-alcoholic friends of A.A. To become a Trustee would be the highest position an alcoholic could achieve in A.A.'s hierarchy.

A.A. as a career could be achieved within a wide range of possibilities. From being an active member at the individual or group level, to becoming a regional delegate sent to New York, there are a wide variety of positions open to members of A.A. Obtaining these positions depends as in other

organizations, on skill and ability and lobbying and luck. Sobriety and group membership are usually a prerequisite. In this paper, this stage is considered the final, positive stage of the alcoholic's recovery, in an A.A. career context.

Conclusion

The career of an alcoholic recovering in A.A. has been outlined from childhood to maturity. Analysis of the data supports the conceptualization of alcoholism as a state of alienation. In childhood and early adolescence, the individual experiences a sense of alienation. It is the alienation aggravated by the alcohol that presents a problem during adolescence and adulthood. The solution is to remove the alcohol and then facilitate personal and social integration. Verification for this notion is provided by the false sense of integration provided by the first drink and the return to alienation which leads to the relapse.

The career stages have been described as exemplifying either a negative or positive directionality. Early alienation and later, further alienation are negative passages. The first drink is a temporary, falsely positive passage. At some point in time, in the passage of further alienation, a turning point or conversion occurs, and the alcoholic enters positive passages of recovery.

Once the alcoholic has changed direction, he or she is described as maintaining a positive course of integration.

This positive course may be interrupted by a temporary, negative relapse. From alienation to integration, the alcoholic has passed from negative to positive.

Dialectical Sociology of Religion offers the explanation for this change in direction. Through the A.A. program, the alcoholic receives a set of beliefs and a social forum within which to internalize new ideas and attitudes. The objectification of the Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions, the ritual of the meetings, the social forum to exercise commitment, and the myths of A.A. history each make it possible for the alcoholic to make the change from an alienated individual to an integrated member of society.

As a recovering alcoholic, further integration is continued with family, job, and acquaintances. Through the A.A. program and fellowship, the alcoholic learns skills and attitudes which make it possible to cope with life without alcohol. The career of an alcoholic recovering in A.A. has been portrayed with social integration and/or a career in A.A. as the final stage.

FOOTNOTES

1. Quotes made by members of A.A. are referenced by using the first initial, stating the sex, and length of sobriety.

2. Glaser and Strauss describe agents as influencing passages (1971:51-56).

3. Glaser and Strauss list voluntarism as one property of status passages (p. 4).

4. See Schact (1970:21-41) and Baum's forward in Religion and Alienation (1975).

5. Dennison reports on studies done on teenage drinking and found that peer group pressure, having friends that drink and perceptions of drinking as a wide spread phenomena as encouraging alcohol use by teenagers (1980:89).

6. Brief stages are common to other careers as well: Normal development of personality involves passing in due time from one status to another. Some stages in this development are of long duration; others are brief. While some are thought of as essentially preparatory, and their length justified by some notion that the preparation for the next stage requires a set time, they are, nevertheless, conventional (Hughes, 1937:409).

7. See Becker (1963:24): ...a career that leads them into ever-increasing deviance....

8. Dunn makes this statement about alcohol as an addictive beverage:

The fact that most people don't recognize the addictive qualities of beverage alcohol is the principal reason social drinking is so dangerous. They don't know what the results of a seemingly harmless activity can be until it is too late (1965:15).

9. Control and aloneness are two of the properties of passages listed by Glaser and Strauss (1971:5).

10. See Goffman (1957:50), previously cited in this paper:

At the cost of his involvement in the prescribed focus of attention, the individual may focus his attention more than he ought upon himself - himself as someone who is faring well or badly, as someone calling forth a desirable or undesirable response from others.

11. Ogborne writes about "hitting bottom": The model of alcoholism emphasized by A.A. lays great emphasis upon "hitting bottom", physical dependence, and loss of control. "Hitting bottom" refers to a belief current among A.A. members that it is the person who comes to A.A. after a prolonged adverse interaction with alcohol, rather than the young initiate, who is most likely to affiliate and benefit (1980:8).

I believe that Ogborne is wrong, that A.A. terms hitting bottom as any point at which the alcoholic is ready to take help from A.A., whether the problems with alcohol have been long or short in duration.

12. Ogborne reports that A.A. appeals to "only a minority of problem drinkers" (1981:662).

13. These figures were compiled in 1980 by A.A. World Service, in a survey of group members.

14. Hall identifies four stages; (1) generating an ambition, (2) gaining admission, (3) acquiring a clientele, and (4) establishing the inner fraternity (1948:327).

15. Robertson discusses the problems for the social sciences with religion:

For various reasons the sociological study of religion has lagged behind other sections of the social sciences in terms of methodological rigour. One of the critical factors - but, it should be stressed, only one among others - is that religious phenomena are more intractable analytically than most sociocultural phenomena (1972:161).

16. In line with their description of the turning point as a miracle, perhaps this definition clouds their perceptions.

17. A.A. is not alone with this belief. Jung wrote Wilson a letter saying:

You see, "alcohol" in Latin is "spiritus" and you use the same word for the highest religious experience as well as for the most depraving

poison. The helpful formula therefore is:
spiritus contra spiritum. (Thomsen, 1975:363)
(Spirituality to counteract alcohol.)

18. Mann supports the theory that spending time with others who are not drinking is a simple technique for sobriety (1981:177).

19. See Glaser and Strauss (1971:45).

20. This is data from the A.A. Public Information Report, 1980.

21. The phrase about membership requirement is from Tradition Three and originally read "honest desire". The word "honest" was dropped later when it was decided that someone just sobering up was limited in his or her ability to be honest.

22. From Alcoholics Anonymous, 1939:43: "The alcoholic at certain times has no effective mental defense against the first drink."

23. Becker defines "side bets": "The committed person has acted in such a way as to involve other interests of his, originally extraneous to the action he is engaged in, directly in that action" (1960:35).

24. Becker would describe them as having entered the commitment unconsciously, as not deciding consciously, and becoming aware at a later point in time that the commitment (1960:38).

25. See Glaser and Strauss (1971:145):
The crisis sometimes lead to mutually supported rather than competing passages, as when alcoholics join A.A. and integrate their management of alcoholism with new endeavours. Even reversions to a member's alcoholic habit can be integrated with new friendships and new activities, as the other members stand by the reverter through his hours of periodic trial.

26. Taylor describes the new status: "They become decent citizens whose mental and spiritual problems have been solved and who, in the process, have found the way to success in their business, social and family relationships" (1953:20).

27. Hughes (1937:404) provides the following description of the relationship between status and responsibilities: Status assigns individuals to various accepted

social categories; each category has its own rights and duties. No individual becomes a moral person until he has a sense of his station and the ways proper to it.

28. See Taylor (1953:55): "Belief is one thing, faith is another! A.A. never confuses the two ..." In Faith and Belief (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), W.C. Smith makes the same distinction between these two.

29. See Robinson (1976:18).

30. See Burns (1975:213).

31. The function of World Service is described in A.A. Comes of Age, 1957:210-299.

CHAPTER IV

RITUALS

Meetings are central to the A.A. program and fellowship. A newcomer, on his or her first day without a drink, often feeling sick and shaky, is quickly brought to his or her first A.A. meeting. Members, with any length of sobriety become known, not by their surnames or addresses, but by their group and the meeting it holds. New members to A.A. may attend as many as one or two meetings a day when they are first 'sobering up'. "Everything starts at a meeting" is a saying that best expresses A.A.'s belief in the importance of meetings.

A.A. meetings are highly ritualized, following a format that originated in the United States where A.A. was founded. Various types of meetings exist. Some are Open Speaker meetings, they are open to both A.A. members, their friends and relatives, and to the public. At Open Speaker meetings a single speaker or several speakers composing a panel are the main part of the meeting. As well as Speaker meetings, there are also Discussion meetings. These may be 'open' or 'closed'. Closed meetings are restricted to A.A. members. The Twelve Steps, a reading from the book

Alcoholics Anonymous, or any problem or topic related to recovery from alcoholism may provide the focal point for Discussion meetings.

A.A. meetings as ritual, the ritualizing of the personal lives of members, and the ritual gatherings of the A.A. fellowship will be described in this chapter. In the commentary on ritual in A.A., a variety of theories for the effectiveness of ritual in the life of a recovering alcoholic will be examined; these theories range from describing ritual as an arena for socialization and identity formation, ritual as worship, to ritual as operating through a biogenetic-structural influence.

The Open Speaker Meeting

In any fair-sized metropolitan area in North America, on any night of the week, there will be anywhere from one to a half-dozen groups of recovering alcoholics meeting to share their 'experience, hope, and strength' at a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous. These alcoholics come together to hear something that will help them 'stay sober for another twenty-four hours', to convince a newcomer of the advantages of 'living in the recovery', and, for those with a more 'lengthy' sobriety, to pay back some of their debt to the fellowship which 'saved their lives'.

Meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous are held in church basements, hospital conference rooms, hostel dining rooms, and school gymnasiums; wherever the group responsible for

the meeting is able to plug in a coffee pot, arrange tables and chairs and ash trays, and obtain a reasonable renting rate. The groups, formed by one, two, or many members may name themselves according to their geographical location or adopt idiomatic phrases symbolizing A.A.'s philosophy; for example, New Hope, New Life, New Horizons, Serenity, Pathfinders and Welcome (the list is endless).

One of the responsibilities assigned in most groups is that of 'greeter'. For anyone coming to their first meeting, 'coming back' after having been a member and then going back to drinking, new in town, or member of the general local fellowship, the greeter offers the 'friendly handshake at the door', as symbol of the group's concern to welcome those coming to the meeting. Greetings may be formal or informal, from "Hi, how are ya?" to "God, it's good to see you again, have you had enough of that jungle out there?"

Once welcomed into the meeting room, visitors are usually offered a coffee from a table set up with urn, plastic cups, and 'fixin's'. The coffee, as well as the handshake are each proffered as gestures of welcome. These gestures are intended to help the visitor relax and facilitate personal interaction, in line with A.A.'s dual approach to recovery from alcoholism, a program of living and a fellowship to reinforce the program through social contact.

In addition to the coffee bar, the remainder of the

physical meeting area is organized in a formalized fashion, depending on whether the meeting is a 'speaker' or 'discussion' meeting, the length of time the group has been established, and the status of the group--whether it is a 'poorer' downtown group or a more middle-class suburban group. A podium, a table with lectern, or a single table marks the position of the chairman at the Speaker meetings. Rows of chairs invite the audience.

A display of A.A. pamphlets and literature, large display prints of the Serenity Prayer, the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions and small poster prints of the A.A. slogans decorate the meeting area. Some groups have velvet banners or wood-carved insignia announcing the group name and the year in which the group was established. The insignia may consist of A.A.'s double "A's", Dürer's Praying Hands, or A.A.'s triangle inside a circle. At almost all meetings the blue "Big Book" called Alcoholics Anonymous: The Story of How Many Thousands of Men and Women Have Recovered from Alcoholism is displayed with the "12 and 12", Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions on or near the chairman's place.

At a smaller meeting, toward meeting time, someone may shout out, "What time does this 8 o'clock meeting start?", signaling the chairman to call the meeting to order. At larger meetings, the chairman may strike a gavel and simply announce, "Let us open this meeting in the usual manner with a Moment of Silence followed by the Serenity Prayer, may we

have that moment now, please." Sometimes the chairman may add, for the benefit of the newcomer, that the moment may be used 'as you see fit', and add, "I use that moment to meditate on why we are here", or "I use that moment to pray for those who were not able to be here tonight." Generally the Moment of Silence is an effective way to break up the socializing and settle everyone down for the meeting.

Following the Moment of Silence, the chairman leads the group in unison, saying the Serenity Prayer:

God, grant me the Serenity to
Accept the things I cannot change,
Courage to change the things I can, and
Wisdom to know the difference. 1

In the Netherlands, as in some other countries, the Serenity Prayer is not used. Ever concerned with not scaring away new prospects with too much 'religion', only the Moment of Silence is used to open the meeting.

After this first part of the opening, meetings vary considerably in the next stage of the meeting format. { The Preamble is read at some meetings. This statement, formulated by A.A.'s World Service in New York in the 1940's in response to repeated queries about A.A., explains in a simple statement, "what A.A. is all about". } This statement may be introduced by the chairperson with, "For those of you who may be wondering what you've gotten yourself into, this is a statement of what A.A. is and does." It is reprinted on the inside of every issue of the A.A. monthly magazine

The Grapevine and reads:

Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for A.A. membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions. A.A. is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes. Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.

This Preamble may be read by the chairman or another member. When it is read by another member, this member identifies him- or herself in a ritualized form, a form repeated by every participant in the meeting. The participant introduces himself with, "I'm an alcoholic, a member of _____ Group, my name is _____. Hi everybody." The order of name, 'alcoholic' label and group membership may vary but the response from the audience, the typical response for which A.A. has become known, is "Hi _____!"

Next the chairperson will introduce the reading of The Twelve Steps. He or she may preface the introduction with this comment, "And in order to achieve, and what's more important, to maintain our sobriety, we have The Twelve Steps." Another member is called up to read these Steps. After the self-introduction routine, she or he reads:

The Twelve Steps

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol--that our lives had become unmanageable.

2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

(In addition to the Steps, part of the ritual for many A.A. meetings is to have the Twelve Traditions read as well.]

Similar to the Steps, they are read by a member:

The Twelve Traditions

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority--a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose--to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.
6. An A.A. group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or

- outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
 8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever non-professional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
 9. A.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
 10. Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the A.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
 11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films.
 12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

Following the reading of the Steps and the Traditions, some groups read the Sanskrit Proverb which is recorded in the front of the Twenty-Four Hours A Day book.² This proverb offers the reminder to "look to this day" and forget about yesterday and tomorrow.⁷ Other groups may read the Twenty-Four Hours A Day entry for that day. Each day of the year this small book teaches about the new life in A.A., offers a "Meditation for the Day", and a "Prayer for the Day". There are also groups who read a poem popular in A.A. called "The Man in the Glass". This poem suggests that it is the person who looks back at you from the mirror that needs to be remembered in all of life's decisions.

In this early part of the meeting format, someone is sometimes asked to get up and give 'their interpretation' of the slogans. These slogans, written on poster boards and

decorating the meeting room, may read, "Live and Let Live", "Let Go and Let God", "Easy Does It", "Keep It Simple", "But For The Grace Of God", "It Takes At It Takes", "You Are No Longer Alone", "Think, Think, Think", "Remember When", and "One Drink, One Drunk". After the self-introduction ritual, the member may say:

The first thing I had to learn when I came into this program was to "Easy Does It". I wanted it all yesterday--sobriety and the family back. I also had to learn to add to that--"But Do It". I knew if I didn't, I'd get drunk. I also had to learn to "Live and Let Live", 'cause I looked around at people and was very judgmental. For me, it was sure good to know I was "No Longer Alone" (B., male, 7 years).

Some speakers may talk about the length of time it took them to learn "these simple slogans", to learn to apply them to their lives. One member expresses his feelings about the slogans:

When I first came around I thought those slogans were Mickey Mouse things, they looked too simple to be of any use to a smart 'fella' like me. But after I'd been around a while I found they weren't that easy. I had a lot of trouble learning to live "One Day At A Time". I felt so sick about my yesterdays and so worried about my tomorrows that I couldn't handle 'today'. Now I've learned that the slogans are really useful and I'm learning to live in day-tight compartments (S., male, 3 years).

Talks on the slogans differ with each speaker; when the member is finished with his talk, everyone applauds. These talks allow a break in the meeting format, a break from the formal readings and a change in the personal expression of members.

This personal expression is repeated when the chairperson 'qualifies'. At some point in any A.A. meeting, the chairperson is expected to identify him- or herself and to 'qualify'--to offer legitimation in terms of past experience, for the right to chair an A.A. meeting. The chairperson may 'qualify' with a brief or lengthy statement.

'Qualifying' statements may become highly stylized by people who chair meetings regularly. Two examples of such statements are:

I wouldn't be here if I didn't need to be here. There are lots of places I'd rather be than at an A.A. meeting, but if it weren't for A.A. I'd probably be dead now, or in a nut house. I think that qualifies me (F., male, 2 years).

and:

I bummed it, sold it, made it, and stole it. Liquor played a big part in my life and nearly cost me my life. I had to come to this wonderful fellowship to learn to live without it (D., male, 1 year).

Some chairpersons qualify by stating briefly: "My being up here is qualification enough." The decision of who chairs meetings is generally decided by the group running the meeting and 'qualifying' clarifies that the chairperson is a member of the fellowship to all present.

{ The highlight of the Speaker Meeting is when one of the members of the fellowship (who has been asked ahead of time) gets up to tell "his story" in which he is expected to tell "what we used to be like, what happened, and what we

are like now" as directed on page fifty-eight of the Big Book, A.A.'s favorite name for the book Alcoholics Anonymous.

After the usual self-introduction, the speaker may ask the audience to "Keep An Open Mind":

Now this is my story, it's what happened to me; I have only one story and that's the one I'm going to tell you. You may not like some of the things that I did, and I don't want you to think that's what has to happen to you before you qualify for this program. It is also not an official statement about A.A. It's my story and I'd like to ask you to keep an open mind. Take what you like and leave the rest, maybe it will make sense to you at a later date (S., female, 7 years).

The speaker may also ask her audience to 'identify' and 'not compare', to listen to the speaker and recognize similarities in incidents or feelings rather than focusing on differences. The speaker may appear nervous and ill-at-ease and remind the audience that he or she "is not really a speaker, but is ready to talk" about his or her experiences with alcohol and recovery in A.A. Often the speaker will mention asking his "Higher Power" to support him in "carrying the message".

Speaking is frequently referred to as "carrying the message" and speakers may be described by others as "having a good message". This reference to message identifies the notion that the speaker may have a "message of hope"--"hope that life can get better once the A.A. program replaces the use of alcohol in the life of the alcoholic, hope that life

will get better once you are in A.A."

The speaker may talk about when he first started drinking, his first drink, or the way in which alcohol affected him by changing his behavior, his feelings, or his perceptions of reality. Then he may continue by talking about how alcoholic drinking became a problem in his life. This has been called "witnessing" by sociologists: "At meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous, members repeatedly witness about the damage they did to their jobs and families because of alcoholism" (Mol, 1976:52). Often speakers will recount stories about getting into trouble with the family, the employer, and the police, or they may talk about being put into jails and/or mental institutions. [Generally they will describe their deviant behavior and explain that they never realized the relationship between their drinking and their problems.] There is often special emphasis on the issue of not being able to identify "booze" as the problem, or being labelled as "alcoholic" and having problems accepting the truth of that label.

[The turning point of coming into A.A. is frequently labelled as a "miracle".] The speakers talk about "hitting bottom", of being so sick that life had become impossible. The speaker will continue his/her story with how s/he lives or works the Twelve Steps, how his/her relationship with the fellowship evolved, and how his/her life has changed and improved. He describes himself as having become an integrated

human being, at ease with self, family, friends, and life on a larger scale. He'll finish his talk with a description of the improvements in his life. These improvements are usually in the area of social, financial, personal, and spiritual changes.

A speaker may also offer advice and suggestions from his or her experiences. She may recount her problems with 'Working the Steps':

I'm going to tell you a bit about the things I did wrong when I first came into the program and then maybe you won't have to make the same mistakes. When I first came in I thought I could work the Steps in any order. Then I nearly got drunk when I tried to make amends and the amends were not well received. Now I know that the Steps are numbered for a reason and they have to be followed in that order (A., female, 3 years).

Generally speakers end on a note of reassurance. They may remind the audience that they themselves were really 'screwed up' when they came into the program and yet things did slowly get better for them. They may list all the "benefits of living sober" and express amazement at the changes that have happened in their own lives. They may express their great gratitude to the A.A. fellowship and remind the audience:

If you're having problems today, just don't drink and keep coming to meetings. Keep coming back. If you can just keep trying you'll find that it works. It really does. Don't drink, go to meetings, and everything will be all right (M., male, 3 years).

Once the speaker completes his talk, there are several other formalities that need to be carried out to complete the meeting. (First the 'speaker thanker' will get up, identify himself, and may make a few comments on identification rather than comparison. The 'speaker thanker' reinforces the process of listening to, and remembering 'the message' from a position of recognizing similarities rather than difference.) He may make statements that begin with "I could really identify with..." and then share how he experienced a similar incident. He may also start with "Now I never had that happen to me..." and complete it by describing a parallel emotion or situation. He may say:

Now I have never lived on skid-row. When I came here I still had my family, my house, my job, and my car, but my skid-row was in my basement. I sat there and drank every day, never got cleaned up or shaved, never talked to anyone toward the end of my drinking, and just worried about where I could get that next drink. So I can really identify with living a skid-row existence (J., male, 3 years).

The 'speaker thanker' finishes his comments with, "Now let's show _____ our appreciation for coming up here and give him another hand." The audience responds with applause, as they did when the speaker finished his talk. Appreciation is often also shown by hand shakes as the speaker leaves the podium and makes his way back to his seat.

After thanking the speaker, announcements are read to inform the audience of birthdays or anniversaries being

celebrated for members who have achieved various lengths of sobriety. The announcements may advertise good coffee and provide the reminder "to bring a friend". The location and speakers for these celebrations are announced. In addition to birthday and anniversary announcements, day or week-end conferences may also be announced. Each of these events will be described in the sections below.

[Toward the end of the meeting the "Seventh Tradition" is held to pay for coffee, rent, and literature, in addition to the other expenses involved with running a meeting.) At 'downtown' meetings, with a skid-row audience, the suggestion may be made to "take some out if you don't have any", or to "take the bus fare to get to the next meeting". These suggestions are made to offer assurance that putting money into the collection is unimportant for those who have no money. On the other hand, at meetings that are held in "the high rent locations", the reminder may be made for a 'silent collection', for bills only, no silver. Or it may be suggested to:

Put in a little extra this week, will ya?
 The price of coffee keeps going up and we
 haven't been able to make it out of the red.
 Just remember that if it weren't for A.A.
 you probably wouldn't have any money, so
 don't sober up and tighten up (H., male,
 36 years).

[The meeting is closed with the Lord's Prayer.] The chairperson may introduce this prayer by saying, "If there's no more for the good of A.A. would you help me close with

with the Lord's Prayer, for those who wish." Instead of the Lord's Prayer, the Serenity Prayer may be said if it was not used at the beginning of the meeting.

With the closing prayer, the formal part of the meeting is over. The chairperson's final task may be to announce: "Now for the most important part of the meeting, would you stay and have some coffee and a sandwich, and share some fellowship with us." Speaker meetings are sometimes called "eatin' meetings". Group members provide coffee, sandwiches, doughnuts, cheese or pickles on a buffet table. [The food is provided to encourage fellowship and further informal interaction and is described by A.A. members as a means to encourage meeting attendance.] R. expresses his past in relation to "eatin' meetings":

I used to come to A.A. just for the sandwiches. Sometimes I would have spent all my money on booze but I'd know that I could come to an A.A. meeting and get something to eat. I also came to bum some 'tailor-made' cigarettes. Then I started to listen and I stayed. That's why I figure we need these "eatin' meetings". Although people may just come for the food, at least we got them inside the doors and maybe they'll stay (male, 12 years).

While drinking their coffee, and eating their food, the members of the audience can be overheard discussing the "message", sharing problems with the "new life", or making small talk. This part of the meeting may take anywhere from fifteen minutes to an hour, allowing members and friends to socialize with each other. At this time too, the members of

the audience may take the time to personally thank the speaker, and often a small group will form around the speaker. Once coffee is finished, the people may wander away from the meeting in groups of two or three, leaving the group members to stack chairs, clean ash trays, and mop floors, leaving the rented meeting room "cleaner than it was before the meeting started".

Discussion Meetings

In addition to Speaker Meetings, A.A. also has open and closed discussion meetings. The focus in this section will be on closed discussion meetings, those meetings that can only be attended by self-proclaimed alcoholics. While the Speaker Meeting is conducted in a formal setting of podium and rows of chairs, the Discussion Meeting is held by sitting around tables. The tables provide the alcoholics with a place to set their ash trays and coffee cups (at some discussion groups, coffee is served on an ongoing basis during the meeting).

Discussion Meetings open with a Moment of Silence, the Serenity Prayer, the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions and the qualifying by the chairperson. These meetings are categorized as "Discussion", "Big Book Study", or "Twelve and Twelve" Meetings. If the discussion topic is to be a chapter from the Big Book or a Step or Tradition from the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, the relevant chapter is

usually read first. Members then respond to the material read by expressing what they have learned about themselves, their drinking, or their recovery. They may also, as with the Speaker Meeting, 'identify' with the section read, sharing their own similarities.

Discussion groups addressing a topic or problem may have a second Moment of Silence after the chairman asks, "Does anyone have a problem, topic or step that they would like to hear about?" From her research on A.A. in Iowa, Sadler describes the role of the chairman at discussion groups:

Most discussion meetings have a chairman. There is no authority attached to that role. He simply opens and closes the meetings and calls on assembled members to speak, one by one.... The chairman is not necessarily the person who has maintained sobriety for the longest time period (1977:208).

Members at a discussion meeting may go around the table and introduce themselves at the beginning of the meeting using the 'introduction ritual'. They may also introduce themselves when it is their turn to speak. Introductions at the beginning of meetings allows the chairperson to put to memory and use their names when it is their turn to speak.

The discussion group resembles a series of mini-speakers rather than a meeting with general free-flowing discussion. Sadler made a similar observation:

Despite the large amount of "experience, strength, and hope" verbalized during A.A. meetings, the format of the meetings is nonconversational. Thus the term "monologue" is used in this discussion. Member's monologues are put "on the table", with or without reference to anything said by previous speakers (Ibid.).

Discussion meetings tend to consist of monologues. Yet, at some meetings, depending on the freedom allowed by the chairman, the conversation may be directed toward the person who brought up the topic or expressed having problems. Encouragement, comfort, or rebuke may be directed toward this person. Conversations may become directed across the table, and arguments may ensue but this would not be the usual ritualistic format for discussions. It would appear that free-flowing discussion is to happen before, after, or outside of the meetings.

At these meetings, the chairperson decides on the ordering of the speakers, giving each person a chance, as time allows, to express their "experience, hope, and strength" with each other as instructed in the A.A. Preamble. If a problem is brought up, the person may explain the problem and then for the next hour to hour-and-a-half, listen to each member in the group tell about similar problems he or she has had, how it was dealt with using the program, and what the outcomes were. Others in the group may identify with the problem and share their more general learning. Whatever the topic of discussion, each member of the group is asked to

share their experience rather than their knowledge or beliefs. If the person does not feel that his or her problem has been resolved, he or she can always bring it up again at the next meeting. And if group members become tired of hearing about the same problem, they are given the suggestion to practice tolerance!

At the close of the meeting the group may hold hands, at the Discussion Meeting, while saying the Lord's Prayer. They may also shake hands before unclasping and mumble quietly to each other, "Keep Coming Back". [This hand-holding symbolizes the sense of unity within the group at the end of the meeting.] Members may feel "calmed down"; they may feel they've learned more about 'working' the program, or they may have heard answers for problems that have been puzzling them. Sadler claims:

The net result of an evening's monologues is to level the highs and lows of all members. Such leveling is of practical significance to members who assert that despair and elation are equally dangerous to sobriety (Ibid.).

Personal Ritual *

Newcomers to A.A. are given several suggestions concerning the incorporation of ritual into their daily lives. Persistent, assertive suggestions are made by A.A. members to these newcomers who, in their alienation from self and society, had previously been rebellious toward taking advice. A.A. members take a "life or death" approach to their

relationships with each other, based on their own experience, as expressed by B.:

When I came into this program, I needed the two-by-four treatment. I needed to be hit over the head with a two-by-four so you could get my attention. Thank God, somebody cared enough to take the time to hit me over the head because I was in such an alcoholic fog that I didn't know what I was doing anyway (male, 4 years).

Affiliates of A.A. describe the newcomer as being in an alcoholic haze, not totally conscious of his environment, and often incapable of organizing his day. [These affiliates attempt to facilitate recovery from alcoholism through instructions that are simple enough to be possible for the newly recovering alcoholic and yet effective enough to allow him to gain a 'toe-hold on sobriety'--one day at a time. Suggestions such as "Don't drink, go to meetings" Join a group and get a sponsor", and "Ask for help in the morning and thank Him at night", are each made to encourage the establishment of daily ritual.]

Sober members of A.A. may describe their days as starting with the following ritualistic organization:

The first thing I do in the morning is ask for another day of sobriety. I usually read my Twenty-Four Hours A Day book or some other form of spiritual literature. I do not start my day until I've done those two things (S., male, 2 years).

The personal ritual may continue with an A.A. meeting some time during the day, work and recreation, and finish with an expression of gratitude for sobriety in the evening.

S. describes his daily ritual of closure:

Sure I get on my knees to thank God at night. I didn't want to have nothing to do with religion when I first came into the program but I wanted to stay sober and you people told me to thank Him at night. At first I felt embarrassed, afraid someone would catch me down there, but now I do it without thinking (Ibid.).

Another member expresses a less formal approach to his closure ritual:

I like to pray in a horizontal position. At night when I go to bed, I take a little time before I fall asleep to think over the day, to take my inventory. I think about the bad and the good and feel thankful that I've been allowed to stay sober for another twenty-four hours (J., male, 7 years).

[In addition to the daily ritual of prayer, meditation and meetings, members have ritualized experience to mark the passage of time in the fellowship. Birthdays and anniversaries are celebrated through meetings, they are A.A.'s rites of passage. In Meaning and Place, Mol states that these rites are "called rites of passage because they guide the passing of an individual or group (for instance a family or a community) from one state to another" (1983:107). Instead of "states", rites of passages mark periods of time in A.A. as these are more easily identified in the life of a recovering alcoholic.]

In A.A., pins are usually given out to mark a month, three months, and six months of sobriety. At one year, medallions are presented. For the years after the first,

pins are presented on an annual basis. Traditionally, gold medallions were handed out to anyone with twenty-five and thirty years of sobriety.

One of the more significant events in the life of an alcoholic recovering in A.A. is the celebration of the first year of sobriety. Announcements have usually been read out several weeks in advance to inform the fellowship and invited family and friends of the alcoholic to help celebrate. The "celebratee" is given the privilege of inviting his or her choice of speaker, chairperson, and all other participants. Just before the speaker speaks, the "celebratee" is asked to come to the front with his or her sponsor for the presentation of the medallion. In Eastern Canada a birthday cake is presented as well. The sponsor gives a short speech commenting on their relationship, an evaluation of how the sponsee is "working the program", and a wish for continued sobriety. Then he hands over the medallion with the reminder that "this is not a reward but a reminder of your commitment to sobriety". Often the Sponsee is informed that the medallion has a smooth side and a rough side; that life can also be made smooth or rough by one's attitudes. The medallion usually has the A.A. insignia on the front and the name, group name, and dry date engraved on the back. The dry date marks the first day without the consumption of alcohol. The sponsor will take his seat after presenting the medallion, leaving the sponsee at the front to make what

may in many cases be their first talk from the front of an A.A. assembly. The member will often thank family, friends, and members of A.A. for helping him stay sober for a year. Sometimes members express their amazement to find themselves sober for such a length of time. They may also share their joy with tears, talking about the changes that have happened in their lives.

[The incorporation of ritual into daily life is encouraged for every A.A. affiliate. In addition to the ritual of meetings, each A.A. member is expected to duplicate the ritualistic behavior of prayer and meditation into his life. Acknowledgement of length of sobriety through annual celebrations becomes another form of personal ritual.]
Finally, attendance at annual fellowship functions, described in the next section, completes the reinforcement of awareness of the passages of time in the life of each A.A. affiliate.

A.A. Fellowship Rituals

[Along with the ritual of personal daily living and the ritual of A.A. meetings, members of A.A. experience yet another form of ritual. This is the ritual of workshops and conferences.] It is at these functions that members experience involvement at the fellowship level. Several of these 'large-scale' ritualistic assemblies will be described below.

Most large metropolitan areas that have several A.A. groups also have a local organizing body called Intergroup.

The function of Intergroup was described in Chapter Three. One of Intergroup's functions is to run day-long workshops to inform members of A.A. activity at the local, national, and international levels. Within these workshops groups are organized to discuss the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, Intergroup, The Grapevine, General Service, Public Information, Co-operation with Professionals, and Central Office. Workshops begin with the Moment of Silence followed by the Serenity Prayer, the reading of the Twelve Traditions, self-introduction rituals, and the plan for the day. They end with the Seventh Tradition and the Lord's Prayer. Although a period of sobriety is not required for attendance, most members attending have had previous involvement with A.A. at the meeting level.

Another form of fellowship ritual is the annual conference. At various times of the year Intergroups organize their annual conference, recognizing the time planned for conferences by neighbouring intergroups. They may have a "Blossom Time" or an "Autumn-Leaf Round-up" conference each year. These conferences are given names using idiomatic A.A. phrases; for example, "We've only just begun", "Road to Happy Destiny", or "Together We Can". Conferences are held in large hotels, with conference fees being charged to defray costs. They usually run from Friday evening with an "opening speaker" to Sunday morning with a "spiritual panel". They are composed of a series of meetings, each beginning and

ending with prayer. The meetings may be differentiated to include a "women's panel", a "non-alcoholic professional" who may be an expert on alcoholism, an "institutional panel" focussing on A.A. in prison, or a series of A.A. members who have been recognized for their outstanding speaking ability or their special way with the "A.A. message".

Simultaneous to these meetings, a talkathon may be organized to run around the clock for the duration of the conference. Members of the audience may volunteer or be asked to approach the microphone to share their 'experience, hope, and strength'. With this marathon approach to A.A., the audience experiences a constant change over with people quietly entering and leaving the assembly room.

Meetings, talkathons, and dining and dancing are features of many A.A. conferences. A.A. members take pride in having their formal dinners followed by a key-note speaker who creatively reiterates the theme of the conference. At the dance that follows, members take pride in having a good time without alcohol as a social lubricant:

Did you ever see so many sober alcoholics
all together in one place, having a good
time without the use of alcohol: Can you
imagine what a mess we'd make of this place
if we were all drinking? (M., male, 22 years)

Conferences are a form of ritual which is specially planned to encourage a sense of pride in the fellowship. Large pictures of the founders, Dr. Bob and Bill W., may be displayed. The size and polish of these festive occasions

accommodate formality and finesse in order to exude an attractive image of A.A. In Elementary Forms of Religious Life, Durkheim postulates the need to affirm collective ideas and collective sentiments:

There can be no society which does not feel the need of upholding and reaffirming at regular intervals the collective sentiments and the collective ideas which make its unity and its personality....(1965:475)

The A.A. conference becomes a ritual that allows for the re-affirmation of this collectivity within a highly appealing setting.

One final feature of ritualistic A.A. life can be found in what is described by Turner as "the pilgrimage". In Dramas, Fields and Metaphors, he describes religious pilgrimages as rites of passage. He claims that they instil an experience and feeling of brotherhood and fellowship (1974: 169). He also states that they may rest on voluntarism (Ibid.:198).

Pilgrimages have been a regular aspect of A.A. history:

...periodic pilgrimages were made to Akron or New York to "touch base". Chicago, for example, embraced the practice of at least a pair of members visiting Akron every two months (Kurtz, 1979:102).

A.A. still has annual pilgrimages to Akron, Ohio, which is considered the birthplace of A.A. Affiliates are encouraged to "make the trip at least once" in their lives. The event is now called "Founders' Day". Homage is paid to the

founders of A.A. and members who were in A.A. with the founders speak at the gatherings.

Another A.A. event that could be considered a pilgrimage is the World Conference. Every four years a huge conference is held to gather A.A. members from all over the globe. These conferences are usually held in a large stadium to accommodate the thousands who attend. Members of A.A. claim "You're not really a full-fledged member of A.A. until you've attended a World Conference and seen all those thousands gathered at one big meeting. The sense of strength and unity is overpowering. I felt spiritually moved when I went" (F., male, 3 years). For F., the World Conference reinforced his sense of oneness with the fellowship, "communitas" as Turner would say. And although attendance is voluntary, F. describes it as an integral part of A.A. and A.A. rituals.

Commentary

Ritual is important in A.A. The alcoholic who has lived a normless, unregulated life, comes into A.A. and is expected to conform to a new, well-regulated life style. Prayer in the morning, meetings in the evening, and regular, annual anniversary and fellowship activities become a part of the new life. This ritual conformity marks one aspect of what could be described as a sociologically astute program and fellowship. An examination of social scientific theories

of ritual illustrates this astuteness. Mol's dialectical sociology of religion, Hegel's theory of worship and d'Aquili's biogenetic-structuralist explanation for the effectiveness of ritual each offer supportive conceptualization of ritual as a social phenomenon that reinforces integration.]

Why is ritual so important in A.A.? Let us examine the answer to this question in light of the previously mentioned theories on ritual. With his or her entry into A.A., the alcoholic begins to make a change from an alienated to an integrated existence. He or she leaves the disorganized life of an anomic, alcoholic existence. A.A. suggests that attendance at meetings, where one learns to live according to the principles of the program, are the means to achieve this radical 'about face'.

The constant repetition of the simple format is sometimes considered a form of brainwashing by members who may attend meetings as often as two or three times a day, seven days a week, when they are first 'sobering up'. Members often suggest to newcomers that they go to meetings as often as they drank, which would be daily for many who are 'daily drinkers' when they enter the program. Since members are learning a new, sober way of life, the A.A. program could be called a re-socialization program with members learning how to relate to themselves, their lives, and others in a new way. However, the re-socialization

description would be incomplete without the recognition of the stripping-away process of an old identity as practicing alcoholic and the welding of the new identity in recovery.

A.A. meetings have been analyzed as being effective because they allow the alcoholic to talk himself out of or socialize himself away from alcoholism. This is the theory proposed by David Robinson in Talking Out of Alcoholism. Others have said that meetings support the sobering-up process by virtue of the fact that "...the new member is spending his time with other A.A.'s who are not drinking..." (Mann, 1982:177). Again the re-socializing factor is considered as facilitating recovery. These explanations provide part of the answer and are supported by social scientific theories of ritual behavior.

The transformation from alienation, anomie, and marginality to orderly living is possible through ritual's ability to maximize order. Ritual, in addition to the three other mechanisms for strengthening identity and integration, is able to facilitate this transformation. In Meaning and Place, Mol offers this graphic description of the dynamics through which ritual is effective in bringing about this change:

Ritual is always repetitive. It repeats a pattern so as to preserve the wholeness of individual, group, society, or whatever the pattern belongs to. Ritual prevents unwitting corrosion by drawing the attention to the object of worship through prayer, dance, chant, song, recitation. It does this again and again.

It retraces, as it were, the grooves around order (1983:107).

Order and wholeness are identity. The alcoholic recovering in A.A. goes to meetings to internalize the sober identity proffered by other A.A. members. In his study of identity, Erikson located identity "in the core of the individual and yet also in the core of his communal culture" (1969:265-66). The identity which is located in the core of the communal culture is called a "collective identity" by Habermas (1979:108). Through the ritual of A.A. meetings the alcoholic takes on the collective identity of the fellowship, adopting a new integrated sense and belief of self.

Ritual as an integrative process is described by Hegel in a very poetic style. Hegel would have called A.A. meetings a form of worship. Hegel described worship as having a unifying influence in his essay "On Religion". He said:

We, however, shall conceive of worship as that action which includes both inwardness and outward manifestation, and which in fact produces restoration of unity with the absolute, and in so doing is also essentially an inward conversion of the spirit and the soul (1970:189).

The "outward manifestation" at an A.A. meeting would be the ritualistic, conforming behavior. The "inwardness" could be identified as the sense of commonality experienced. Even the inward conversion of spirit and soul can be explained through the responses to meetings by A.A. affiliates to a

meeting. In The Adventure of Sobriety, Stewart, a member of A.A., describes the feeling or spiritual affect of a meeting:

As persons, we are related to one another as notes to a chord, as chords to a tune. In a personal context, we become as one, yet each of us is distinctly himself (1976:39).

Another member describes it differently ("I came to this meeting because it gives me strength and hope, hope because I see other people making it and strength to get through another day" (B., male, 3 months). One member sums up the process very simply, "If I feel bad I go to a meeting and somehow when I leave that meeting I don't feel so bad" (M., male, 22 years).

Hegel stated that "Worship is thus, in fact, the external process by which the subject posits itself as identical with its essential being" (1970:192). Hegel defined the "essential being" as God, claiming "the consciousness of God springs only out of feelings" and that "the relation of man to God lies within the sphere of feeling only and is not to be brought over into thought" (Ibid.:174).

Consistent with this description of God-consciousness, A.A. members describe A.A. as their 'church' and identify unified, integrated feelings as resulting from attendance at a meeting, for them a form of worship. ^{Higher Power}

While Hegel described the identity reinforcing dynamics of ritual through the use of the words "worship", "unity", and "God", d'Aquili and his co-authors describe a

similar effective potential for ritual using a very different approach. In The Spectrum of Ritual, d'Aquili et.al. take a biogenetic-structuralist approach to ritual. They describe this approach as being "an amalgamation of evolutionary, biological, neurophysiological and structuralist theory" (1979:4). Their reaction to Robinson's theory of "talking out" is contained in their belief in the importance of formally organized, repeatable patterns for behavior (verbal or non-verbal). Talking out is only the starting point; structure must be provided to prevent "chaos" (Ibid.:51). Talking out without structure could simply lead to further disintegration and alienation. [Ritualistic behavior is effective because it is organized and patterned; for the alcoholic it provides an integrative structure] (Ibid.:1). d'Aquili provides a description of ritual which gives an apt portrayal of the place of A.A. meetings as ritual in the life of a recovering, changing alcoholic:

...rituals can act as a buffer or "fail safe" point.... While they may, in some cases, inhibit the development of really complex and flexible functioning, they do act as an organ of conservation, maintaining at least minimal structural organization and providing the glue to hold the structure together in rough weather (Ibid.:244).

Consistent with their interdisciplinary approach to the examination of ritual, the authors offer an interesting neurobiological explanation for the effectiveness of ritual. This explanation begins by stating:

The raison d'etre for rituals is the re-adjustment of dysphasic biological and social rhythms by manipulation of neuro-physiological structures under controlled conditions. Rituals properly executed promote a feeling of well-being and relief, not only because prolonged or intense stresses are alleviated, but also because... (Ibid.:144).

It continues with a complicated explanation of the relationship between the nervous system, the right brain hemisphere, the maintenance and expansion of trophotropic and ergotropic (both mind-altering) chemicals, the excitation and synchronization of cortical rhythms and the state of trance that results. The feeling of ease and relaxation described by members of A.A. after a meeting might well be explained by this neurobiological explanation.]

Conclusion

Perhaps that "feel good" feeling experienced by A.A. members at the end of a meeting is a form of trance. In any case, d'Aquili and his co-authors reiterate the integrative effect of ritual, supporting observations by Mol and Hegel.

[A sense of common identity can be achieved through ritualistic behavior. The bewildered, disoriented alcoholic, through the ritual of A.A. meetings, is able to take on a new integrative identity while stripping off the old one.]

However, ritual alone would not be enough. Alcoholics often establish individual patterns of ritualistic behavior around their drinking. Drinking at specific times, in certain places and with certain people may be elements of

individual drinking rituals. In order for ritual to become an integrative mechanism, it must be augmented by the other mechanisms for "wholeness" formation--objectification, commitment, and myth.

FOOTNOTES

1. This prayer is the first verse of the poem written by Reinhold Niebuhr. See Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age, p. 196.

2. The Twenty-Four Hours A Day book is published by Hazelton and is not "Conference Approved" literature.

CHAPTER V

OBJECTIFICATION

Alcoholics come to A.A. to have their lives changed from chaos and disorganization to order and meaning. They come in as confused, disoriented people who have experienced a wide variety of problems. They may be confronted with this description of the changes they are about to experience:

In Alcoholics Anonymous you learn who you are and what you are. You learn to live without booze. It's the greatest university in the world! You'll establish a relationship with a Higher Power and you'll clean up your relationships with your fellow-man. You'll learn to accept yourself (An A.A. Oldtimer).

Although the words may differ, most newcomers to A.A. are given some ideas that things are going to change in their lives. Through the rhythm and repetition of meetings and through interaction with older members, they are confronted with a way of living which is in total discord with their previous drunken existence. The disjunction of the old and the new life is remedied by various systems of objectification, firmly established, well-organized beliefs about the nature of human existence. These systems are woven through the fiber of the meetings and are represented by the Twelve

Steps and the Twelve Traditions and by the fellowship and its sober members.

A system of objectification is "an overall theory of world view that works as a standard by which to judge the world...", using Mol's definition in Meaning and Place (1983: 118-119). He states that objectification is the process whereby one makes order into an object and "thereby relativizing mundane disorder and change" (Ibid.). He adds that the beliefs in meaning and order are projected "into a transcendent point of reference", a focal point that lies beyond experience and material existence. The result of this process is the "creation of meaning for the here and now", providing "a platform of confidence outside the world, through which change can be accepted" (Ibid.).

For the alcoholic coming to A.A., objectification, according to Mol's definition, helps her understand her alcoholism, her previous alcoholic life, her means for order and rehabilitation in the present, and her relationships with her fellows. The Higher Power becomes the transcendental point of reference and confidence is provided for making the changes necessitated by the termination of the drinking habit. In A.A., the Twelve Steps provide a more personal system of objectification and the Twelve Traditions present a social system of meaning and order.

Ogborne describes the adoption of objectification systems in his booklet on A.A. affiliates:

Persons who have lost touch with the meaning and purpose of their lives--who have lost control over their drinking and believe that it is due to a severe illness, who believe that they are powerless and not the captains of their own fate, who look at the world in a global manner and who feel the need to affiliate with an authoritarian group having clear-cut precepts--may fairly be said to be unstructured (1981:670).

Ogborne observes that newcomers to A.A. have no system of objectification and need a "clear-cut" system of meaning. Before A.A. their only point of transcendence may have been 'the bottle'. Within their unstructured meaningless 'alcoholic fog' they may at first be able to understand only the 'mini steps' or the slogans, as expressed by one member-- "When I first came into the program my head was too fogged up to make much sense of anything. I had to use the mini steps" (M., female, 3 years). Yet, once sober for a length of time, they are ready to come to a clearer understanding about the meaning of life and their position in the human order.

Personal Objectification

The Twelve Steps provide a clearly delineated system of objectification with each step. An examination of these steps provides, in the first place, a set of beliefs about the nature and effects of alcoholism, and the means for rehabilitation. Secondly, the Steps advocate a transcendental point of reference and prescribe the process for relating to that point. Third, and lastly, the Steps present

an overall world view.

The Twelve Steps were first printed in Chapter Five of the book Alcoholics Anonymous. They were presented as steps taken by the first one hundred members of A.A. They are an imitation and an elaboration of the steps used by the Oxford Group, which could be named A.A.'s forerunner. The Oxford Group had six steps stating that men are sinners, that they can be changed, that confession is a prerequisite for change, that the changed soul has direct access to God, that the "Age of Miracles" has returned and "that those who have changed must change others" (Gellman, 1964:160). These steps became the starting point for A.A.'s Twelve Steps. Although it was Bill Wilson who first wrote the Steps, the other members who first joined A.A. argued, and discussed, and finally accepted the Steps. They are introduced in Alcoholics Anonymous as "the steps we took, which are suggested as a program of recovery..." (p. 59).

Newcomers to A.A. are encouraged to attend to the Steps through a variety of comments. They may be told, "If you want to stay sober, you have to live the Steps, not just learn them". They may also be told, "These Steps are 'suggested' in the same way that it is suggested that you pull the chord when you jump out of an airplane with a parachute on your back." It is the incorporation of the Twelve Steps into all aspects of daily living that constitutes the A.A. program.

The informal suggestions concerning the living of the Steps are matched, by established A.A. members, with assurance of the intent of the steps:

These Steps are meant to help you learn to feel good about yourself. We want to say to you, "You're O.K. and life can be beautiful." If you examine these Steps closely you'll see that they are each designed for your welfare, so you'll feel good about you, and you'll establish right relationships with your fellowman and your Higher Power (M., male, 22 years).

Although "powerless", "sanity", "moral inventory", and perhaps especially "God as we understood Him" may be words that initially intimidate an alcoholic accustomed to a normless existence, the A.A. fellowship, through meetings, sponsorship, and the sharing of personal difficulties with these Steps, encourages a relaxed, "Easy Does It" approach to this program.

The Twelve Steps, as a system of objectification, defines individual existence, urges the amending of social relations and inspires efforts to accept a transcendental point of reference. An examination of the Steps individually allows for the delineation of the system of meaning and order provided in this program. From Step One through Step Twelve, the reforming alcoholic is led through a program of self-acceptance to altruistic interests in his fellowman.

With Step One, the alcoholic is expected to admit his powerlessness over alcohol and to an unmanageable life. Taking this Step encompasses a willingness to stop drinking.

The fifth chapter of A.A.'s Big Book is titled "How It Works", and the "HOW" of the program is defined as Honesty, Open-mindedness, and Willingness. These three attributes are named as essential to living the A.A. way of life and are integrated into the Steps from the very beginning. In taking the first step, the alcoholic is expected to 'admit, accept, and act' on his awareness that it is alcohol that is the problem in his life. The unmanageability of life supports and facilitates this awareness. Marriage problems, as well as health, financial, and employment problems are each identified as major areas of unmanageability.

By learning that one is 'powerless over alcohol' and 'alcoholic', the newcomer is presented with a label for identifying his present reality. This provides a reassuring answer for some, as expressed by one member of A.A.:

When I first came here I heard a fellow introduce himself as an alcoholic and I thought that was a pretty sporty name. I'd been called everything from a drunken, no-good, shiftless bum to an incorrigible dipsomaniac and "alcoholic" sounded pretty good to me (D., male, 3 years).

This presentation of a label provided D. with self-acceptance. It allowed him an acceptable definition of self, it gave him an identity. Alcoholics Anonymous defines the 'powerlessness over alcohol' as an illness and a disease, providing further freedom from the moral implication usually attached to excessive drinking. J. describes how he felt superior to some and inferior to others at the same time,

and how A.A.'s description of alcoholism as an illness eased the tension between these two extremes:

I came into A.A. feeling like a super-ace swinger and a moral degenerate all at the same time and the tension between these two used to drive me to drink. A.A. helped me put these two together. No one is all bad or all good. I found out I was an alcoholic, and that was why I did those things. In A.A. I got my self-esteem back, no one is all bad (J., male, 24 years).

In addition to providing an acceptable and sense of identity, the taking of the first step also locates the problem firmly within the individual (Robinson, 1976:96). It is the individual that is powerless. For the alienated alcoholic, who may have tended to blame his upbringing, his financial and social circumstances, or the world-at-large for his difficulties with the life, the notion is presented that it is the powerlessness over alcohol that has been the problem. This awareness simplifies the recognition of solutions. Since alcohol is the problem, the termination of drinking is the solution.

In The Little Red Book, a small book which is read by many A.A. members although it is not "A.A. conference approved literature", this relationship between alcohol and personal problems is described:

Alcoholism stimulates such a condition (of physical and mental breakdown) and further complicates it by a systematic daily intake of toxic poison--alcohol. The blood stream and body cells are first affected, then the brain, as we compulsively substitute the poison alcohol for the nutrition necessary

to normal health (p. 23).

Although it was initially alienation that encouraged excessive use of alcohol, it is the continued use of alcohol which causes the physical and mental breakdown. Discontinuing drinking habits will therefore remedy much of the unmanageability of life. Yet, this is only the first Step.

* [In the second Step, the newcomer is informed that others "came to believe that a Power greater than themselves" was a part of their recovery. Members of A.A. describe their "quitting drinking" as a miracle and attribute that miracle to a 'Higher Power'. This Higher Power may be a member of A.A., the fellowship, or God "as they understood Him". The contrast between the chaos of their drinking lives, the sharp turn around, and the often surprised insight that it was alcohol that was the problem, along with the subsequent decision to terminate their addictive behavior, does present a scenario that leads to the 'miracle' label.]

Furthermore, the acceptance of a transcendental point of reference also contributes to describing these changes as miracles. Kurtz describes alcoholics as being their own gods in his history of A.A. He titled his book Not-God to illustrate that:

the fundamental and first message of Alcoholics Anonymous to its members is that they are not infinite, not absolute, not God. Every alcoholic's problems had first been, according to this insight, claiming God-like powers, especially that of control (1979:3).

[The alcoholic, with the second Step, is expected to forfeit his godly position and accept a power, any power, greater than himself. In Alcoholics Anonymous the writers claim that "each of them has gained access to, and believes in, a Power greater than themselves", while previous to A.A., they used to amuse themselves "by cynically dissecting spiritual beliefs and practices..." (550, 49). While everyone is given the greatest leeway to define for themselves their Higher Power, everyone is expected to be "willing to try". Some members say, "Mine does a good job for me, why not use it until you come up with one of your own." Another possible definition of a Higher Power is suggested in The Little Red Book:

Most of us have appreciated the perfection of the universe, the animation of living things, the action of the human mind, the power of love. These things all seem to denote a dynamic Life Force that is back of, in and through everything about us. This force appears to direct all things harmoniously but irresistibly toward a natural, definite, useful conclusion (p. 49, 50).

[After "coming", after "coming to", and after "coming to believe", as they like to say in A.A., the newcomer is asked to take Step Three and "make a decision". That decision concerns the "turning over" of "will and life" to the care of the Higher Power defined in Step Two. } One member expressed her experience with this step:

One day I just decided that I'd quit worrying and fussing about everything,

that I'd just "Let Go and Let God". At the end of the day, when I checked out how things had gone, I found that everything had gone well, so I figured God must have looked after it. Now I try to maintain that attitude all the time (J., female, 4 years).

For J. the third Step was a simple process that had to be repeated regularly. Not only does the A.A. system of objectification spell out a transcendental point of reference, but it also expects members to live according to a recognition and incorporation of that point with respect to all aspects of daily living. For an alienated, god-playing alcoholic this may be a tall order, but A.A. claims:

Practicing Step Three is like the opening of a door to which to all appearances is still closed and locked. All we need is the key, and the decision to swing the door open. There is only one key, and it is called willingness (Twelve and Twelve, 34).

Again willingness is identified as the basic requirement for taking this Step.

With the first three Steps, the alcoholic is provided with a basic set of ideas and beliefs which provide an objective representation of his existence. His problem is alcohol, and his solution is the acceptance of some type of Higher Power into his life. Having taken these first three Steps, A.A. anticipates that any alcoholic will have a strong enough beginning at understanding his condition and a strong enough sense of meaning and place, that he is able to continue with the other nine steps.

Step Four and Five involve the taking of "a searching and fearless moral inventory" and a confession and sharing of this inventory to "God, to ourselves, and to another human being". The inventory consists of self-analysis:

Step Four is our vigorous and painstaking efforts to discover what these (physical and mental) liabilities in each of us have been, and are. We want to find exactly how, when, and where our natural desires have warped us (Twelve and Twelve, 43).

The character traits possibly identified in this inventory may consist of resentments, dishonesty, self-pity, jealousy, criticism, intolerance, fear and anger (Red Book, p. 60) and pride, greed, and lust. These attributes are named as contributing to the self-destructive behavior of excessive drinking. They could also be identified as exacerbating feelings of alienation so common to the alcoholic.

Once this inventory is made, and some members insist it should include assets as well as liabilities, it has to be shared in the fifth Step. The Little Red Book describes the taking of this step as contributing to the development of humility, honesty, and spirituality and recommends that it be taken with a clergyman, psychiatrist or doctor. While members of A.A. may not disagree with this suggestion, they also identify a sponsor or another A.A. member as suitable for sharing this inventory. When asked about feelings brought on by hearing many inventories, one oldtimer commented:

I've heard it all and I usually forget it all. I usually reassure anyone who is going to give me their inventory that there's probably nothing they've done or felt that I haven't either felt or thought of doing so nothing surprises me anymore (M., male, 22 years).

On the other hand, J. describes her feelings after having shared her inventory with another member:

I felt so relieved. I talked about things with my sponsor that I had tried to hide away in the far, back corners of my mind. Sure I cried a lot as I was talking about all those things but I felt so good when it was all over. I felt like I'd joined the human race (J., female, 4 years).

Some write out their inventories using a check list, others write and talk about their past wrongs. The methods used for this step may vary but the intent of the Step is always the same. The alcoholic is expected to examine himself, rather than what are considered wrongs done to him, and he is expected to talk about these things to someone else. These Steps are meant to prepare him for Steps Six and Seven where he is asked to become "entirely ready" and to "humbly ask" that character defects identified in the two previous Steps will be removed by God.

With these last four Steps a transformation is expected to occur in the alcoholic identity which was initially presented in the first Step. This identity is expected to align itself with a type of moral order and to conform with a system of order suggested by the fellowship. Some define GOD as "Good, Orderly Direction" exemplifying

the informal adoption of an orderly meaning core. An interesting aspect of the A.A. program shows itself at this point--the defects are 'to be removed'. No action on the part of the individual is expected other than "to become ready" and to ask for removal. No specific guidelines are provided for how this removal will occur.

Once the alcoholic has taken the first seven Steps, he is asked to "make a list of persons harmed" during his drinking and to make amends to them, in Steps Eight and Nine. The meaning prescribed by these Steps involve restitution. Within the A.A. system of objectification, as outlined by these Steps, the alcoholic is directed to cause no harm to his family, relatives, and acquaintances, to inventory his own behavior, and to make amends where harm is done. These amend-making Steps appear to serve several functions. Through making a list of persons harmed and through becoming willing to make amends, the recovering alcoholic takes responsibility for his own behavior. He stops seeing things in terms of how others are treating him, which had probably contributed to the initial development of his sense of alienation. Instead of analyzing, evaluating, and criticizing his environment and those in it, he addresses himself completely to his own behavior, facilitating integration.

C. expresses this change:

I stopped blaming the world for all my problems. I started to see that I was

my only problem and that I was my only solution and I didn't want to hurt me anymore. People, places and things could no longer bother me (C., female, 4 years).

As described by C. the alcoholic takes on responsibility for her own behavior. She takes on a new meaning of the order of things. She thinks in terms of making changes in herself and her attitudes rather than being disturbed by any aspect of her environment.

Making amends also resolves tensions that may have been created while the alcoholic was still "practicing". Members of A.A. are instructed to examine all their relationships and identify the problems they brought to that relationship. Then they are told to approach those harmed, when there is no chance of "hurting them or others", to rectify through explanation, excuse, apology, or restitution. The intent of this Step is, once again, to make the alcoholic feel good about himself, so that "...he begins to feel some importance as an individual, and his self-respect slowly returns" (Mann, 1982:177). These Steps therefore bring a calm sense of order to the life of the reformed alcoholic. His sense of self and his relationships with others are brought to an orderly resolution.

In Alcoholics Anonymous a second intent is given for Steps Eight and Nine and the making of amends: "Our real purpose is to fit ourselves to be of maximum service to God and the people about us" (p. 77). This purpose defines yet

another aspect of the ordering provided for a recovering alcoholic; service is prescribed for this new way of life. Amend making, and the resolution of personal tensions is only the beginning. Recovery in A.A. consists of an altruistic dedication to others as a replacement for the self-centeredness of drinking.

When making amends, A.A. members are instructed to impress on others "a sincere desire to set right the wrong" (A.A., p. 77). Often they will inform those to whom they are making amends, of the changes in their lives, that they've quit drinking, and perhaps even that they've joined A.A. Members of A.A. suggest:

Simply we tell him that we will never get over drinking until we have done our utmost to straighten out the past. We are there to sweep off our side of the street, realizing that nothing worth while can be accomplished until we do so, never trying to tell him what he should do (Ibid.).

Again the recovering alcoholic is expected to "take his own inventory" and to take full responsibility upon himself.

Having stopped the drinking habit, adopted spiritual principles, taken and shared an inventory, and made amends, the A.A. affiliate is now ready to incorporate Steps Ten, Eleven, and Twelve into his life. Steps Ten and Eleven define the personal ritual that is to be planned into each day. This personal ritual, as described in Chapter Four, consists of prayer and meditation and daily inventory. Step Ten prescribes the continued inventory taking and the prompt

admission of wrongs. Step Eleven, on the other hand, advocates prayer and meditation directed toward acquiring "knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out".

In addition to the daily routines of Steps Ten and Eleven, Step Twelve also defines the behavior expected from a recovering alcoholic. By Step Twelve, the alcoholic is expected to have experienced a "spiritual awakening as the result of these steps". The spiritual awakening may consist of deep new insights, a "complete personality change", "ego-deflation at depth", or, as described in Appendix II of Alcoholics Anonymous, "an overwhelming and immediate" God consciousness followed at once by "a vast change in feeling and outlook" (p. 569). This appendix continues:

Most of our experiences are what the psychologist William James calls the "educational variety" because they develop slowly over a period of time. Quite often friends of the newcomer are aware of the difference long before he is himself. He finally realizes that he has undergone a profound alteration in his reaction to life; that such a change could hardly have been brought on by himself alone...they have tapped an unsuspected inner resource which they presently identify with their own conception of a Power greater than themselves (Ibid.).

Now the alcoholic gets involved with carrying this message to other alcoholics, "this" message being the belief that recovery from alcoholism is possible through the Twelve Steps. He is also told to "practice these principles" of admission, inventory, turning things over to a Higher Power,

and amend making, in all his affairs. Not only the drinking, and the alcoholic living but all other aspects of life are to be decided according to the Twelve Steps. They are presented as a comprehensive system of objectification. It is these steps that give practical guidelines for all areas of life, they objectify reality by defining and prescribing beliefs and behaviors concerning every facet of human existence. These notions are condensed into three distinct and "pertinent" ideas for the alcoholic; that they could not manage their own lives, that "probably no human power" could have relieved them of their alcoholism, and that "God could and would if He were sought" (Alcoholics Anonymous, p. 60).

For the alcoholic recovering in A.A. reality is objectified through the Twelve Steps. Prescriptions and instructions are provided as guidelines for living. A set of beliefs called "The Promises" are also presented, portraying the possibilities that can be achieved through living the Twelve Steps. These are the promises A.A. holds out to its affiliates:

If we are painstaking about this phase of our development, we will be amazed before we are half way through. We are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness. We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it. We will comprehend the word serenity and we will know peace (Alcoholics Anonymous, p. 84).

"The Promises" continue by claiming that no matter how low the alcoholic had sunk physically, mentally or spiritually,

he will find that his experience will be of benefit to others. He will no longer feel useless, selfishness will be replaced with concern for others. Attitudes and outlooks on life will change. A new order with new meaning will be achieved through living the Steps.

Social Objectification

Through the Twelve Traditions A.A. members are presented with a system of objectification for their lives as members of the fellowship. These Traditions were formulated in the mid-1940's as a response to correspondence between groups and A.A.'s New York City office. The groups were accustomed to writing Bill Wilson when they had questions and problems. He would answer these letters by sharing his experience and by making suggestions. The Traditions were written by Wilson after several years of corresponding with groups. Kurtz describes the formulation of the Twelve Traditions:

By 1945, some of the questions had become noticeably repetitious, which suggested that "all this mass of experience might be codified into a set of principles which could offer solutions to all our problems of living and working together and of relating our society to the world outside (1979:113).

An examination of these Traditions can describe the objectification of the program by outlining the relationship of the membership to each other, to other groups, and to the general society.

Tradition One outlines the relative importance of the individual and the group. The welfare of the larger unit is defined as more important than that of the individual. Bill Wilson explains this concept:

The First Tradition has to do with the general welfare, because, God knows, we have learned that our general welfare comes before anything else. As important as the individual is, it had to come first, or there could be no individual survival for anybody--that was certain (Last Talks, p. 18).

In practice, the principle of this tradition is illustrated when a person who has been drinking comes to a meeting and begins to act in such a manner that he or she disrupts the meeting. Although everyone will be concerned with treating the person with tolerance and attracting him or her to sobriety through the program, the welfare and well-being of others present at the meeting has to be considered as more important. This Tradition draws boundaries around the A.A. group, protecting it from outside threats. The disruptive person may be asked to leave or be ushered into a separate area if the chairman or other members decide that the interruptions are a threat to the "common welfare" of the others.

The second tradition provides the transcendental point of reference characteristic of any system of objectification. Yet this tradition offers an interesting twist, it posits the transcendent in the physical. "A loving God" becomes the ultimate authority and contact with that

authority is possible through the expression of the "group conscience". A.A. claims that its experience, as described in A.A.'s history proves that this "apparently impractical principle", which may seem "vague, nebulous, and pretty naive", works. Experience has taught A.A. that the group conscience is able to steer the membership, that the voice of the group conscience is "the true voice of Alcoholics Anonymous" (Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, pp. 132-135).

Requirements for membership are given in Tradition Three, defining who may enter the A.A. membership boundaries. All one needs to join A.A. is a "desire to stop drinking". When the Traditions were first written, the word 'honest' was inserted before 'desire'. With time, the membership came to see that those coming into A.A. may find it difficult to be honest and so the word was dropped.

Tradition Four proclaims the autonomy of each group, safeguarding the boundaries around groups and limiting this protection and autonomy for "matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole". Tradition Five outlines the task for each group--"to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers". Tradition Six bans A.A. involvement ideologically or financially with "any related or outside enterprise" and expresses a concern that this type of involvement would detract from the "primary purpose". Clearly this Tradition reinforces and accentuates the boundary that A.A. installs around itself in relation to the rest of society.

Tradition Seven prescribes financial independence for each A.A. group, and Tradition Eight states that Alcoholics Anonymous must work non-professionally except in its "Service Centers". Offices organized by A.A. may pay their workers but the funding is to be raised by the fellowship, financial contacts outside of A.A. are vetoed. All other A.A. work such as "Twelfth Stepping" is to be done by volunteers from within the fellowship. Tradition Nine discourages overemphasis on formal organization. Tradition Ten again isolates A.A. from the rest of society, and advocates that A.A. should have "no opinion on outside issues".

Tradition Eleven identifies an important principle of the A.A. program, one which is encouraged at both the personal and group level. A.A. believes in "attraction rather than promotion" and although it may sometimes appear to be promoting its attraction, a "soft sell" is encouraged:

...a great responsibility fell upon us to develop the best possible public relations policy for Alcoholics Anonymous. Through many painful experiences, we think we have arrived at what that policy ought to be. It is the opposite in many ways of usual promotional practice. We found that we had to rely upon the principle of attraction rather than of promotion (Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, pp. 180-181).

[In practice, this means that members of A.A. believe that it is their example that should encourage others who wish to stop their drinking habit to try the Twelve Step program. By their examples of a sober life and their practice of responsibility to others,] A.A. believes that the fellowship

will grow in numbers.

The last tradition, Twelve, identifies anonymity as the "spiritual foundation of all" the traditions and emphasizes the importance of placing "principles before personalities". Anonymity has been an important principle of the fellowship from its very beginning. Initially it was felt that anonymity was necessary to protect the reputations of those who were interested in the program. Doctors, lawyers, and businessmen were thought as finding it a problem professionally if there were chances that the admission of powerlessness over alcohol would lead to their being publically labeled as "drunks". Anonymity became especially important during A.A.'s early years when "fears over the economic effects of being known as an ex-drunk were realistic..." and personal anonymity became "an especially cherished protection" (Kurtz, 1979:87).

As Alcoholics Anonymous gained public recognition, anonymity became important to the fellowship as well. The relapse or return to drinking by any one of its members did not provide attraction. If the public did not know who the members were, they would also not know when a member had had a "slip" and had returned to drinking.

Furthermore, anonymity not only protects personal and fellowship reputations, but it is also described as a spiritual principle consistent with A.A.'s concern for ego-deflation. As well as believing that A.A. affiliation

should be anonymous, members also believe that this principle of anonymity should be applied to behavior within the fellowship. Who helps whom, who does what for the fellowship; who belongs to what profession, or who goes back to drinking, is believed to be information that fits into this anonymous category by some members and some groups while it may be 'open' information for others. Everyone does agree on the reasons for anonymity:

Anonymity is maintained for several reasons. Oddly enough, the first and most important is that it helps to keep a member humble. Humility--a spiritual quality some people consider a sign of weakness--means much to ex-inebriates. Among other things, it means the difference between success and failure in their contest with life. No other group of people--as A.A. sees it--so well illustrates the truth of the ancient adage "Pride goeth before a fall" as do the victims of chronic alcoholism (Kurtz, 1979:97).

Anonymity, as a principle used in A.A., exemplifies the many principles of objectification provided by the Steps and the Traditions. These sets of beliefs give private meaning to members, prescribe behaviors, define relations with a transcendental point of reference and establish a referential base of ideas from which members are expected to enact the new life of recovery and sobriety. The Twelve Concepts, which are similar to the Twelve Traditions, outline the principles for the operation of A.A. on a larger, international scale.¹ The Concepts may have little influence on a newly affiliated member, and yet they offer further

assurance that every aspect of A.A. life does have a system of objectification offering order and regulation, and defining and maintaining boundaries.

Commentary

The Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions are described as the A.A. program. They are viewed by the fellowship as the ideological heart of the program encompassing the basic concepts upon which the organization operates. An examination of these systems of objectification in light of their potential as sources of identity presents further insights into recovery from alienation and alcoholism as it occurs for A.A. members.

In Elementary Forms of Religious Life, Durkheim describes religious conceptions, and the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions could be called religious conceptions, as having as "their object" the expression and explanation of "not that which is exceptional and abnormal in things, but, on the contrary, that which is constant and regular" (1965: 43). Durkheim would therefore describe A.A.'s system of objectification as expressing and explaining man's roles and responsibilities in daily life, roles and responsibilities which, though perhaps novel for an A.A. member, are ordinary and common for non-alcoholics. He might even describe A.A.'s Steps and Traditions as systems of classification, as "hierarchized notions" which have been stated in a fashion simple

enough for the alcoholic to follow (Mauss and Durkheim, 1969:81).

Defining a system of objectification as teachings which explain and express the ordinary aspects of human existence is replicated in Freud's work on religion. He defines religious ideas as:

teachings and assertions about facts and conditions of external (or internal) reality which tell one something one has not discovered for oneself and which lay claim to one's belief. Since they give us information about what is most important and interesting to us in life, they are particularly highly prized (1964:25).

Freud's definition, similar to Durkheim's, provides a simple starting point for analyzing the Steps and the Traditions. These beliefs are organized and prioritized. They do give information about life and prescribe ordered behavior. However, these systems of objectification have not only an external, physical, or behavioral element and an internal, emotional, or mental aspect, but they also have a metaphysical, spiritual, or sacred dimension. The Steps and Traditions define and objectify a sacred reality as well.

In Mol's theory of religion the sacred and the informative are integrated within one conceptualization. In dialectical sociology of religion an interpretation of reality can be and is tied in with the transcendental point of reference. (The Higher Power or God "as we understood Him" is central to the Steps and the Traditions. With the first

Step and the admission of powerlessness, the door is opened to the second Step and the belief in a "Power greater than ourselves". An examination of this system of objectification would be inadequate without an acknowledgment that reality has become sacralized, using Mol's conception of sacralization as "the process of safeguarding and reinforcing a complex of orderly interpretations of reality, rules, and legitimation" (1976:202).

Durkheim would not, of course, have argued against the centrality of the supernatural to religion. He claimed that "O()ne idea which generally passes as characteristic of all that is religious is that of the supernatural" (1965:39). Yet he omits the "supernatural" out of his definition of objectification as a mental, rational system. Without acknowledgment of the meta-physical characteristics of religious beliefs one could overlook the importance of a "Higher Power" to the A.A. program.

The A.A. program is not only geared toward prescribing personal and social behavior, it also requires acceptance of some transcendental ordering point. In most systems of religious beliefs this is assumed rather than outlined through instructional directives. The first hundred members of A.A., while having difficulty accepting this order before joining the fellowship, said:

441K We finally saw that faith in some kind of God was a part of our make-up, just as much as the feeling we have for a friend. Sometimes we had to search fearlessly, but He

was there. He was as much a fact as we were. We found the Great Reality deep down within us (Alcoholics Anonymous, p. 55).

They may call it God, Higher Power or "Great Reality". Whatever the name, members are expected to recognize some power that transcends their individual being. Some members are told not to continue with the other steps until the first three Steps, which require some awareness of a transcendental point of reference, are firmly established in their lives. In A.A. therefore, this point of reference is essential for the rest of the program.]

The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions prescribe action and require acceptance of a transcendent entity. They may also be described as the "latent and primary sources of identity" (Mol, 1976:3). Taking the first step of admitting powerlessness and unmanageability is symbolized by most members by naming themselves 'alcoholics', the first Step is paralleled with the self-imposed label. Members of A.A. may introduce themselves as "alcoholic, by my own admission".

The identity provided by A.A.'s system of objectification begins with the label 'alcoholic'. It continues with the word 'unmanageable'. A.A. members believe that their lives are unmanageable because they drank. Similarly, each of the Steps and Traditions contribute to this identity formation: their importance as individuals is secondary to the importance of the group, personal problems become their own responsibility, they have an obligation to inform others

of the changes in their lives, the source for positive change is some sort of Higher Power, they can forget about the past and focus on the problems of daily living, "God will look after it", and there are guidelines for a sober life. With these Steps and Traditions members are provided with a sense of meaning for their life and a sense of place in the larger scheme of things.]

Conclusion

Recovery in A.A. is made possible through the adoption of a new, sober identity. [Through the ritual of meetings and the repetition of its systems of objectification, A.A. indoctrinates affiliates with the principles needed to change from the alienated existence of the practicing alcoholic to the integrated, orderly life of the recovering alcoholic.] [A.A.'s Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions provide the alcoholic with a new identity, a transcendent Power source, and guidelines for living.]

FOOTNOTE

1. See The A.A. Service Manual combined with Twelve Concepts For World Service by Bill W. 1981-82 Edition.

CHAPTER VI

COMMITMENT

Dramatic changes are expected from a recovering alcoholic. A totally new way of thinking and living is necessitated by the transition from drinking to sobriety. Going to meetings replaces going to pubs or drinking at home; order and routine are substituted for chaos and anomie. In many instances, the recovering alcoholic, through the A.A. program and fellowship, is asked to think and behave in ways that are foreign and repugnant to his alienated being.

The ritual of A.A. meetings attempts to draw the newcomer into a welcoming environment. A.A. members recall their own feelings and attitudes when they first "came through the doors of A.A.", and try to reach out to the newcomer with a gentle patience or an enthusiastic persuasion. The Steps and Tradition, A.A.'s systems of objectification, are offered as "suggestions" for rehabilitation from alcoholism. Ever aware of the difficulties presented by change, the A.A. fellowship cautiously encourages the newcomer to "try our program for ninety days and if you're not happy with it, we'll gladly refund your misery".

For the newcomer, his initial contact with A.A.

involves not only the communication of information about the program and fellowship, it also includes making a commitment. His feelings of readiness to give A.A. a try, his sense of desperation about trying to bring about some positive changes in his life, and even his thoughts of hope that the program might help him, can each contribute to a commitment to stop drinking.

This chapter begins by describing aspects of the process through which commitment is originally established. Then the expression of that commitment is examined with respect to behavioral changes of the recovering alcoholic. The problems of conflicting commitments and the resolution of conflicts through A.A.'s system of objectification are outlined next. Finally, a commentary is presented on the place of commitment in A.A. and in the social scientific study of religion.

Establishing Commitment

In 1972, Kenneth Jones carried out some interesting research on A.A. in England. He suggested that Alcoholics Anonymous was a new revivalism and claimed that "A.A. has as little organization as possible, and a lack of centralised control" (1972:602). He continued his description of A.A. with the observation that A.A. "has an intense level of commitment" (Ibid.).

A.A. offers its own description of the intensity of

commitment:

Under the lash of alcoholism, we are driven to A.A., and there we discover the fatal nature of our situation. Then, and only then, do we become as open-minded to conviction and as willing to listen as the dying can be. We stand ready to do anything which will lift the merciless obsession from us (Twelve and Twelve, p. 24).

Within this description A.A. identifies the "HOW of the Program", the open-mindedness and the willingness, as ingredients of making a commitment. How do members get to the point where they are "ready to do anything"? What drives them to this intensity?

In Chapter Three, describing the career of an alcoholic, the point where the alcoholic changes from a negative to positive direction is named "hitting bottom". A.A. uses a variety of expressions to describe this stage. Members talk about "bottoming out", of "raising someone's bottom", and of "high and low bottom drunks". Ogborne defines "hitting bottom":

The model of alcoholism emphasized by A.A. lays great emphasis upon "hitting bottom", physical dependence, and loss of control. "Hitting bottom" refers to a belief current among A.A. members that it is the person who comes to A.A. after a prolonged adverse interaction with alcohol, rather than the young initiate, who is most likely to affiliate and benefit (1980:8).

For Ogborne, it is the "prolonged adverse interaction" that defines "hitting bottom". When the alcoholic "hits bottom", he may have lost his family, his job and possessions, and

finally be ready to make a commitment to stay sober, "one day at a time" and try living "the A.A. way". "High bottom drunks" are those who have not lost all before they are ready to make this commitment. As A.A. describes it:

Alcoholics who still had their health, their families, their jobs, and even two cars in the garage, began to recognize their alcoholism. As this trend grew, they were joined by young people who were scarcely more than potential alcoholics. They were spared that last ten or fifteen years of literal hell the rest of us had gone through (Twelve and Twelve, p. 23).

"Hitting bottom" is recognizing that the consumption of alcohol is causing problems. "Hitting bottom" is becoming ready to ask and receive help. For members of A.A., it is being honest, willing, and open-minded enough to get involved with A.A. rituals and to acknowledge the possibility of "trying" A.A.'s systems of objectification, which, before this time, may have seemed ridiculous, impossible, useless or ludicrous.

"Hitting bottom" has been an integral part of A.A. from its inception. Bill Wilson had to "hit bottom" before he would adopt spiritual principles into his life. For Wilson, "complete deflation at depth was the one requirement to prepare" him for the experiences that were to change his life and influence so many others after him (Thompson, 1976: 231). Wilson had been uncomfortable with the notion of a "higher Power". "As a student, if he'd had any God, it had been the God of Science, of fact" (Ibid.:213). The laws

governing the universe became the closest expression to any kind of God that Wilson could feel comfortable about. Even toward the end of his drinking, Wilson himself stated: "The word God still aroused a certain antipathy. When the thought was expressed that there might be a God personal to me this feeling was intensified" (Alcoholics Anonymous, p. 12). For Wilson, the commitment to sobriety and the spiritual principles of the Oxford Group were jeopardized by his resistance to acknowledging a Higher Power in his life. He stated this clearly in his opening paragraph of The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions:

Who cares to admit complete defeat?
 Practically no one, of course. Every natural instinct cries out against the idea of personal powerlessness. It is truly awful to admit that, glass in hand, we have warped our minds into such an obsession for destructive drinking that only an act of Providence can remove it from us (P. 21).

The admission of powerlessness over alcoholic drinking, followed by the acceptance of some kind of "Higher Power" encompasses the establishing of commitment in A.A. Whether the "Higher Power" is to be the principles of A.A., the fellowship and its examples of sobriety, or a member, the newcomer is expected to be ready to leave the "plug in the jug" and not drink, with the help of some power greater than himself. He or she is expected to commit him-/herself to sobriety and to joining A.A. The "Big Book" of Alcoholics Anonymous gives a clear suggestion for handling those cases

in which the alcoholic is not ready to make a commitment:
 "If he does not want to stop drinking, don't waste time
 trying to persuade him. You may spoil a later opportunity"
 (p. 90).

"Hitting bottom" and its subsequent decision to
 affiliate with A.A. is described as a simple process by some
 members of A.A. The relief of finding others with similar
 problems, of learning that "there is a solution" as promised
 in Chapter Two of Alcoholics Anonymous, or of discovering
 that it is the consumption of alcohol that had been causing
 the problems, makes it easy for some to commit themselves
 to A.A. C. expresses this relief:

I was so surprised to learn there were others
 who had had the same problems as I had, and
 who had been able to make sweeping changes
 in their attitudes, personalities, and lives.
 Besides, things couldn't get any worse if I
 just tried to do what was suggested to me
 (female, 4 years).

This relief of the new awareness was combined with a sense
 of comfort for L., when he first came to A.A.:

When I got here I felt so bad that just
 being with smiling people made me feel better.
 When I got here I was afraid you people might
 kick me out so I was ready to do anything
 just so you'd let me stay. I was sick and I
 thought I was crazy but you people seemed to
 not care so I wanted to belong (male, 3 years).

Members share their own difficulties with establishing
 a commitment. John Burns, when informed that he'd have to
 surrender to God and make amends to others, complained that
 these instructions sounded "naive, platitudinous, moralistic,

and (ugh!) religious to the jaded, modern ear" (1975:8). Through this sharing the newcomer is reassured that others had the same difficulty, that "no contracts have to be signed", and that "the doors swing both ways, you can freely come in as well as go out" (J., male, 14 years).

Furthermore, members have techniques for easing newcomers into a commitment. Rather than asking them to join the fellowship, they "open the door" to commitment by inviting the initiate to "go to a meeting tonight". They may reinforce this invitation by stating firmly "I'll be over at 7:30 to pick you up for the meeting". Consistent with their belief that freshly sober newcomers are in "too much of a fog to make any kind of sane decision themselves", "that you have to kind of take over for them", and "that they may even still be in a blackout" (M., male, 22 years), members may take an assertive stance in eliciting that initial commitment. "Once you get them at a meeting then the magic of the fellowship can take over" (Ibid.).

Underlying their actions toward newcomers, members hold the belief that prospects either are or are not "ready" to quit drinking and make a commitment to try the A.A. program. Whether attracted to the fellowship, pushed toward sobriety by personal, social, or financial problems, or dragged into a meeting "with their heels firmly digging into the ground", the newcomer is welcomed into A.A. with patience and tolerance. One member expresses her entry into A.A.:

I was more or less wooed into the fellowship. M. sat with me patiently for several nights listening to me talk about my past and my difficulties. Nothing was ever forced on me; it was simply suggested that I might have a problem with alcohol and that going to meetings might be a good idea (J., female, 4 years).

Through suggestions balanced with assertion, a commitment is elicited from newcomers. These suggestions are seasoned with the reminder that things are to be taken "One Day at a Time". In this way newcomers are gently, yet firmly encouraged to commit themselves to A.A. It must, however, be remembered that not all newcomers have a choice about coming to A.A. Some are sent by judges and doctors. Others are coerced by family and friends. Although such newcomers have not been left free to decide whether or not to go to A.A., they do have the option of whether or not they will totally "give themselves" to the program, to get involved, and become part of A.A. In The Answer to Addiction, John Burns summarized "ten practical points" from Alcoholics Anonymous for those who are ready to commit themselves to working toward recovery. The points include "completely giving ourselves to this simple Program", practicing rigorous honesty, "being willing to go to any lengths to recover", being "fearless and thorough" and "realizing there are no easier softer ways". He continues by identifying a readiness to let go of old ideas, to recognize that half measures will not work, to ask God for protection and care, to be willing

to grow along spiritual lines and to accept the A.A. program as a prerequisite for success in A.A. (1975:43).

Expressing Commitment

Having made the initial commitment to try A.A., the newcomer is given many suggestions for experiencing and expressing that commitment. He may be encouraged to "get active, get involved, and not stay on the periphery or the fringe of the fellowship". Expressing commitment may be carried out through group membership, Twelfth Stepping, or sponsorship.

The first act of expressing membership could be to join a group. Very early in their sobriety, new members are urged to get some phone numbers of people to talk to, join a group, and get a sponsor. It may be recommended that they visit several groups and then join the one in which they feel most comfortable. Joining a group involves giving the secretary of the group a name, address, phone number, and dry date. At some meetings groups announce, "If any one would like to join our group just see..." Other groups may recruit by adding, "Our group could sure use some more members, so if you're looking for a group..."

Groups need members to carry out the many jobs involved with running a meeting. Commitment through group membership can be expressed by setting up for the meeting, making coffee, bringing sandwiches, direct participation in

the meeting format, and cleaning up after the meeting. It may also be expressed by speaking at meetings, either for one's own group or for other groups. Speaking, or witnessing serves two functions. It deepens commitment and allows for a form of catharsis to happen through the public confession. The deepening of commitment is expressed by J.: "I'm really scared and I hate doin' this. I'm not really a speaker as 'yous' will find out but I do whatever I'm asked in A.A. because it helps me stay sober" (Male, 2 years).

The benefits of confession are a tradition in A.A. It began when Bill Wilson first went to see Bob Smith, the co-founder, and made his confession. Thompsen, in his biography called Bill W. tells about Wilson:

Then he told his own story, playing down his spiritual experience and describing, as he had never done to anyone the horror of the suicidal obsession that had forced him to go on drinking and the physical allergy his body had developed (1976:238).

Before telling this story, Wilson had said to Smith "that he was not there, as Dr. Bob might suppose, to help him, but because he, Bill Wilson, needed help" (Ibid.).

Clearly, the confession was made for the benefit of the confessor. J. commented on this belief when he said:

I hope I'll say something tonight that will be of some help to someone. If I don't, I know that at least I'll have helped myself 'cause I know that when I'm finished I'll feel good (male, 2 years).

The concept of the benefits of making confession is identified by some members as "one of the many paradoxes of

A.A." Confession is made to benefit the confessor, yet it is also made with the hope that the listener will benefit as well. This same paradox may be used to reassure someone who feels too much is being asked of him by his group. After complaining about the work being expected of him, a member may be reminded, "Well, it's keeping you sober, isn't it?"

Helping others as a way of helping oneself is central to all Twelfth Step work. Responsibility to others is outlined in A.A.'s Responsibility Creed:

I am responsible.
 When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help,
 I want the hand of A.A. always to be there.
 And for that: I am responsible.

Alcoholics Anonymous expands its instructions for this responsibility in the chapter "Working with others". It describes helping others as "the foundation stone" of recovery (p. 97), believing that "faith without works is dead" (p. 14). Furthermore, the "Big Book" repeats A.A.'s belief in the benefits of working with others:

Practical experience shows that nothing will so much insure immunity from drinking as intense working with others. It works when other activities fail....Do not think of what you can get out of the occasion. Think of what you can bring to it (A.A.: 89, 102).

The alcoholic is reminded that working with others is a means to strengthen his own experience of the program.

Robinson has a similar perception of the potential for firming commitment within Twelfth Step work. He describes

membership in a self-help group such as A.A. as meaning "belonging and being part of..." and states:

Twelfth Stepping someone else is, for many members, a real turning point in their A.A. career. It is the time when they feel that they belong enough to 'carry the message'. For many people, this is when they really begin to think of themselves as members (1979:54).

In recruiting others through the Twelfth Step process, the recovering alcoholic is able to see how alcoholism affects the lives of others, to experience the catharsis of confession through sharing his own experiences with alcoholic drinking, and reiterate a belief in the A.A. program and fellowship as a means to recovery.

Twelfth Stepping is carried out in several ways. Someone who feels he needs help may call someone he knows to be a member of A.A. Professional people such as judges, doctors, or social workers may have contact with someone in A.A. to recommend to their clients. Some courts in Canada have an A.A. member present who contacts their defendants if alcoholism is suspected as being a problem. A.A. has a phone listing in most urban areas. Calling the A.A. number may mean that a volunteer or an answering service will channel the call to a member of A.A. who is prepared to take the call, speak with the caller, and make an appointment to visit the caller with another A.A. member. Not all newcomers to A.A. experience this Twelfth Stepping process; some go directly to their first meeting and are Twelfth Stepped by

the speaker in a more impersonal manner.

Sponsorship is another avenue through which commitment to sobriety and to A.A. can be expressed. The suggestion is made to "pick someone who has what you want", that "what" being material goods or, more often, mental and spiritual attitudes. Sponsors are chosen for a wide variety of reasons, from the cars they drive, their involvement with A.A., to their manner of dealing with people. They are to act as guides and mentors, helping the sponsee with his recovery and with integrating A.A. principles into his life.

In A.A.'s history, Bill Wilson first sponsored Bob Smith. Smith described this sponsorship in A.A.'s pamphlet "Last talks of A.A.'s Co-Founders":

After my June 10th episode, Bill came to live at our house and stayed for about three months. There was hardly a night that we didn't sit up until two or three o'clock, talking (p. 8).

In the same article, Smith elaborated on his understanding of the responsibility of sponsorship:

I think the kind of service that really counts is giving of yourself, and that almost invariably requires effort and time. It isn't a matter of just putting a little quiet money in the dish. That's needed, but it isn't giving much for the average individual in days like these, when most people get along fairly well (p. 10).

Through this relationship, both the sponsor and the sponsee or "pidgeon", as they are sometimes called, express their commitments to sobriety, to another member, and to A.A.

Traditionally, sponsorship might include the provision of food, shelter, clothing, money, or a job. The first members of A.A. spent money as well as time and effort in trying to help new members on "the road to sobriety". Robinson describes the role of sponsor in contemporary England as encompassing several responsibilities. He lists encouragement to attend meetings and 'keeping an open mind', the provision of exemplary behavior, the introduction of newcomers to others with common interests, being available to discuss problems, encouraging involvement, talking to relatives of newcomers, and getting the newcomer involved with Twelfth Step work.

The "Big Book" of Alcoholics Anonymous makes several suggestions concerning the responsibility of helping the newcomer. It says, "Offer him friendship and fellowship. Tell him that if he wants to get well you will do anything to help" (p. 95). It continues with this description of the task of A.A. members in helping others:

Helping others is the foundation stone of your recovery. A kindly act once in a while isn't enough. You have to act the Good Samaritan every day, if need be. It may mean the loss of many night's sleep, great interference with your pleasures, interruption to your business. It may mean sharing your money and your home, counseling frantic wives and relatives... (p. 97).

These suggestions outline a fervent dedication to the A.A. program. The price of recovery in A.A. is high. Yet the member is repeatedly reminded of the paradox that helping

others benefits himself. It is suggested that "Life will take on a new meaning". The job of sponsorship is described as very rewarding: "We know you will not want to miss it" (Alcoholics Anonymous, p. 89).

Sponsorship is one of the many ways in which an A.A. member can exercise his commitment to A.A. Involvement with a group, running meetings, Twelfth Step work, and sponsorship are only the beginning. After a few years of sobriety, affiliates can continue expressing their commitment through activity in Intergroup, volunteering for jobs at a Central Office, Public Information work, and General Service. For each, with his or her special interest and abilities, individual expression of commitment is possible and encouraged within the fellowship.

Conflicting Commitments

Membership in A.A. requires an intense level of commitment, especially at first, when the newcomer is experiencing reality without alcohol for what may be the first time in his or her life. Concerning group meeting attendance, a newcomer may be told, "The only reason you miss your meeting is a funeral--your own" (J., male, 14 years). Observers of A.A. have identified this initial intense involvement as a substituting of meetings for alcohol. Commitment to A.A. may therefore result in conflicts with commitment to family, personal relationships, and to institutions, such as the

church. What is A.A.'s response to conflicts in commitment?
How do members resolve these conflicts?

Within A.A.'s systems of objectification, the first Step and the first Tradition provide direction for resolution of conflicts. Members remind each other that they are alcoholics first and foremost, and that if they go back to their drinking behavior all other commitments would be threatened as well. E. expresses this belief:

The most important thing I have to remember everyday is that I am an alcoholic. I have a disease and A.A. is my medicine. A.A. comes first in my life, without it I'd have nothing anyway. I have to put me and my sobriety before my family, otherwise I'd end up losing my family anyway (male, 1½ years).

A.A. membership may pose a special threat to familial commitment. While alcohol had once disrupted family life, it is replaced by activity in A.A. which may be equally disruptive to family cohesion. Alcoholics Anonymous recognized this conflict in the chapter "To Wives":

Still another difficulty is that you may become jealous of the attention he bestows on other people, especially alcoholics. You have been starving for his companionship, yet he spends long hours helping other men and their families. The fact is that he should work with other people to maintain his own sobriety (p. 119).

This chapter continues with the suggestion that the wife initiate a resolution to this conflict by thinking of "what you can put into life instead of how much you can take out of

it", by helping the wives and families of the alcoholics with whom the husband is spending his time (Ibid., p. 120). Although these suggestions for service to others are made to the wife, they apply to all family members. Al-Anon Family Groups have been organized to facilitate that involvement for the family and friends of alcoholics. The conflict of A.A. affiliation and family can be resolved by getting everyone active in Twelfth Step work.

Then too, involvement with A.A. tends to lessen after several years in the program. With continuous sobriety and the daily practice of integrating the Twelve Steps into behavior and attitudes, the A.A. member becomes freer to attend less meetings and to work out some balance in his or her life. One A.A. oldtimer made this suggestion about working out balance:

I know people who go to meetings and have mold growing on their stoves. After we've been in A.A. for a while we need to divide our life just like a pie. We need to cut the pie into equal pieces for A.A., home, and ourselves (V., male, 26 years).

Practical experience within A.A. confirms this observation of the resolution of conflict with time:

The relationship between my wife and me was restored to a love and happiness that we had not known even before my alcoholism became acute. As our children grew up, I was able to be a father to them when they most needed one. My company advanced me rapidly, once my reliability was established again. Regaining my health, I became an avid jogger, sailor, and skier (A.A.:559).

Once A.A. members have started their physical and mental recovery, they are again able to reestablish their commitment to family, employer, and to recreation. What had initially seemed an intense, obsessive involvement with A.A., becomes an interest and concern that is balanced out with the other areas of life. Through recovery in A.A., the alcoholic is able to experience an integrated balance between several facets of life.

Yet another area for potential conflict can be identified in the alcoholic's relationship with the helping professions. The ministers, counselors, or psychiatrists who had originally referred the alcoholic to A.A., may be dropped as the alcoholic joins A.A. The A.A. program and fellowship do not, however, set themselves apart from other sources of recovery and support. A.A. states:

God has abundantly supplied this world with fine doctors, psychologists, and practitioners of various kinds. Do not hesitate to take your health problems to such persons. Most of them give freely of themselves, that their fellows may enjoy sound minds and bodies (Alcoholics Anonymous, p. 133).

According to A.A.'s beliefs, conflicts between A.A. and the helping professions need not exist.

Alcoholics who were church members in their youth and their early drinking days may have dropped church attendance during the latter stages of their drinking careers or their entry into A.A. A.A. does not condemn organized religion, but rather separates itself from religious

institutions. (It calls itself a spiritual program. A.A. acknowledges the utility of previous affiliation with religious denominations and the integration of religious practices from those denominations into daily rituals (Alcoholics Anonymous, pp. 49, 87). In Alcoholics Anonymous, the stories by recovering alcoholics state that commitment to A.A. reinforced their commitment to the religions they had inherited. One member claims, "In summing up, I can say that A.A. has made me, I hope, a real Catholic" (Alcoholics Anonymous, p. 221). Whether Catholic, Protestant, Jew or Hindu, the A.A. member need not experience any conflict between A.A., his church and his commitment to each. If the conflict does exist during his first few years of sobriety, experience in A.A. indicates that it can readily be resolved with the passing of time.

For members who are not able to resolve their commitment conflicts, one answer may be to revoke their commitment to sobriety and to "slip" or resume their drinking habits.

Rudy completed a study on "slipping" and found:

It is apparent from a number of studies that slipping is a common occurrence in A.A. In a study of A.A. groups in London, Edwards et al. pointed out that 57% of their respondents had slipped at least once and 18% had slipped five or more times (1980:727).

He also found that slipping enhances group solidarity, by pointing out "to all A.A. members the vulnerability they must acknowledge daily" (Ibid.:731). He observed "slipping" as

deviant behavior which serves a function in A.A.

"Slipping" serves the function of reasserting commitment to sobriety and to A.A. In Alcoholics Anonymous, its early members did not view slipping as a cancellation of commitment. In their perceptions of alcoholism as a disease and the alcoholic as "powerless", they viewed "slipping" as beyond the rational aspects of human nature:

And the truth, strange to say, is usually that he has no more idea why he took that first drink than you have...in their hearts they really do not know why they do it (A.A., p. 23).

The renewal of commitment is expressed by A.A. affiliates in their responses to seeing another member "go back out":

When I heard that A. had gotten drunk after seven years of sobriety I just shook my head and wondered if I'd be crazy enough to go back to drinking in a couple of years. I just kind of decided that I'd better take a good look at myself and make sure I'm really listening at meetings and living the program (J., female, 4 years).

Similarly, another member expresses his recommitment to A.A.:

I know I'm just three feet (arm's length) away from picking up that 'glass of disaster'. A couple of months ago, when my father died, I thought of drinking and someone who was just 'coming back' told me, "Don't do it, F., nothing has changed out there." After that I decided I needed more meetings and I started going to two a day again (F., male, 2 years).

Members express a sense of threat to their own sobriety when they hear about or see someone relapse. They are able to objectively see how alcoholism changes thinking,

attitudes, and behavior. The physical affects of alcoholism become obvious on a dirty, drunk, unshaven, self-destructive drinker; and members are able to picture themselves in that situation. They may feel thankful to be sober that day and ready to go to another A.A. meeting and try, with just a little more sincerity, to practice the A.A. program and continue involvement with the A.A. fellowship.

Commentary

The career of an alcoholic recovering in A.A. clarifies the extreme changes that occur after the turning point, when the alcoholic begins to move from alienation to integration. The ritual of meetings and the objectification of the Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions each facilitate the transition. d'Aquili comments that "individuals must first be encouraged or coerced into participating in ritual", that the first step is "gaining and holding their attention..." (1981:230). This gaining and maintaining of a participant's attention is made possible through their commitment.

In Identity and Religion, Mol describes Durkheim, Weber, and "many other sociologists of religion" as under-rating commitment (1978:11). Wilson does attribute sect members as having a "distinctive and intense" sense of commitment (1982:118) and Durkheim and Mauss acknowledge "the influence of divers sentiments" connected with religion (1969:86), but neither recognized the importance of commitment

to the adoption of ritual and objectification. The career of an alcoholic makes clear the prominence of commitment or emotional anchoring in the conversion from drunkenness to sobriety. Mol integrates commitment with the other three mechanisms for integration, stating that:

Commitment or loyalty is very much present in the other categories (objectification, ritual, and myth) of our analysis. All the categories overlap to an extent.... All these feelings have a potent effect on a sense of belonging. Social consensus would not be possible without them (1982a:30).

Before continuing with a commentary on the relationship of commitment to the A.A. program, a clarification of this concept is provided. In 1960, Howard Becker wrote an article called "Notes on the Concept of Commitment". He described commitment as "an explanation of consistency in behaviour" and defined it as behavior that "persists over time" (pp. 33-36). Mol, on the other hand, identifies commitment as an "emotional attachment to a specific focus of identity" allowing "personal and social unity". Commitment therefore persists over a certain period of time and unites an individual with a social unit resulting in a conformity of behavior on the part of the individual to the larger unit. William James described this union as conversion:

To be converted, to be regenerated, to receive grace, to experience religion, to gain an assurance, are so many phrases which denote the process, gradual or

sudden, by which a self hitherto divided, and consciously wrong, inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right, superior and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities (1961:160).

Whether the alienated self of the practicing alcoholic is divided, wrong and inferior, or the integrated member of A.A. is right, superior and happy may be open to conjecture; the point that is clear is that the committed A.A. member has a "firmer hold" on "religious realities" or a system of transcendental ordering and unified sameness of action, or ritual.

In his history of religion in Canada, Mol offers several examples of behavior expressing commitment which are parallel to behavior prescribed for A.A. newcomers. Nova Scotia's New Lights, in the late 1700's, encouraged the making of amends:

One had to ask forgiveness from all those whom had been hurt in the past, foremost amongst whom were parents, spouses and children. Actual reconciliation often took place after confession of unjust dealings, impetuous anger, irresponsible behaviour, and serious infidelity. Past tensions and bitterness tended, at least initially, to be replaced by a new sense of family integrity. This increased the capacity for pulling together and freed energy for coping with the difficult and uncertain times (1982c:139).

This behavior not only produced a sense of integrity, it would also declare and reinforce commitment to the religious unit. As well as the making of amendments, active involvement to express commitment was common in the Salvation Army's

history. Mol describes them as promptly putting new converts to work, "so that there was little time for anything else" (Ibid.:146). Work and witnessing were used. Mol describes the witnessing in the Salvation Army:

There was first of all the miracle element. Someone whom everyone knew as the town drunk or the wife-beater had turned over a new leaf and openly confessed his miserable sins to all and sundry in meetings and on street corners (Ibid.:146).

Amendmaking, work, and witnessing are each identified as means to express and confirm commitment. The service to others, the giving of self, which are encouraged in A.A., each contribute to commitment. Mol describes these acts as sacrifice and claims that "sacrifice is a form of commitment that reinforces a system of meaning or an identity by clarifying priorities" (1976:226). The clarification of priorities is certainly true for commitment in A.A. Every behavior is geared toward "attaining and maintaining sobriety" and in doing "whatever is suggested by A.A. in order to stay sober". The fear of "returning to the insanity of drinking" is repeatedly used as the reason for following suggestions, for co-operating with the program.

Mol not only identifies sacrifice as influencing commitment, he also recognizes the relevance of boundaries to commitment. He quotes Kanter to say that boundaries define groups, setting them apart from the environment, and providing the groups with a sharp focus, thereby facilitating

commitment (1976:66). He also describes identities as diversifying into personal, group, and social identities and claims that there are "constant boundary conflicts" as each identity vies for more commitment "to maximize allegiance" (Ibid.:144). Within A.A. the conflicts between identities exist as well. Through the first Tradition, group identity and group identity and group commitment are given priority, as "our common welfare should come first". Similarly, sobriety and A.A. are given highest priority by virtue of A.A.'s perception of alcoholism as being a physical and mental or emotional illness. Without sobriety, A.A. believes that all else is in jeopardy. Drinking is a taboo.

A.A. is able to clearly define its taboos and place these taboos in a hierarchical order. Douglas names taboos as social pollution and makes this categorization:

Four kinds of social pollution seem worth distinguishing. The first is danger pressing on external boundaries; the second, danger from transgressing the internal lines of the system; the third, danger in the margins of the lines. The fourth is danger from internal contradiction, when some of the basic postulates are denied by other basic postulates, so that at certain points the system seems to be at war with itself (1966:122).

Each of these dangers can be identified within the A.A. program, establishing priorities in commitment and expressing, as Douglas claims, "a general view of the social order" (Ibid.:3). Getting drunk, taking a drink is the prime taboo in A.A. Staying sober therefore becomes the parallel

commitment. This taboo presses "on external boundaries". An A.A. member is either "in" and sober or has "gone back out" and returned to drinking. Sobriety forms the external boundary. The taboo related to "internal lines" is related to the common welfare of A.A. as a whole. "Margins of the lines" taboos relate to expectations for interaction with outsiders. After the commitment to sobriety and A.A., comes the commitment to helping others, and A.A. allows no place for the fourth category, or internal contradiction, in its commitment to "a loving God" that is expressed through "group conscience".

In summary, commitment is important to the recovering alcoholic. His or her loyalty to sobriety, A.A., and living the Twelve Step program is a decisive factor in determining whether or not the transformation from alienation to integration can happen. A.A.'s taboo against drinking makes it easier to differentiate between those who are or are not totally committed to the A.A. way of life. Although it must be conceded that there are A.A. members who are committed to the fellowship or to "carrying the message" who are not able to stay sober. Their partial commitment can not be ignored.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the establishing and expressing of commitment and the resolution of conflicting commitments in A.A. "Hitting bottom" as the impetus to

making a commitment has been described as being reinforced by the sharing and encouragement of Twelfth Stepping. The expression of commitment within A.A. happens through involvement, witnessing, Twelfth Stepping and sponsorship. Conflicting commitments have been acknowledged and examined. Their resolution through A.A.'s objectification, Al-Anon, and "slipping" are also explored. Finally a review of social theories on commitment has discussed the importance of commitment to the success of the A.A. program in the life of a recovering alcoholic.

A.A. as an expanding self-help group, relying almost exclusively on volunteer help, demonstrates a high level of commitment on the part of all members. A.A.'s slogan "It Takes What It Takes" summarizes the intense involvement by many members in their own sobriety and their involvement with A.A. newcomers. Bill Wilson stated, "We stand ready to do anything...". Commitment could perhaps be identified as the prime influence on any A.A. member's participation with the program and the fellowship, supporting Mol's theory that commitment is a mechanism for allowing the adoption of a new identity. Along with ritual and objectification, commitment is necessary for an alcoholic wishing to replace his alienated existence with an integrating identity, the new self as a recovering alcoholic.

CHAPTER VII

MYTH

For the recovering alcoholic, entry into A.A. means stepping into a whole new world, taking on a totally different identity. Each A.A. affiliate is transformed, through the program and the fellowship, from an alienated, anomic alcoholic who lives by his own rules and norms, who hides behind alcohol whenever discomfort or problems arise, to an integrated member of society who stops drinking, gets along well with family and friends, and who seeks to help other alcoholics to stop drinking. These drastic changes are described by members of A.A. as '180 degree turns'; "where I was once heading on the road to self-destruction at a lickety-split pace, my life just took a complete 'about face' and I began moving in the totally opposite direction, thanks to A.A., toward caring about and helping others" (P., male, 3 years).

These great changes are made possible through the ritual of A.A. meetings with their soothing repetition, the objectification of the Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions with their system of meaning and their provision of a sense of place, and the reinforcement through commitment or

emotional anchorage which provide the dedication needed to stay long enough, listen openmindedly enough, and be willing enough to internalize A.A.'s beliefs and suggestions. In addition to these three mechanisms for identity formation, A.A. has a fourth means for facilitating the adaption of a new, sober identity. Consistent with Mol's theory that religion reinforces identity through four mechanisms, A.A. also has an ideological framework composed of history, myths, symbols, and beliefs or a set of dialectical dramatizations. Both A.A.'s history and its symbols and beliefs portray the dialectical dramatization of A.A.'s battle for the recovery of members, against alcoholism. A review of its history and a description of its contemporary symbols and beliefs display A.A.'s battle with "John Barleycorn", A.A.'s pseudonym for alcohol.

The History of A.A.

The newcomer to A.A. is presented with the total social package of A.A., its routines, its norms, its perceptions of reality and its prescriptions for living. Many of these have been outlined in the chapters describing ritual, objectification, and commitment. Most of A.A.'s beliefs are described in the chapter on objectification and yet a study of A.A. would be incomplete without reviewing its mythology, its stories about how A.A. was founded, the early experiences of A.A.'s co-founders, and the development

of A.A.'s systems of objectification. Since A.A. was founded in the mid 1930's, it has only existed for about fifty years and therefore time has not yet mellowed these historical accounts into a more mythical set of narratives.

The history of A.A. begins with the history of its co-founders, Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob Smith. In 1980, a Central West Ontario Convention of Alcoholics Anonymous put on a Conference with the title "We've Only Just Begun". On the cover of their brochure, along with pictures of the co-founders, they had a story from India which aptly portrays the relationship between A.A. and its co-founders (A.A. tends to borrow whatever serves its purpose from other disciplines and other cultures). The story was titled "A Kind of Immortality". It tells about a custom in India where the young Indian women, when they are married, are given saris of the finest silk, embroidered with gold. These saris are worn until they are worn out, at which time they are burned in bowls, leaving only the gold. The saris turn to ashes but the gold remains, ready to be woven into a new sari. The story concludes with the idea that although A.A.'s co-founders are dead, they had left "bits and pieces" of what they once possessed, as "the pure gold of two lives well lived".

An examination of the early lives of Wilson and Smith demonstrates the myriad influences from religion and medicine that went into the founding of A.A. Both of these men

started as habitual drinkers who were to experience the progression of their drinking habits to the point where alcohol interfered with their jobs, their family relationships and their friendships.

Wilson was a stockbroker who lived in New York. Many times he had sought to end his drinking habit. During his drinking years, the practice was to hospitalize sick drunks or to attempt to convert them to a more dedicated interest in religion. In his book on alcohol addiction, Burns claimed that before 1840 there "had been very few recoveries" from alcoholism (1975:8). It was at this time that the Washington movement came into being in the U.S. The Washington Movement was founded by a tailor, a silversmith, a coachmaker, two blacksmiths and a carpenter. They had signed pledges of total abstinence from alcohol and they met regularly and witnessed to others of their recovery. Within four years they had grown into an organization of four hundred thousand reformed "drunkards" and "tipplers" (Ibid.:9). The Washingtonian society broke up in 1848, torn apart by religious disagreements, political involvement with the temperance movement and the professionalization of members. Its beliefs and demise provided an example for A.A. one hundred years later when Bill Wilson claimed that the Washingtonians had failed because of four flaws: exhibitionism, competition, controversy on 'outside issues' and refusal to stick to their main purpose, helping other alcoholics

(Kurts, 1979:116-117). Although the elapse of time prevented direct influence from the Washingtonians on A.A., some of this society's beliefs and experiences were to be carried over to the latter organization.

Another forerunner of A.A. was the Oxford Group which was renamed "Moral Rearmament" in 1939 (Dr. Bob, p. 53). The Oxford Group had been founded by Frank Buchman of the First Century Christian Fellowship in 1921. This Group did have a direct influence on A.A.'s beliefs and practices. The Oxford Group was first introduced to Bill Wilson by Ebby Thatcher, an old drinking buddy, the year before A.A. was founded.

Wilson had a saying that "when the pupil is ready, the teacher arrives" and Ebby Thatcher was to direct him to his first teacher, Sam Shoemaker (A.A. Comes of Age, p. 58-59). Shoemaker ran a mission where Thatcher's Oxford Group friends met. Men were served a meal and then expected to stay for hymns, prayers, and the testimonials of ex-drunks. It was here that Thatcher had replaced his alcoholism with religion, and he tried to get Wilson to do the same. Wilson had been appalled to hear that Thatcher had "got religion". Wilson reported this response:

What a crusher that was--Ebby and religion!
Maybe his alcoholic insanity had become
religious insanity. It was an awful letdown.
I had been educated at a wonderful engineering
college where somehow I had gathered the
impression that man was God (Op. cit.:58).

Thatcher's news of his recovering from alcoholism did not initially attract or enthuse Wilson. Yet Thatcher had a patient way with Wilson, waiting until Wilson had 'hit bottom' and become ready to co-operate.

Wilson did later get involved with the Oxford Group, thereby meeting Sam Shoemaker. Shoemaker had a pleasant way with what he called "congenital skeptics" (Shoemaker, 1954:1). He encouraged religious skeptics to "Act As If -" in their first steps toward developing faith in a Higher Power. He felt that a man or woman could "get religion" by acting as if they had faith.

Until, indeed, there was an opening for God to come through. Faith is primarily a kind of expectant loyalty toward God, life and the universe, and only secondarily an intellectual conviction (Ibid.:2).

These beliefs of Shoemaker's made it possible for Wilson to approach and involve himself with the Oxford Group, they allowed Wilson to keep enough of an 'open mind' to give this group a try.

As well as meeting Shoemaker, Wilson was also introduced by Ebby Thatcher to the writings of William James, to Varieties of Religious Experience. Wilson found this book "rather difficult reading" but learned from it about spiritual experiences. James' pragmatic approach to religion, his scientific description of the "pain, suffering, calamity" of finding spirituality and his identification of "complete hopelessness and deflation at depth" as the requirements for

reading recipients, proved enlightening to Wilson (A.A. Comes of Age, p. 64). James' writing contributed to Wilson's further acceptance of the spirituality that was to become an integral part of the A.A. program.

During this time, when Wilson was first introduced to Sam Shoemaker through Ebby Thatcher and the Oxford Group, Wilson was to meet yet another one of his teachers. This was Dr. Silkworth of the Towns Hospital, New York, where Wilson had been admitted several times to "dry out". Silkworth came to be nicknamed "Silky" and "the little doctor who loved drunks" by A.A. members. He was described by Wilson as having "greater faith in our Society than we did at first" and as having made "indispensible contributions to the development of the A.A. program of recovery" (Ibid.: 162).

Thatcher, Shoemaker, and Silkworth are each described as having arrived when the "pupil was ready", when Wilson showed a willingness to listen to and consider what each proffered as solutions to his alcoholic drinking. Their arrival came to symbolize and reinforce A.A.'s belief in the concept of "readiness". This part of A.A.'s history could be considered the origins for this mythical conception.

There is yet another aspect of A.A.'s history that has come to symbolize one of A.A.'s basic tenets. The first meeting between Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob Smith has come to represent the "mythical two" of A.A., one alcoholic helping

another. Wilson and Smith met through their contact with the Oxford Group. At the time of their first meeting on June 10, 1935, Wilson had been involved with the Oxford people in New York City for five months and Smith had been an Oxford member in Akron, Ohio for two and one half years (Dr. Bob, p. 70). Wilson had gone to Akron on business, and one evening, when his business efforts seemed dismal, he developed a strong urge to drink. In the lobby of the hotel where he was staying, he found a church directory. With the noises from the bar in the background, he began to make phone calls to get in touch with another alcoholic. Wrestling with the notion of going into the bar to have a few drinks, he was seized with a desperate panic, and remembered that "in trying to help other people" he had been able to stay sober himself (A.A. Comes of Age, p. 65). Out of this battle between alcohol and the desire to stay sober, emerged the impetus to establish contact with another alcoholic and the persistence to make several phone calls. He reached Henrietta Seiberling, also an Oxford Group member, who knew Smith and agreed to organize the first meeting between Wilson and Smith.

A.A. literature describing this meeting between the two men who were to become its co-founders, usually implies that a kind of magic happens when two alcoholics get together. Wilson described Smith as talking about himself "as he had never talked about himself before" (Ibid.:68). Smith described Wilson as:

the first living human with whom I had ever talked who knew what he was talking about in regard to alcoholism from actual experience. In other words, he talked my language. He knew all the answers, and certainly not because he had picked them up in his reading (Dr. Bob, p. 68).

This first meeting between Wilson and Smith was to last for five hours, although Smith had originally planned to visit with Wilson at Seiberlings for a mere twenty minutes, out of politeness to Mrs. Seiberling who had previously made several attempts to help Smith overcome his addiction to alcohol.

A.A.'s mythical two was to become the essence of the A.A. fellowship. As Wilson writes later, "It was then discovered that when one alcoholic had planted in the mind of another the true nature of his malady, that person could never be the same again" (Twelve and Twelve, p. 23). The Oxford group had provided A.A. with directions for its program but it was to be the meeting of these two men which originated the A.A. fellowship. Through his meeting with Wilson, Smith was able to stay sober for a short period of time. He was to have one relapse, but near the beginning of June of 1935, he had his last beer, and June 10, 1935 was to become A.A.'s founding date (Dr. Bob, p. 75).

At their first meeting, Wilson and Smith had discussed helping each other stay sober and "helping other men with similar difficulties" (Ibid.:67). A.A. publishes a poster portraying "The Man on the Bed". This was to be Bill D., A.A.'s third member. A.A.'s mythical two are here portrayed

as 'carrying the message' to another 'sick and suffering alcoholic'. The poster symbolizes A.A.'s belief in the spiritual power "wherever two or more are gathered" (Kurtz, 1979:8). It also presents A.A.'s belief in service to others.

The meeting between Wilson and Smith marked the beginning of A.A.'s combining a spiritual program of recovery from alcoholism with a fellowship organized and directed toward service to others. A.A. believes that a mythical magic occurs when two alcoholics talk together. Medical and religious experts may have similar information to share with the alcoholic but only the sharing of experience by someone who had "walked the walk" and can therefore "talk the talk" is able to reach the consciousness of the practicing alcoholic. A.A.'s history and experience formed the basis for this myth.

Beliefs and Symbols

Another myth that originated in A.A.'s history concerns beliefs about the nature of alcoholism and the alcoholic. It was out of these beliefs that A.A.'s systems of objectification and concerns for service to other alcoholics developed. A review of A.A.'s beliefs concerning alcoholism provides the basic myth out of which A.A. grew.

Thanks to its teachers, Silkworth and Shoemaker, to name only two, A.A. describes alcoholism as a three-fold

illness; physical, mental or emotional, and spiritual. Silkworth described the alcoholic as physically allergic to alcohol and claimed that this physical allergy is expressed by and coupled with a craving for alcohol, or a mental obsession. He described alcoholics as having one symptom in common: "they cannot start drinking without developing the phenomenon of craving" (Alcoholics Anonymous, p. xxviii). He therefore recommended complete abstinence from alcohol consumption. Thus alcoholism was described as a disease and Burns claims that "hundreds of thousands of dollars have been spent in an effort to convince the people of America that alcohol addiction is a disease" (1975:94). Burns continues by describing this approach of alcoholism as a disease, as a "true and humane way of looking at the problem" (Ibid.:100). Setting aside the debate of whether or not alcoholism is a disease, recognition of the relationship between the physical consumption of alcohol and the resultant mental craving facilitated A.A.'s approach of total abstinence.

A.A. describes alcoholism as a disease that touches every class of society, avoiding the stereotype that only the skid-row bum could be an alcoholic (A.A. Comes of Age, p. 102). It focused on the obsession with drinking. It also identified personality and character traits as inherent in the alcoholic. Dr. Bob Smith identified selfishness and rebellion as traits that had exacerbated the alcoholism in his life. These mental traits were to prompt much of A.A.'s

program of recovery. Such words as "suggestions" and "as we understood Him" are examples of A.A.'s recognition of the need to circumvent rebellion, while service to others was to overcome the selfishness. And yet service to others was only part of the solution. With the perception of alcoholism as a physical, mental and spiritual disease, A.A. claimed that the antidote for this disease consisted of spiritual well being.

How was the alcoholic expected to acquire spiritual health? In A.A. Comes of Age, Wilson stated that relief from the obsession for alcohol was possible through integrating the first two of the Twelve Steps into all aspects of daily life (p. 45). In As Bill Sees It, he restates this assertion by claiming that putting oneself into God's hands will improve all aspects of life and decrease the need to 'hide in the bottle' (p. 2).

Following James' statement that spirituality can be achieved through a "profound personality change", A.A. combines the mental and the spiritual (As Bill Sees It, p. 1). Various mental attitudes were combined with spiritual precepts for sober living. Most of these ideas originated in beliefs held by Dr. Bob Smith and Bill Wilson and the Oxford Group.

Several of A.A.'s basic beliefs express A.A.'s interest in spiritual development as an antidote to alcoholism. Concern for the welfare of others, confession of past

wrongs, and living by the Four Absolutes, absolute honesty, absolute purity, absolute unselfishness, and absolute lover were each seen as means to acquire spiritual strength (Burns, 1975:61). A.A. sought to end what is described by Kurtz as the "pinch of alienation" by unifying the physical and mental with a healthy spiritual dimension. By convincing the alcoholic that he was not God, while assuring him that there was a Higher Power taking care of him, A.A.'s co-founders set out to convince others of the success they were experiencing in their battle against alcoholism and for recovery.

Wilson described their first attempt to help others by 'planting the seed' that recovery from alcoholism was possible through spiritual growth:

We immediately started to look around for prospects, and it wasn't long before one appeared, in the form of a man whom a great many of you know....Anyway, we did talk, and I'm glad to say the conversation fell on fertile ground (The last talks, p. 6).

Believing that alcoholics were rebellious, impetuous, self-willed individuals, A.A. promoted and practiced a variety of approaches and prescriptions. Anonymity was adopted as an all-pervading spiritual principle. Alcoholics helping others might be tempted to own or take responsibility for the recovery of others. Pride could then interfere with the ego-deflation necessary for recovery.

Their slogans of "One Day at a Time" and others were useful for learning to live without alcohol and were found to be equally practical when applied to other problems as

well (Thompson, 1976:248). Even the Twelve Steps are described by Smith as meaning 'love' and 'service' when they are "simmered down" (Dr. Bob, p. 77). These beliefs in service originated from the readings of the book of James from the Bible. James was the favorite book of A.A.'s first members, they had even considered calling themselves "The James Club". The statement in James that "faith without works is dead" was adopted by A.A.'s founders.

And repeating their tendency to borrow from others, A.A. also adopted the prayer of St. Francis to support their beliefs in service. This prayer reads:

Lord, make me a channel of the peace.
 That where there is hatred, I may bring
 love,
 That where there is wrong, I may bring
 the spirit of forgiveness,
 That where there is discord, I may bring
 harmony,
 That where there is error, I may bring
 truth,
 That where there is despair, I may bring
 hope,
 That where there are shadows, I may bring
 light,
 That where there is sadness, I may bring
 joy.
 Lord, grant that I may seek
 Rather to comfort than be comforted,
 To understand, than to be understood,
 To love, than to be loved.
 For it is by self-forgetting that one finds.
 It is by forgiving that one is forgiven.
 It is by dying that one awakens to eternal
 life. (Twelve and Twelve, p. 99)

The St. Francis prayer acknowledges God as the source of such spiritual qualities as love, forgiveness, harmony, truth, and hope. A.A. also believes that the source of spiritual

strength for anyone working the Twelve Steps comes from a Higher Power.

An examination of A.A.'s myths would be incomplete without mention of its symbols. A.A. has adopted an official symbol of a triangle inside a circle and favors another symbol, Durer's Praying Hands. The three sides of the triangle inside the circle represent "Unity, Service, and Recovery". Sometimes there are two A's placed inside the triangle. The circle represents wholeness, the wholeness of members and of the fellowship.

A.A.'s basic myth of one alcoholic helping another is symbolized by the Praying Hands. At face value, it might appear that this symbol stresses prayer, but in A.A. replicas of this sculpture represent the agreement between Durer and his friend. Both of these men had been interested in becoming artists however they lacked the financial resources. Therefore, they agreed to support each other through art school in Paris. Durer went to school first while his friend worked. Then when Durer had finished his studies, his friend's hands had become too gnarled to become artist's hands, he had to give up his ambition to become an artist. It is this spirit of self-sacrifice that influenced A.A. to adopt Durer's Praying Hands as a symbolic representation of its ideals.

Being an anonymous, or somewhat 'secret' society, A.A. uses its symbols to inform other members of affiliation.

Anyone wearing a necklace with the Praying Hands could very likely be an A.A. member. Some members also sport their A.A. medallions with the triangle inside the circle as necklaces or bracelets. Bumper stickers reading "Honk if you know Bill W."; "I believe in miracles, I am one"; and "I didn't quit, I surrendered" are another means to identify A.A. members. The "friend of Bill W. or Wilson" has traditionally been a way to find out if someone is a member, just by asking, "Are you a friend of Bill Wilson's?" or "Do you know Bill Wilson?".

A.A.'s beliefs and symbols consistently have one theme, that of service to other alcoholics as a means to achieving recovery from alcoholism. This theme originated in A.A.'s history and developed along with the A.A. program. The myth that the battle against alcoholism is fought and won through service rendered to others, and especially to other alcoholics, comprises the basis of every aspect of A.A. literature.

Commentary

In dialectical sociology of religion, myth is described as the fourth mechanism for reinforcing identity and wholeness. Malinowski, Levi-Strauss and d'Aquili have also explored the place of myth in religion. A review of Mol's description of myth supported by the work of these other writers offers a better understanding of the role of myth in

the development and continued growth of Alcoholics Anonymous.

In Identity and the Sacred, Mol grouped myth, theology, and religious symbolism together and stated that they "interpret reality" and provide "a surface shorthand for much more basic experiences of human individuals and groups" (1976:13). In The Firm and the Formless, he adds:

There is considerable overlap between the provision for order we discussed in chapter two (objectification) and the ordering of myths. Both hold arbitrariness and meaninglessness at bay. Both contribute to the integration of vital elements of existence (1982a:48).

Mol elaborates by describing myths as "recurrent narratives" and "intricate composition(s) and content(s) of the projected order" which "integrate the various strains of mundane experience in a symbolic account" (Ibid.). He describes the narrations as "simple tales" and adds that these tales form a "kaleidoscopic and infinitely variable dramatisation of the wholeness/breakdown or identity/change..." (Op. cit.:62). Malinowski's description of myths also identifies myths as "explainer", as a "special class of stories regarded as sacred embodied in ritual, morals, and social organization" and forming the "dogmatic backbone" of a religion,

Myth is not only looked upon as a commentary of additional information, but it is a warrant, a charter, and often even a practical guide to the activities with which it is connected (1954:108).

Myths, therefore, explain and interpret reality.

A.A.'s myths about Wilson helping others to stay sober, his

meeting with Smith after being tempted to go into the bar at the hotel, and the nature of the alcoholic and alcoholism are each stories around which the whole of the A.A. program and fellowship have been built. A.A.'s simple narrative of Wilson's persistence in phoning through the church directory in the hotel lobby has elements of dramatization.

Supporting Mol's notion of "dramatization of wholeness/breakdown or identity/change" is the story of Wilson's spiritual experience. Often repeated in A.A. talks and literature, the story describes Wilson as once again finding himself in the Towns Hospital to 'dry out' after having gone on 'a drunk'. He had fallen into a deep depression. Ebby Thatcher had visited him and had repeated "the Oxford Group formula which had released him from drinking" (Lois Remembers, p. 89), Wilson's wife, Lois described his experience. After Thatcher had left, Wilson had cried out, "If there be a God, let Him show Himself". Then:

The effect was electric. He later told how the room blazed with light, how he was filled with a joy beyond description. In his mind's eye he stood on a mountain tip, and a great wind, not of air but of spirit, blew through him. He was free (Ibid.).

This was Wilson's spiritual experience. He himself repeated similar details about this experience in Alcoholics Anonymous. It became the turning point in his life. His wholeness was metaphysically restored. It was after this experience that his great enthusiasm to help others surfaced.

In his description of myths, Mol specifies the place of myths in the dialectic between identity and change, through a "system of binary yet congruent oppositions, in which fundamental notions are hidden behind concrete symbols" (1982(b):22, 25). This dialectic is central to A.A.'s myths and is symbolized in the struggle against drinking; the good is sobriety, the bad is drunkenness. It is almost as if the practicing, drinking alcoholic takes on what Erikson describes as a "negative identity" in his description of Gandhi's deviant friend Mehtab (1969:135). The battle in A.A. is between drinking and not drinking, with alcohol providing the dividing line between good and evil. A Higher Power, service to others, are juxtaposed to self-indulgent, self-willed, excessive alcohol consumption. Following Mol's specification and A.A.'s conceptualizations, the sober alcoholic has an integrated identity, and the drinking alcoholic is an ever-changing, alienated being.

Levi-Strauss adds an interesting dimension to his description of myths. He claims that myths give man "the illusion that he can understand the universe and that he does understand the universe" (1978:17). [For Levi-Strauss, myths become an illusion of understanding. Identifying them as illusions does not, however, lessen their importance and Levi-Strauss likens myths to the contemporary use of history. Today it is history that contributes to man's understanding of the universe.]

Similarly, Durkheim claimed that an "understanding of the most recent religions", and A.A. has been called a recent religion, is only possible by "following the manner in which they have been progressively composed in history" (1915:15). A.A.'s myths demonstrate their close ties with A.A.'s history. Consistent with Durkheim's claim, A.A.'s history provides an understanding of how A.A. has developed.

Weber's description of charisma and charismatic leaders furthers the understanding of A.A.'s founding. Weber offered this description of charisma:

Charisma may be either of two types. Where this appellation is fully merited, charisma is a gift that inheres in an object or person simply by virtue of natural endowment. Such primary charisma cannot be acquired by any means. But charisma of the other type may be produced artificially in an object or person through some extraordinary means. Even then, it is assumed that charismatic powers can be developed only in people or objects in which the germ already existed but would have remained dormant unless evoked by some ascetic or other regimen (1922:2).

Both Wilson and Smith could be described as charismatic leaders, according to Weber's characteristics of charisma. Wilson could be considered to have been naturally endowed through the 'gift' of his spiritual experience for it was this experience, supported by the information from his teachers which had propelled him into his involvement with Smith. Both men had experienced "some ascetic or other regimen" to facilitate their development of charismatic powers. Their drinking problems had provided a tremendous

driving force, pushing them to seek solutions to their alcohol problem. Then their ascetic abstinence from alcohol had provided a continuing impetus after they had overcome the nearly insurmountable odds for dying alcoholic deaths.

Weber continues his historical outline of the founding of religion through the activity of the "prophet". Weber defines a prophet as "a purely individual bearer of charisma, who by virtue of his mission proclaims a religious doctrine or divine commandment" (1922:46). He states that:

No radical distinction will be drawn between a "renewer of religion" who preaches an older revelation, actual or supposititious, and a "founder of religion" who claims to bring completely new deliverances (Ibid.).

He also differentiated between two types of prophets, one who proclaims the will of a god, and one who through his example demonstrates this will to others (Op. cit.:55). Then Weber described the prophet's winning of permanent followers and the grouping into a congregation as the stage central to the establishment of any religion (Op. cit.:60).

Wilson and Smith could best be described as exemplary prophets. Their belief in the sharing of experience rather than knowledge attests to their being living examples of what sober living, according to spiritual principles, could achieve. And yet they were more than exemplary prophets for they not only lived according to the precepts of the Oxford Group, but they also led their small group of alcoholics away from that group to establish their own individual, spiritual

or religious entity.

A.A. repeatedly stressed that it was not a religion, it did not wish to set itself up in opposition to other religions. A.A. claims religion to be identical to religious organization and wished to be viewed as a spiritual program and fellowship living and practicing the spiritual principles of dependence on a Higher Power, love and tolerance for mankind, and morality. In spite of these claims concerning its distinct spiritual rather than religious nature, sociologists have tended to describe A.A. as a sect and a revivalist religion.

As with many religions, A.A. does teach the possibility of redemption, redemption from alcoholism, to its adherents. Weber stated that religion of redemption "has had its permanent locus among the less-favored social strata" (1953:274). He believed that "the lowest and the most economically unstable strata of the proletariat" has been most "readily susceptible to being influenced by" prophets and their messages (1922:101, 104). This has not been the case with A.A. however. Although newcomers were certainly 'down and out' when initially approached with the A.A. message, the myth of the positive possibilities of sobriety had more meaning for alcoholics with middle-class backgrounds. Studies of A.A. affiliates indicate that it is not the upper or lower class alcoholic who most successfully involves himself with A.A. The upper class alcoholic has a longer way

to go to "hit bottom". He usually dies from alcoholism before losing enough emotionally or financially to become willing to surrender to A.A. principles. The lower class alcoholic has too little to gain through sobriety (Trice, 1978:32). The myth of recovery can not stray too far from individual reality to have meaning. If it is too much of an illusion, it loses its power of conviction.

The importance of myths can easily be played down in cultures where facts are cherished. d'Aquili's research using the biogenetic-structuralist perspective proved useful in examining the importance of ritual to the A.A. program and offers a similar elucidation on the place of myth. d'Aquili introduces his research by commenting on the continued existence of cults believing in demon, power, and supernatural forces three centuries after the age of reason. He claims that man's neural structures, located in the central nervous system, the cortex, necessitate the generation of myths. He examines the specialized functions of parts of the brain, the interplay between cognitive elements and the environment, and the social phenomenon of myth making. By injecting sodium amytal on the dominant side of the brain and briefly interfering with its verbal and analytic functions (sodium amytal is a truth serum and would therefore encourage the perception of reality), he found that the chemical:

prevents the organization of precepts into

an analytical and verbal mode, results in a dramatic reaction involving a sense of guilt, nothingness, indignity, worries about the future, and a sense of loss of mastery over the environment (1981:29).

From these experiments, d'Aquili concludes that "human beings have no choice but to construct myths to explain their world", that "they must construct myths to orient themselves within that universe", "they are driven to understand the world and cannot do otherwise" (Op. cit.:30, 32). d'Aquili reiterates that myths have two functions, they present problems "of ultimate concern to society" and they solve these problems "by resolution or unification of the seemingly irreconcilable opposites" (Op. cit.:27). These opposites are personified in the A.A. myths by the self-centered, God-playing alcoholic who is to become the serving, anonymous member.

d'Aquili's claim that man has a need to create, share, and transmit myths is certainly expressed in A.A. Favored speakers are able to recreate and portray the insanity of their own alcoholic life and witness the great changes that have happened. They are also able to project their devotion to A.A., describing the fellowship as having a "divinely inspired program" (D., male, 34 years). They make reference in their talks to A.A.'s co-founders and their fortuitous meeting through the Oxford Group, they have a special ability to revitalize the A.A. myths. In his description of myths, Mol states that they are "emotion-laden assertions of man's

place in the world" (1976:13). The emotional aspects of the myths come through whenever they are repeated at A.A. meetings.

Man may not only need to create myths, but it would appear from A.A. meetings, that he also needs to have them repeated regularly. The emotional attributes are identified in A.A. by the phrase "language of the heart". When someone in A.A. is truly able to speak about A.A. myths and beliefs and effectively communicate them, he or she is said to be speaking with that special language.

Not only do A.A. members repeat the myths, they seem also to add 'mini-myths' or more locally-oriented versions of A.A. history. A.A. has its myth makers who are able to offer poetic, mythical renditions of incidents in local A.A. history. Stories of great sacrifice for the fellowship, of inordinate luck or coincidence in this or that endeavour to help another alcoholic "see the light" and become ready to adopt A.A. principles, and of great misfortunes incurred to those who lose the battle with alcohol. These stories are told by the myth makers who place little value on factual detail and who express more concern for telling a good story that will inform the fellowship of A.A. beliefs and traditions. One such story concerns the efforts of a small group of members to help J. "sober up". J. had reportedly been on a drinking spree for several months after having achieved several years of sobriety in the program. During one of

these drinking sessions she had finally indicated to a member that she wanted to stop drinking. M. described the response of several A.A. members:

Now I don't know if J. had called in a blackout or what, but anyway we decided we'd see what we could do to help J. get a couple of weeks of sobriety. We started to sit with her around the clock, holding meetings at her bedside. Two or three of us would sit there while she either slept or sat up, begging us to get her a drink. We'd talk her out of it, she'd go back to sleep, and then we'd continue our meeting (M., male, 23 years).

M.'s story continues with a description of how groups of people, mostly women, were scheduled around the clock to "baby sit" J. and keep her from getting out of her house to go for a drink. J. did stay sober for several years, probably feeling obligated to all the people who had taken the time to help her get her initial two weeks of sobriety (according to M.).

The story of J. is but one of the many local myths that A.A. story tellers repeat in any A.A. region. Members of A.A. repeat their personal stories of experiences until they take on a mythical quality. One typical personal myth is built around dreaming. A.A. affiliates relate stories of dreaming about drinking, of taking a drink by mistake, or of attending a party and getting drunk. They conclude these stories by relating their great relief to find they had only been dreaming.

Conclusion

Dialectic sociology of religion describes myths as the fourth mechanism for reinforcing identity. Myths are described as dialectical dramatization. An examination of A.A.'s history and beliefs does indeed demonstrate A.A.'s myths, their means to project and personify identity and their dialectical dramatization of the battle between the good and the evil, sobriety and drunkenness, and the recovering versus the practicing alcoholic.

A.A.'s most prominent myths of the "mythical two"-- Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob Smith, of "readiness" or 'hitting bottom' and of the nature of alcoholism, each originated in A.A.'s history. These myths interpret reality and portray the nature of human existence for the alcoholic. They present the conceptual framework within which A.A.'s systems of objectification were formulated, provide much of the content for the ritual of A.A. meetings, and tend to sharpen the A.A. affiliate's sense of commitment.

The symbols of the encircled triangle and the Praying Hands provide members with an even more precise statement of A.A.'s myths. These symbols provide a concise portrayal of A.A.'s beliefs in service to others, as a means to recovering from alcoholism. A.A.'s myths and symbols exemplify not only their importance for the alcoholic's adoption of a sober identity, but they also indicate how each of the four mechanisms for identity formation and reinforcement are interrelated.

Although they have each been examined separately, ritual, commitment, objectification and myth are interwoven and experience an intricate interplay within the A.A. program and fellowship.

CHAPTER VIII

CRITIQUE

In this chapter a critical approach is taken toward the analysis of the data, the basic theoretical paradigm of dialectical sociology of religion, and the problems inherent with a social scientific examination of religion. Having completed the task of presenting a description of Alcoholics Anonymous using the dialectical paradigm, we can now stand back, take an overview of the ideas and concepts presented, and re-examine the work from a broader perspective. Some interesting implication concerning the function of A.A. and the scientific analysis of man's spiritual nature can be recognized from this broader perspective. This chapter outlines the limits of the data, a critique of dialectical sociology of religion using sociology's three dominant traditions of structural-functionalism, symbolic-interaction, and conflict theory, and highlights the problems inherent with the scientific approach to religion.

Limits of the Data

For this thesis, only a positive approach has been taken to affiliation with Alcoholics Anonymous. The focus has been on those who come to A.A. and stay, on successful

A.A. affiliation. The ideal career from alienation to integration has been mapped out as it is expected (by the fellowship) to happen for anyone coming into the program. The problems that occur during this process have been acknowledged and incorporated into the career. Nevertheless, the critique could be made that the data are restricted to a small percentage of A.A. members, as supported by J.'s comments:

Now I know that only a small percent of those who come here to look us over, stay. I understand that only one out of every ten who enter the doors of A.A. die sober. A.A. is not for everybody, it's not for those who need it, but for those who want it (male, 15 years).

This thesis has not taken into account those who come to A.A., stay for a brief period, quit drinking and stay abstinent on their own, or go back to drinking. For these people, A.A. may prove to be an influence which furthers their sense of alienation, making them feel that even with other people who have problems with alcohol, they still do not feel they belong.

This thesis has also not taken a critical stance toward the social issues of alienation and alcoholism. Whether or not, and how modern technological society is exacerbating alienation and alcoholism have been considered as questions beyond the scope of the piece of research.

Those who stop drinking, and "recover from alcoholism" either on their own or with the help of other agents have been

excluded as well.¹ This is not to say that the basic conceptualization of alcoholism as a state of alienation would not apply to these individuals but rather to recognize that A.A. is not the only means through which integration, as the antidote to alcoholism, can be introduced into the life of an alcoholic.

Furthermore, a critique of A.A. has also been excluded from this work. A.A. has been critiqued by others as being overly self-centered and as showing more interest in its own organizational well-being than the welfare of alcoholics in general.² It could be said that A.A. "works" simply because A.A. members form a strong social unit, discrediting the religious elements of the program. This would imply that if they wished, A.A. members could use their program and their fellowship to help their members become "social drinkers" who are able to control their drinking habits. A critique of A.A. at a variety of levels could provide some interesting ideas.

A critique of A.A. also indicates that, in addition to perceiving this social unit as a religion, sect, or cult, it could also be examined from several other perspectives. A.A. could be considered as a continuation of the socialization process. Alienation, within this model, would be conceptualized as incomplete socialization.³ Not only would the alcoholic be considered alienated, but he would also be described as immature.

Supporting the notion that A.A. "works" because it provides an effective socialization process for those who become successfully affiliated, is another theory that A.A.'s effectiveness rests on yet another social element; its provision of a strong sense of community. For those sociologists, such as Nisbet, who perceive society as impersonal and anonymous, with "non-communal relations of competition or conflict, utility or contractual assent", A.A. would be perceived as providing "close and personal ties" (1967:48).⁴ Through its fellowship, A.A. does indeed attempt to welcome newcomers into its community. Twelfth Stepping, attendance at meetings, sponsorship, and the encouragement for involvement are each geared toward the acceptance of a sense of community on the part of all A.A. members.

This stress on the social aspects of the A.A. program and fellowship is in agreement with Simmel's approach to any social phenomenon; his suggestion to examine form and content, to identify the drives, interests, and purposes that prompt action or sociation (1950:40). That puzzling occurrence, when newcomers to A.A. have an instant sense of feeling "at home, at last" would be explained by Simmel in purely social terms when he examines "human crowds" and attributes them to being "characterized by casual stimuli" which make for "enormous effects":

These phenomenon must probably be traced to mutual influences through effusions of

feeling that are hard to ascertain. Yet, because they occur between each and all others, they come to cause, in every member of the mass, an excitation that cannot possibly be explained either in terms of him or of the matter at issue (Ibid.:35).

For Simmel, this feeling can be explained purely in social terms, as happening between the individual and the group.

While an elaboration of these preceptions of A.A. as socialization or resocialization, and as community can contribute to the understanding of A.A.'s effectiveness, they do not provide a comprehensive approach. They focus on one area of the A.A. program and fellowship and neglect other important facets. Certainly A.A. does resocialize members, however, one of the chief concerns for this process is to have members establish a relationship with a "Higher Power" which may initially be "GOD"--"Good Orderly Direction" and "Group Of Drunks", and very social. But, this "higher Power" is ultimately expected to take on a transcendent nature. And the community that is established within the fellowship is expected to have a social as well as a spiritual basis. Any theorizing about A.A. would need to incorporate the social and the religious aspects of this organization into one, comprehensive paradigm.

Dialectical Sociology of Religion

The dialectical paradigm proves to be just such a comprehensive paradigm, it provides a theory that considers reality from a wide continuum. The larger reality in which

religion takes place and the more narrow reality of aspects of religious phenomena can be perceived in a way that has been particularly useful in this thesis. It has also provided a methodology for organizing the data accumulated during the qualitative analysis of the phenomenon, Alcoholics Anonymous. The dialectical paradigm begins by postulating the anomie that prevails in the life of a practicing alcoholic.⁵ It is through this paradigm that the conceptualization of alcoholism as a state of alienation has been made possible. Then too, when the career model is applied to the life of the alcoholic, Glaser and Strauss, Hughes and Hall, or Becker do not consider a radical 'about face' or a '180 degree turn' in their models of passages and careers. This type of personal and social change is left unacknowledged and unexplained. The dialectical sociology of religion framework is able to explain the dialectic between alienation and integration and the role of religion or systems of belief, as A.A. might be called, in facilitating a change from one to the other.

The interrelatedness of each of the four mechanisms has been demonstrated in the chapters on ritual, objectification, commitment, and myth. All of the mechanisms are important to each other, one without the others brings about decreased effectiveness. Ritual without commitment, objectification without the reassuring influence of myths would bring about a decreased influence on the desired

changes in the alcoholic's identity. It is through their integration that these mechanisms support integration.

The basic concepts presented in dialectical sociology of religion have also been shown to be supported by the work of others. In the commentaries on each of the mechanisms it is clear that the works of such people as Durkheim, Weber, d'Aquili and Turner, to name only a few, each complement Mol's work. The dialectical paradigm fits larger theoretical pieces together and presents no conflict with the observation of other sociologists. In fact, most scientific studies of religion support Mol's theory.

Donavan's Interpreting Religious Experience provides just one of a host of examples which agrees with Mol's observations. Just as Mol claims that religion is an integrating force, Donavan claims:

It is the enormous integrating power religious interpretations have, then, that keeps religion alive even when natural explanations are also available....So long as people continue to look for that kind of total, all-embracing explanation for their experience, they will consider that religion has more to offer them than science, for it is by far the more comprehensive of the two (.979:115).

When dialectical sociology of religion is examined in light of sociology's three dominant traditions, several additional favorable features of this theory are accented. Dialectical sociology of religion surpasses a structural-functional approach to religion by augmenting the structure and the function of religion with a content analysis.

The structure of ritual would be incomplete without the symbolic content of the systems of objectification and the myths of history and beliefs. Through this inclusion of content, the dialectical model becomes a blend of structural-functionalism and symbolic-interaction. Symbol systems, their sharing through ritual, and their internalization through commitment take a position, within this paradigm, of equal importance to structure.

In Aspects of Scientific Explanation, Carl Hempel explores the logic of functional analysis. He identifies the inability to predict and the use of such key terms as 'need' as flaws in functional analysis (1965). Dialectical sociology of religion identifies the need for identity as a basic aspect of human nature. This 'need' is posited in the larger context of anomie and alienation and is qualified in terms of integration and wholeness, so that it is able to make predictions and does not maintain a key position, contrary to Hempel's critique. Since the dialectical model combines the structure with the symbols, it is able to overcome basic criticisms of structural-functionalist theory.

With respect to conflict theory, dialectical sociology of religion does not identify conflict in a one-sided way, as attributable to only one segment of society. Mol's theory carries the conflict theme several steps further by acknowledging conflict at several levels within society, he claims that there are "constant boundary conflicts between

personal, group and social identities in all societies, because there is an inherent tendency in each to maximize allegiance" (1976:144). Another way in which Mol carries the conflict theme a step further is through his postulation that society is in a constant state of flux, oscillating from change to sameness, from conflict to cohesion, from alienation to integration.

Although dialectical sociology of religion, with its blend of structural-functionalism, symbolic-interaction, and conflict theory, was useful for this study of alcoholism, is supported by the work of other sociologists, and compares favorably with sociology's three dominant traditions, it does present two problems. The first problem concerns the alcoholic's sense of self before he takes on the A.A. identity. Defining identity as positive and wholemaking does not account for the fact that the alcoholic must have had some sense of self before coming to A.A. Was this a "negative identity", as Erikson calls it? There appears to be little room within the dialectical paradigm to account for a negative sense of self, a sense of self which is considered by Haas and Shaffir as yet another identity.

The second problem concerns the use of prayer. With dialectical sociology of religion prayer is placed with the realm of ritual. However, it could be proposed that prayer is a possible fifth mechanism. Prayer is more than ritual, in that it is a conversation to be carried on and a

relationship to be established with some entity that humans are not directly able to perceive.

Within A.A., prayer is considered as very powerful. Members are expected to repeat prayers not only at meetings and not only as part of their personal daily ritual, but also in all times of trouble, temptation to drink, or great joy. Prayer becomes a nonrational approach to any of life's situations and leads to an examination of the issue of the rational versus the nonrational, of science and religion.

Science and Religion

In 1969 Sir Alister Hardy set up a Religious Experience Research Unit at Oxford University. Hay, who worked with Hardy, claimed that they wanted to "use modern social survey techniques to explore the nature and frequency of reports of religious experience in Great Britain" (1982:11).

Hardy describes prayer with this statement:

Instead of supposing that one great personal-like Deity is thinking out simultaneously the detailed answers to the millions of different problems of all the individuals of the world, is it not more reasonable to suppose that some action is set in motion by prayer which draws the particular solution for each one of us from our own winds? In saying this I must again make clear that I am not implying that I believe this destroys our conception of the Divine (1979:236).

Hardy's theory on prayer demonstrates the difficulty scientists experience with religion. In attempting to get close to an accurate explanation of the phenomenon, they must

constantly restrain themselves from explaining "it away", from carrying the explanation so far into the rational that it loses all spiritual or religious qualities.

A brief review of sociology's problems with religion as expressed in the writings of sociology's founding fathers demonstrates that religion has traditionally presented problems for social scientists. Hay describes Durkheim as claiming that man was a religious animal for who "in the beginning all is religious" (1982:15). Yet Durkheim himself describes man as wholly social. Simmel, on the other hand, has separate categories for the social and the religious:

This is the fact that, even in its autonomy, religious life contains elements that are not specifically religious, but social. Certainly, these elements--particular kinds of reciprocal attitude and behaviour--are fused organically with the religious mood itself. But only when they are isolated by means of the sociological method, will they show what within the whole complex of religious behaviour may legitimately be considered purely religious, that is, independent of anything social (1950:15).

For Simmel, then, there were elements of society that were purely religious.

The problem of combining science with religion lead to what Weber described as the shifting of religion "into the realm of the irrational" (1953:281). Yinger described science's response to religion: "When anthropology and sociology developed in the nineteenth century, religion naturally came into their view as one of the most significant

aspects of society and culture" (1970:11). However, with time and the shift into the irrational realm, religion has acquired a precarious position within the social science disciplines.

William James, a psychologist, extensively researched man's spiritual nature and concluded, with his pragmatic approach, as a scientist, that in human consciousness there was a sense of reality, "a feeling of objective presence..." and concluded that this feeling "unequivocally testifies that we can experience union with something larger than ourselves..." and that that union allows for the finding of "our greatest peace" (1961:73,407). James claimed what is repeated by Hardy, that "the spiritual nature of man is being shown to be a reality" (1979:142).

This same call for scientists to recognize man's spiritual nature is repeated by Richard Quinney. He accuses social scientists of systematically excluding "the metaphysical from interpretation and understanding" (1982:13). He suggests that the recognition of a metaphysical reality be reintroduced into social scientist's definition of social existence. The inclusion of the metaphysical would certainly be necessary for a meaningful analysis of prayer as a fifth mechanism for reinforcing identity.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the limits of the data used to support the thesis. It has presented a brief critique of the dialectical sociology of religion model. It has also attempted to make the point that contemporary social scientists need to reincorporate man as a spiritual as well as rational being into their conceptualization of human reality. This radical position would allow for the analysis of such nonrational elements in the career of an alcoholic recovering in A.A. as the spiritual experiences and, more especially, as the use of prayer. This awareness would allow, as Yinger claimed, the growth of knowledge so that conceptualizations of religion could be changed without having religion destroyed (1970:183).

FOOTNOTES

1. In Alternatives to Alcohol Abuse, Miller lists relaxation, assertion, social and marital, self-control, and occupational skills training programs as solutions for alcoholism.

2. See Chafetz (1962), p. 165:

...A.A. is really not interested in alcoholics in general, but only as they relate to A.A. itself. By action and by rules, A.A. expresses more interest in strengthening and perpetuating Alcoholics Anonymous than in helping alcoholics.

3. This notion of A.A. as a socialization process is described by Chafetz:

...A.A. may be a resocialization process weaning the individual back into society. As Bacon interprets A.A., it permits its members to go through a maturing process (1962:159).

4. Nisbet offers this definition of "community":

By community I mean something that goes far beyond mere local community. The word... encompasses all forms of relationship which are characterized by a high degree of personal intimacy, emotional depth, moral commitment, social cohesion, and continuity in time (1967:47).

5. Mol makes this statement on anomie in Faith and Fragility:

And so anomie prevails. Not anomie in the sense of narrow normlessness (the actual meaning of the term). After all the major subsystems of Canadian society continue to operate in the familiar grooves. But anomie in the sense of the absence of a meaning-system which straddles the differentiations and which command a reasonable unanimous allegiance... (p. 179).

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, the dual tasks of describing Alcoholics Anonymous and of using dialectical sociology of religion to account for A.A.'s effectiveness have been accomplished by piling the building blocks of each chapter one on top of the other. The first chapter outlined the methods used to collect the data, the plan for support of the conceptualization of alcoholism as a state of alienation, and the use of dialectical sociology of religion to account for A.A.'s effectiveness in transforming alienation into integration.

The second chapter described the dialectical sociology of religion paradigm, tracing its statements on religion and change as this theme surfaced in the antecedents to 'identity theory', were stated in the theory, and were applied as 'identity theory' evolved into the dialectical framework. The third chapter traced the career of an alcoholic from childhood to recovery in A.A., supporting the conceptualization of alcoholism as a state of alienation. Chapters Four, Five, Six, and Seven presented ethnographic details of the four mechanisms for reinforcing identity. And Chapter Eight offered a critique of the data, the theory, and science's approach to religion.

This research supports Homans' work on small groups. In the late forties, he explored groups and their effects on the individual; he concluded that small groups would be the key to solving the problems of "advancing civilization" (1950:468). In her Ph.D. dissertation on A.A., Taylor reiterates the place of A.A. and self-help groups:

Self-help groups, of which A.A. is an early example, are proliferating.... From the "social problem" areas of alcoholism and drug addiction, the use of the self-help group process has spread into such diverse "personal problem" areas as smoking, overeating, gambling. Child abuse and divorce, and more recently into the problem areas of such chronic illness as cancer (1977:178).

This thesis has limited its understanding to A.A. by examining it from a more secular perspective. Describing A.A. from its spiritual perspective allows for a deeper understanding of A.A.'s effectiveness.

Alienation, in A.A., is transformed into integration through the mechanisms of ritual, objectification, commitment, myth, and prayer. This transformation is made possible through the acceptance of man as not only a physical and mental or rational being, but also as an emotional and spiritual being. The anticipated significance of this research is the establishment of the dialectical theory of religion as a comprehensive theoretical construct for describing and explaining A.A. and its mode of treating alcoholics. Mol's dialectical sociology of religion makes

an excellent starting point for the analysis of A.A. It provides a sound theoretical framework within which A.A.'s success can be explained. This dialectical paradigm also allows for the incorporation of psychological, organization and to some extent, the spiritual aspects of the A.A. program.

APPENDIX II

Glossary of A.A. Argot

- blackout - a period of time in which activity is carried on as usual by the alcoholic but not remembered later.
- bleeding deacon - a member of A.A. who thinks A.A. cannot get along without his or her guidance.
- carrying the message - telling others about the benefits of sobriety and A.A.
- circuit rider - someone who goes to meetings often and regularly.
- dry - an adjective used to describe someone who is not drinking and not living the A.A. program but practicing their character defects.
- dry drunk - acting the way one did while drinking when no alcohol has been consumed. Behavior examples: aggression, depression, manic, emotional highs or lows, emotional problems.
- ego deflation at depth - the end result anticipated from living the A.A. program.
- elder statesman - a wise member who offers guidance while maintaining a quiet side-lines position.
- high bottom drunk - someone who becomes ready to join A.A. before too many problems have been brought on by alcohol.
- hitting bottom - reaching a point of becoming ready to stop drinking and accept help.
- John Barleycorn - like "booze", another name for alcohol.
- low bottom drunk - someone who hits bottom after experiencing severe physical, mental, financial, or social problems.

old timer - anyone with a length of sobriety greater than five years.

pigeon - sponsor's term for a sponsee.

put the plug in the jug - to quit drinking.

the seventh tradition - the collection of money to pay the expenses of running the meeting.

two stepping - practicing only the first and twelfth steps and none of the steps in between.

sponsor - a person chosen for support and guidance with the program of A.A.

sober up and tighten up - a phrase that reflects a phenomenon common in A.A., where the alcoholic quits drinking and then becomes very frugal.

stinking thinking - negative, destructive thinking which is contrary to the A.A. program and may include thoughts of it being O.K. to have a drink.

telephonitis - making many and lengthy phone calls while drunk.

thirteenth stepping - the practice of including sex with twelve step work and with other members of A.A. under the pretense of promoting sobriety.

trusting servants - anyone taking on any position of authority in A.A. is given these labels as a reminder to not let the ego become inflated by the power or prestige.

work the steps - practicing the principles of A.A.

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