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ADN 7980

Alcoholics

Anonymous

an interview with

Edward Dowling, S.J.

by

Frank A. Riley

THE QUEEN'S WORK

3115 South Grand Boulevard

ST. LOUIS 18, MO.

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*Dedicated in Gratitude
to the
Women and Men of A. A.*



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SUMMARY

Far from anonymous, justly famed ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS is here résuméd and high-lighted in an interview with Father Dowling, early friend and consistent admirer of what is perhaps the most unique group to come out of our age: men and women—so familiar to the American scene that they are almost a tradition, having in common a "destructive thirst"—banded together to raise one another from "sodden uselessness to human dignity"...with the help of "a loving God."

Nihil obstat:

William M. Drumm

Censor Librorum

Imprimatur:

✠ Joseph E. Ritter

Archiepiscopus Sancti Ludovici

Sancti Ludovici, die 25 Junii 1947

Sixth printing, January 1950

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THE QUEEN'S WORK

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Alcoholics Anonymous

an interview with

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AT LEAST once a week most Alcoholics Anonymous groups have meetings which they call "open house." Evenings are spent at a member's home or at a club room, where plenty of steaming coffee, appetizing food, and unabashed spiritual conversation constitute the fare. (I know of very few places incidentally where one can count on getting the latter outside of A.A.)

One of the most touching and revealing incidents I have encountered took place recently at such an "open house," to which I was invited. Joe ————— had been in A.A. about six weeks. He was close to fifty in years, had seen a lot of life, and could have been called "old roughsides." Downtown his business associates knew him as prosperous and influential, heavy drinking—few of them knew just how heavy—and hard.

At this particular meeting Joe called his sponsor aside, out to the kitchen. He was plainly flushed and excited. The sponsor (the person who introduced Joe to A.A. and guided him through its first steps) must have thought that he was going to

tell him that "his slip was showing"—A.A. parlance for backsliding or slipping into drink again.

But Joe just wanted to unburden himself of something that he couldn't tell even his wife or his doctor. "Gene," he said, grasping him by the arm, "my daughter kissed me tonight."

Human Engineering

You see, before he found A.A., he had lost all standing and respect in his family. His wife had grown afraid of him and his children learned even to hate him for his drunken stupors. Now that he was on the road back, this enormous achievement so simply recorded, his daughter's gesture of affection, could be fully appreciated only by another ex-lush like himself.

To me this incident is typical of A.A.'s achievement. Their human engineering rivals the building of skyscraper, dam, or canal. But unfortunately its greatness is not so easily recognized or appreciated.

Contrary to common belief, Alcoholics Anonymous as a group are not at all averse to publicity. In fact they need and encourage occasional public mention to assist them in their work to help other alcoholics. Nowadays anyone who has heard of the organization at all has no problem about getting in touch with them. In a city of any size it is as easy to locate this group as looking in the telephone book under "Alcoholics Anonymous."

Slow Starter

When I first met the cofounders of A.A., in 1939, they had scarcely one hundred members, scattered throughout a few cities. It was then in existence only four years. But the initial slow growth was due apparently only to a lack of a way by which to disseminate the idea. When they had succeeded in getting the book "Alcoholics Anonymous" published, in that same year, the spread of the group became phenomenal.

It is obvious that any organization which succeeds in changing radically the lives of about 75,000 people is going to have trouble finding a bushel large enough under which to hide its light. Just fourteen years after its foundation there were more than 2,500 chapters scattered throughout every part of the United States, in outposts in Canada, in Latin America, and abroad. The group is picking up members at the rate of 1,000 a month.

A.A.'s influence on the families and friends of alcoholics and on other nonalcoholics has been incalculable. Great numbers of people have been made conscious of the problem of alcoholism and its role in modern life through the attention that newspapers, movies, and the radio have recently focused upon it.

A large measure of credit for this increased awareness belongs, I believe, to A.A. In its February 24, 1947, issue *Time* magazine substantiates this claim: "In the last months, A.A.'s stock among doctors

and an estimated 750,000 alcoholics has climbed fast. . . . Before A.A., all but 5% of alcoholics were considered hopeless. Of A.A.'s members, some 50% never touch a drop after they join; 25% get on the wagon after one or two slips."

Although public acceptance of A.A. is now quite general and includes clergymen, doctors, and police agencies, the individual alcoholic's acceptance of the program is always fairly difficult—and his or her family find it even harder to believe in this "new cure."

No Money Problems

Not long ago I talked to a woman whose alcoholic brother has for years been the despair of the family. Right now he is finishing up his eleventh trip to a sanitarium after his most recent binge. His sister can hardly believe in a thing like A.A. after all the disheartening false hopes of those many years.

One of the first questions about A.A. is: "How much is this cure going to cost?" People are often on the incredulous side when they learn that A.A. is one of the few organizations in the world that are relatively free of money problems. Again quoting *Time*: "The organization has . . . no dues, no big funds (its small Manhattan headquarters last year spent only \$35,000, donated by members)."

Usually too the family of an alcoholic believes that their particular "problem

child" is unique—an especially bad actor. The family cannot grasp the fact that there is nothing about alcohol and its problems that their problem can add to the experience of a group of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Will, Not Wish or Want

Whether or not it takes a thief to catch a thief, it is certainly true that no one can understand and handle an alcoholic the way another alcoholic can. A.A.s know every trick of the imbiber's trade—and they know their own limitations. They are very willing however to do anything they can for their brother alcoholics because they have found that helping other chronic drinkers is one of the principal aids toward keeping themselves dried up. They ask only one thing of the prospective member: He must say that he *wills* to be helped, not merely that he wishes or wants assistance. They recognize the fact that one cannot be helped against his own will.

Yet A.A.'s drawing force lies in this: that the alcoholic has tried everything else. The clients of the A.A.s are always at or nearly at the end of their rope. They themselves express this by saying that they have "either seen or felt bottom"—and I suppose that only an alcoholic can fully realize just what that means. Whatever may be the general truth of Thoreau's contention that men live lives of quiet desperation, I do know that those words are true of the alcoholic, and of his family, who are

constantly in a noisome and critical kind of desperation over the final issue, which is life itself—life or death.

The chief contribution that a clergyman or a doctor faced with an alcoholic victim can make is to direct the liquor addict to the Alcoholics Anonymous movement. I don't believe that I have personally very much interest in the problem of excessive drinking as such. Why certain people succumb to the powers of the bottle and others do not is a kind of scientific conundrum. Men are able to split the atom . . . but they can't solve this riddle. I have however always been fascinated by A.A. results, as I think anyone else is who has studied them.

Hackneyed Problems—Unique Answer

Probably one out of every ten people that a clergyman meets either has had, has now, or will have in his own family this problem of alcoholism. Doctors and social workers are continually confronted with the same riddle, and I suppose many a lawyer is too. The real alcoholic seems rarely to be able to help himself, nor can medical treatment effect a lasting cure. What made me vitally interested in alcoholics was Alcoholics Anonymous. I was startled by the fact that they *have* an answer that no one else has been able to supply. (Incidentally they have also been helpful in solving any number of other important nonalcoholic problems, racial prejudice being one of them.)

The "True" Alcoholic

In any discussion of chronic drunkenness the most thorny question arising is that of determining just what does characterize, how one distinguishes the "true alcoholic." A.A. members tell me that where drinking has created problems in one's personal, domestic, moral, or financial life or at that point where one cannot stop drinking when one wants to, there you have real danger signals — though they are not infallible signals.

In the experience of A.A.s there are two kinds of drinkers—the "sissy" drinker and the real alcoholic. For the "sissy" drinker alcohol tends to satisfy a thirst-craving. For the alcoholic alcohol increases and stimulates the craving. In the case of a "sissy" drinker alcohol acts like water on fire. In the case of a true alcoholic it is like gasoline added to fire. For the alcoholic the thought of one drink is too much... and the guzzling of fifty isn't enough. Awakening after a night's binge, the "sissy" drinker doesn't even want to see a liquor ad. The alcoholic awakening after a binge often enough craves a drink to settle his nerves.

The point should be made clear however that the A.A. program deals only with the approximately three out of a hundred drinkers who become chronic, uncontrollable alcoholics. About ninety-seven out of every hundred people who ever take a drink will never contract chronic alcoholism—at least that is what the alcoholic researchers

tell us. Yet endless confusion and misunderstanding are brought about because people indiscriminately lump the ninety-seven per cent with the three per cent and try to explain them all in the same terms.

Rule of Thumb

And those "terms" are never very satisfying as an explanation to the person who wants to know whether *he* is an alcoholic or a particular person that he knows is an alcoholic. Is there a sharp line of difference between the casual drinker and the problem drinker?

The A.A.s have an answer to that question. Usually the real alcoholic when he starts losing control of his drinking habits is not aware that he is losing control. In other words an individual is not a capable judge of the degree of his own addiction, any more than a lunatic is capable of diagnosing his own insanity.

The most workable test that I know—and probably the best rule of thumb—for the alcoholic is formulated in the first step of the A.A. program. If the excessive drinker can admit that "he is powerless over alcohol, that his life has become unmanageable," then it seems certain that he is a problem drinker, that he is a chronic alcoholic, and that he positively needs A.A.

The Twelve Steps

It is impossible to say much about A.A. without talking about its backbone, the

twelve-steps program that all A.A.s embrace.

- “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 understand 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 understand Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
- “12. Having had a spiritual experience [awakening] as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to other alcoholics and to practice these principles in all our affairs.”

“Alcoholics Anonymous”

With the exception of that word “experience” in the twelfth step, which has been changed to the word “awakening” in later versions, these steps as they have been quoted here have been A.A.’s source of direction and unity. By all odds the best exposition of them is found in their book, “Alcoholics Anonymous,” which you can obtain (for \$3.50) by writing to P. O. Box 459, Grand Central Annex, New York 17, New York. That is the address of the central office of A.A., which acts as a clearinghouse and service bureau for all the A.A. groups around the country. The A.A.’s national monthly, *The Grapevine* (published from P. O. Box 329, Grand Central Annex, New York 17, New York, \$2.50 a year) contains a wealth of fine material.

Those twelve steps are the real spiritual powerhouse of A.A. I remember the astonishment of one Jesuit, whom I believe to

be wise in the ways of the spirit, when he first read A.A.'s twelve steps. He was astounded at the great similarity between those steps and the Foundation and First Week of "The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius," which contains the basic and ridding-oneself-of-sin part of Jesuit spirituality.

Spiritual Exercises

Both the twelve steps and the Foundation of the Spiritual Exercises aim at a man's recognition of his dependence on God. Both the twelve steps and the First Week seek in and for man the springboards of fear (always the beginning of wisdom) and shame (the next best thing to innocence) through his consideration of his sins, the results of those sins, and the removal of them by confession.

Any instructed Christian who studies the twelve steps will find that what it expressed and what is implicit in them are very familiar to him. He will feel at home as he reads those steps, as if he had been in this place before. For the twelve steps are really a series of spiritual exercises.

The first step is an exercise in humility, a recognition of the real desperateness of the situation, and a declaration of dependence.

The second step shows you the alcoholic explicitly declaring this dependence on God.

The third step involves a surrender of man's most precious faculty, his will, to the will of God.

Individual Approach

One of the founders of A.A. told me that the question of how a member would work out the dependence on God demanded of him in these first three steps—whether in a church or outside one, whether in this church or in that one—was not the concern of the Alcoholics Anonymous movement.

Continuing down the line . . .

The fourth step could be called an examination of conscience.

The fifth step is nonsacramental confession.

The sixth step has been called by an astute alcoholic friend of mine the step that divides the boys from the men in A.A. At first reading it is unimpressive. But between the "almost willing" that it might have said and the "entirely ready" that it does say, I personally see Christ's "take up" (not just accept) "your cross daily."

Contrition has been called the other side of the coin of love . . . and this sixth step is impossible without a love of God based on a humble sense of reparation, thanksgiving, and adoration.

The seventh step really asks for the cross, because the first shortcoming to be removed is the satisfaction of the alcoholic's craving—a crucifixion that a non-

alcoholic cannot fully understand. As the months go by, this removal of shortcomings is effected by God's sandpapering the little crosses that crowd each hour.

The eighth and the ninth steps would in moral theology be called restitution, something that every child learns about in his catechism.

The tenth step should be called a daily examination of conscience.

The eleventh step would come closest in the spiritual tradition to the practice of the presence of God.

In the twelfth step the alcoholic becomes an apostle, a missionary: He saves himself by saving others. The A.A.s insist that the most important part of this indispensable twelfth step is that by which he says he must "practice these principles in *all*... [his] affairs." That is the point at which the A.A. program becomes a way of life.

Self-Preservation

There are in the success story of A.A. a number of very important factors that one might overlook by a mere cursory examination of these twelve steps. Of these factors I would be inclined to rate as highly important what might be called A.A.'s group or community spirit.

Strangely enough the experience of the A.A. has convinced them that the only thing that *starts* this process of rehabilitation is, not a noble sentiment of unselfishness, but the old fundamental instinct of

FACTUAL GAIN and LOSS CHART ON UNCONTROLLED DRINKING

ASSETS	Liabilities
<p>New Feeling of Maturity.</p>	<p>Silly and Foolish.</p>
<p>Disappearance of Self-Consciousness. Pleasure of Disregarding Conventions.</p>	<p>Pseudo Maturity. Pulling Boners. PENALTY OF INDISCRETIONS.</p>
<p>Magnified Feelings of Friendships for "Pals." False Feeling of Superiority and Grandeur Mental Elations—Good Parties.</p>	<p>Indifference to Feelings of Others. Temporary Depression. Inferiority Reactions. Hang-overs. UNFAVORABLE PUBLICITY.</p>
<p>Temporary Elimination of Business and Family Worries. Source of Companions of No Import Self Esteem in "Going on the Wagon." Wishful Thinking!</p>	<p>Loss of Real Friends. Disruption of Family Affections. Divorce? "Boss" Hatred—Auto Accidents. Serious Trouble; Loss of Self-Respect. Debts—Disregard of Honesty Fear of Society, other than Drunks. INCREASING RESENTMENTS.</p>

Loss of Memory—Gradual or Serious.
 Business Losses (Time Out?) (Fired?)
 Worry, Relative to Reputation and Dependency,
 and Size of Liquor Bills. Disintegration of Central
 Nervous System. Fear of Wasted Life
DISSIPATED APPEARANCE.

Jails—Hospitals—Continuous Borrowing or Pan-
 handling—Mooching—Fear of Insanity. Fear of
 being Sober Enough to See Depleted Self in True
 Light. **CHRONIC INSOMNIA—HORROR—DREAMS.**
ALCOHOLIC ILLNESS—BITTERNESS—
MELANCHOLY

Loss of Zest for Life—Chronic Illness.
 Contemplated Suicide.
 Accentuation of Insanity Characteristics.
WET BRAIN. INSTITUTIONS. D E A T H ! ! !

Temporary Physical and
 Mental Well-Being.

False Courage Relating to
 Social, Sex and
 Business Life.

Satisfying Flight
 from Reality.

Satisfying a
 Craving and
 Addiction.

ASSETS

LIABILITIES

This analysis of the effects of drink was made by a local chapter of the Alcoholics Anonymous, whose national headquarters may be reached through Box 459, Grand Central Annex, New York 17, N. Y.
 Reprinted from *The Queen's Work* magazine, 3115 South Grand Blvd., St. Louis 18, Missouri

self-preservation. Every A.A. member begins close to the bottom of things; hence the only way to go is up. They have found that those who want to stop drinking to please their wives or save their businesses or reputations seldom get to first base. Those who believe that they must stop drinking if they are going to save their own lives have a much better chance to dry up and stay dried up.

Enlightened Selfishness

Now here is the twist: While enlightened selfishness is about the only thing that will start an alcoholic on the road back, only the knowledge of the group's support keeps him on that road. A.A.s defeat loneliness and discouragement by their meetings, which are alive with good talk and good cheer. To be sure that no social obligations are incurred, no financial worries imposed, and no keeping-up-with-the-Jones circle initiated, each A.A. pays for his own entertainment. At every A.A. meeting a "kitty" is placed in the center of the room. So for all their insistence on intelligent selfishness as a starter, their motto in their other activities might well be: "*I am my brother's keeper.*"

Another facet of the A.A. organization is its purebred democracy. All the A.A.s know what humiliations are. Humiliations make for humility. As for virtue, so for democracy there is no more solid foundation than humility. In A.A. there are no officers or leaders in the ordinary sense.

One device that is frequently used is that of having rotating chairmanships. Whatever official organization the A.A.s have set up, they have always been careful to insure its serving the membership rather than directing or ruling it.

The A.A.s have a bond of mutual understanding and sympathy that would be very difficult for any other kind of club or association to parallel. Their regard for one another is based on their realization of a suffering common to all of them. The story that one A.A. tells about how he had to sit on his hands to keep them from shaking when he had the DT's, another matches with the story about the time he would have jumped out of an eleventh-story window if he hadn't "passed out" on the window ledge. Not a few A.A.s count jail and workhouse sentences among their experiences. Others tell of good jobs they held for many years and finally lost through drink in middle or old age. And there are many who recall the bitter experience of their families' love turning to hatred for them. The A.A.s know the sneer of the sober and the contempt of the self-righteous. There is grim, stark tragedy close to the lives of all of them.

The Group Approach

The twelve steps are really the individual's approach to the alcoholic problem. There are many, many people in out-of-the-way places who have become good members of A.A. from their reading of the

book "Alcoholics Anonymous" and through the realization that what others can do they might do also.

But as someone once said, "Inherent in the possession of the truth is the instinct to share it."

Group activity however poses some additional questions. So in 1946 the founders of the organization drafted twelve *points* for the general guidance of these clubs—as the twelve *steps* had been for the guidance of the individual members of A.A. These points were based on the group's observations of their many mistakes and many more successes. A summary of them gives something of their spirit:

The Twelve Points

1. Each member is but a small part of a great whole—A.A. must continue to live or most of us will surely die.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority — a loving God.
3. Our membership ought to include all who suffer alcoholism. Hence we may refuse none who wish to recover. Nor ought A.A. membership ever depend upon money or conformity. Any two or three alcoholics gathered together for sobriety may call themselves an A.A. group.
4. With respect to its own affairs each group is autonomous.

5. The group is a spiritual entity having one primary purpose—to help the alcoholic who still suffers.
6. Problems of money, property, and authority may easily divert us from our primary spiritual aim. We think therefore that any considerable property of genuine use to A.A. should be separately incorporated and managed, thus dividing the material from the spiritual.
7. Each group should be fully supported by the voluntary contributions of its members and should not have funds from any other source.
8. A.A. should remain forever non-professional. Professionalism we define as the occupation of counseling alcoholics for fees or hire.
9. Each group needs the least possible organization. Rotating leadership is usually the best.
10. No A.A. group or members should ever, in such a way as to implicate A.A., express any opinion on outside controversial issues — particularly those of politics, alcohol reform, or sectarian religion.
11. Our relations with the outside world should be characterized with modesty and anonymity.
12. We believe that the principle of anonymity has an immense spiritual

significance. It reminds us that we are to place principles before personalities; that we are actually to practice a truly humble modesty. This is to the end that our great blessings may never spoil us; that we shall forever live in thankful contemplation of Him who presides over us all.

Vigilance, Sobriety's Price

Of course that necessary anonymity continues to puzzle outsiders. That that "principle of anonymity has an immense spiritual significance," I myself can verify. Over a period of years I have been privileged to attend and address a good many of A.A. meetings in many cities, and each time I have felt that I have come away from them a good deal richer in soul than I went in.

So effective is this unique treatment of A.A. that cases abandoned by many city institutions are now turned over in routine order to A.A. groups. And A.A. treats this "disease"—over which the patient and the doctor are said to have no control—with such purely nonphysical "medicines" as faith in God and human fellowship.

Another thing that puzzles the uninitiated is the insistence of A.A. that the only thing that can get the program started is the individual's *willingness* to try it—this in the face of the fact that the very first step in A.A. is the alcoholic's open admission that his will is powerless, at least over

alcohol. But there is no inconsistency here at all. For though the chronic alcoholic craves a drink in the way that a thirsty man on a desert eats his heart out for water, he still has complete freedom of will over any other faculty. This freedom obviously includes the ability to choose or reject a treatment for his uncontrollable thirst.

I'll always remember one fellow who put the matter very eloquently when he said, "We stand forever in the shadow of tragedy, and eternal vigilance is the price of sobriety."

And so it is. A.A. claims no cure for alcoholism, any more than a physician claims a cure for diabetes or tuberculosis. These diseases are said to be arrested, not cured.

"Skidding . . . Backsliding . . ."

In fact an axiom of A.A. is: "Once an alcoholic, always an alcoholic." That is another paradox, for it is in the realization of their constant danger that their greatest security lies. This whole matter cannot be a fretful, worrisome, or anxious sort of thing. Their success lies rather in their staying close to God and close together for mutual help. They try to stay sober for only one day at a time. Like Eliza on the ice they go from one step to the next . . . and usually they find to their amazement that by not fretting about the past or the future they make amazing progress in the present.

There is no question that the A.A. program does achieve for thousands of its members its main purpose—sobriety. I truly believe that the program will help anybody that God can help, and I never met anyone who wasn't in that category.

But lapses are not infrequent. In fact the group has a word for them: "skidding," or sometimes the more expressive "backsliding."

A. A. and the Church

The statistical evidence of the thousands of people that A.A. has succeeded in drying up impresses the outsiders. But the real A.A. boosters are those who have seen a human being restored from sodden uselessness to human dignity.

Really to know the tremendous importance of this group to others, you should talk to a person who was forced to live with an alcoholic for years and then at last had the rare privilege of living with that same person now become an A.A. and of associating with his A.A. friends.

While A.A.'s main purpose is, not religion, but sobriety, their experience has shown their need to use certain spiritual exercises in their attempt to get help from God, without which help they are, they realize, doomed. Sobriety, as a moral habit, is not unrelated to religion. Spirit or spiritual means soul; religion adds to this the notion of relationship between one's soul and the highest thing in an individual's scale of values, whether that be one's belly

or something higher, one's mind or something higher still—the God of Abraham and the God of Augustine.

There are certain things that antedate the Church. There are natural things such as marriage and patience, the state of courage and humility. The Church is not the founder of human nature; rather is it the fountain and source of knowledge about human nature and how we can build upon it to form the higher strata of supernature.

Alcoholics Anonymous is natural; it is natural at the point where nature comes closest to the supernatural, namely in humiliations and in consequent humility. There is something spiritual about an art museum or a symphony, and the Church approves of our use of them. There is something spiritual about A.A. too, and participation in it almost invariably results in poor Christians' becoming better Christians.

Thirst Not Drink

A.A.'s great contribution to the treatment of chronic alcoholism is their concentration of effort on *thirst* rather than on *drink*. In a way the alcoholic's spirit is like eroded land, ditched and gullied by flash floods, uncontrollable torrents of alcohol that submerge it and dissolve its richest minerals. When each flood is over, the drought that returns is worse than ever.

The alcoholic knows that all the pruning and preening of his soul, all the contour

farming and seeding will be of no avail—unless he can control the rain. There still remains that intolerable thirst; only one thing seems to satisfy it—drink. There are only two ways to get that drink: further cloudbursts of alcohol with the consequent destruction and devastation, or the gentle rain from heaven. The A.A. program is a slow seeping of God into the thirsty soul of the alcoholic; the alternative is a deluge of alcohol.

It is exactly at this point in the treatment of thirst that the lessons of A.A. start to have a universal application. The A.A. people know that fear, discouragement, futility, and loneliness are the four melancholy horsemen of the alcoholic apocalypse. These Our Lord contended with in the Garden of Olives, and consciously or unconsciously the A.A.s have imitated Him in His answer — the only possible answer: “Not my will, but thine be done.” It was only after Christ had said this that the angel ministered to Him and quenched His terrible thirst, ministered to His fear, discouragement, futility, and loneliness.

Such thirst is universal. It was the great Augustine’s thirst for God that supplied the entire subject matter of his Confessions. The reason that it is such a great book is to be found of course in the fact that every human being in some measure sees his own experience mirrored therein. With all of us that thirst is much like Christina Rossetti’s sea, that “drinking, thirsteth still.” That thirst is built into us,

a part of our nature, and the only thing that adequately satisfies it is God. But like Augustine most of us will try anything and everything else before we come to God to quench that thirst.

The Old Saw

Some men attempt to satisfy their thirst for a power greater than themselves in the pursuit of knowledge, pleasure, money, honor. Some flee to the wilderness, and some wallow in the city streets. Some drink deeply (like the three per cent) and some merely dabble (like the ninety-seven per cent). The alcoholic exemplifies just one type of thirst; he happens to be the kind of person who tries to short-circuit this pursuit of God by seeking a pleasurable oblivion in drunkenness.

The full significance of the achievement of A.A. and the application of their basic method to other similar problems has not yet been fully realized or appreciated. The success of the A.A. reminds me of an old saw: There must be something wrong with Christianity because of the terrible state of affairs in the "Christian world." But the real trouble is that Christianity is not being tried at all, and the state of the world is the precise result of Christ's being left out of the world.

The A.A.s have tried some of the fundamental and basic tenets of Christianity, and those tenets have worked wonderfully with them.

The alcoholic problem and its A.A. solution can by analogy be applied to any chief vice that is found in human beings. In A.A. the alcoholic's immediate family is part of the group. These families are always amazed to discover that they get from the group a great deal more than the restoration of their alcoholic kin. Sometimes they discover that the vice of the alcoholic was negligible compared to their own rottenness, and not infrequently they learn that before the great change they were actually contributing to the victim's plight.

The Founders

Of course everyone wants to know who started Alcoholics Anonymous. The New York broker and Akron doctor—two of the dearest friends I have—who are behind it all, have always insisted upon their anonymity. By a net of circumstances more intricate than the plot of a first novel they got together in 1935 and wrote the book that I spoke of earlier, "Alcoholics Anonymous," after they had first tested it thoroughly on themselves and on their first little group of friends.

Both these men are however known by little children of a thousand homes in this country, by wives and mothers and husbands who whisper their names in benediction. They are known especially by their own wives, Lois and Anne, to whom they are the echoes of the blessing of God... and Lois and Anne are the angels of their

resurrection. For if at any time during a trying twenty years these women had given up hope in the ultimate return of Bill and Doc to manhood, there might be no A.A. today . . . and thousands of now sober, respectable citizens might be drowning in the bottomless pool of alcoholism.



APPENDIX

One A.A. group says that if you have one of the following symptoms you *may* be an alcoholic; if two, you *probably* are an alcoholic; if three, you *certainly* are an alcoholic.

The following symptoms are taken from a report in Your Life magazine, by Dr. Robert V. Seliger of Johns Hopkins, medical director of The Farm for Patients With Alcoholic Problems and chief psychiatrist of The Neuropsychiatric Institute of Baltimore.

YOUR BODY. Do you require a drink the next morning? prefer to drink alone? crave a drink at a definite time daily? get the inner shakes unless you continue to drink? Does drinking cause you bodily complaints? cause you sleeplessness? endanger your health? Has a physician ever treated you for drinking? Have you ever been hospitalized for drinking?

YOUR SOUL. Has drinking made you irritable? changed your personality? made you restless? made you more impulsive? Has drinking weakened your self-control? cut down your ambition? Does it interfere with your perseverance toward a goal? Do you drink for self-encouragement? to relieve a feeling of inadequacy? Do you show marked moodiness as a result of drinking? Is drink affecting your peace of mind? disturbing the harmony of your life? Have you ever had a complete loss of memory while you've been drinking or shortly

afterward? felt inability to concentrate? felt remorse?

YOUR HOME. Is drinking harming your family in any way? making you careless of your family's welfare? making your home life unhappy? Have you thought less of your spouse since you began to drink? Has your sexual potency suffered from your drinking?

YOUR BUSINESS. Do you lose time from your work because of drinking? Has your initiative decreased since you've been drinking? ambition decreased? perseverance lessened? efficiency decreased? Is drinking jeopardizing your business? your job?

YOUR ASSOCIATES. Do you drink to obtain social ease? (This is sometimes the case with shy, timid, self-conscious individuals.) Do you show marked dislikes and hatreds since you have been drinking? increase in jealousy in general? Has drinking made you more sensitive? harder to get along with? Have you turned to an inferior environment since you have been drinking? Is drinking clouding your reputation?

The Twelve-Steps Program

That All A.A.s Embrace

- "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 understand 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 understand Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
- "12. Having had a spiritual experience (awakening) as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to other alcoholics and to practice these principles in all our affairs."

FURTHER READING . . .

Father Dowling's pamphlet suggestions for use by Alcoholics Anonymous discussion groups in their preparations for talks on the twelve steps and for the personal meditation recommended by the eleventh step

1st STEP

- I Can Take It or Leave It Alone
Daniel A. Lord, S.J. 10c
- Who's Pushing Your Mind Around?
As Told to Daniel A. Lord, S.J.
By Raphael C. McCarthy, S.J. 10c

2nd STEP

- Atheism Doesn't Make Sense—Daniel A. Lord, S.J. . . 10c
- The Happiness of Faith—Daniel A. Lord, S.J. 25c

3rd STEP

- Is Religion Bad for Your Mind?
As Told to Daniel A. Lord, S.J.
By Raphael C. McCarthy, S.J. 10c
- Has Life Any Meaning?—Daniel A. Lord, S.J. 10c

4th STEP

- Are You Scrupulous?
As Told to Daniel A. Lord, S.J.
By Francis J. O'Boyle, S.J. 10c

5th STEP

- When We Go to Confession—Daniel A. Lord, S.J. . . 10c
- Confession Is a Joy?—Daniel A. Lord, S.J. 10c

6th STEP

- The Invincible Standard—Daniel A. Lord, S.J. . . . 10c

7th STEP

- How to Make An Act of Perfect Contrition
Leo T. Dowling, S.J. 5c

8th STEP

- What of Free Will?—Daniel A. Lord, S.J. 5c

9th STEP

- Of Course We Don't Mean You
Daniel A. Lord, S.J. 10c

10th STEP

- Examination of Conscience for Married Couples
Edwin C. Haungs, S.J. 10c

11th STEP

- Prayers Are Always Answered—Daniel A. Lord, S.J. . . 10c

12th STEP

- How to Stay Young—Daniel A. Lord, S.J. 10c



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IN
U.S.A.

THE QUEEN'S WORK

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an interview with

Edward Dowling, S.J.

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Frank A. Riley

Alcoholics

Anonymous
