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### An Exploration of A.A.'s Twelve Step Spirituality for the Purpose of Communicating a Right Understanding of Law and Gospel to Recovering Lutheran Alcoholics

Gary Galen

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, [ir\\_galeng@csl.edu](mailto:ir_galeng@csl.edu)

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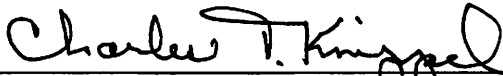
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AN EXPLORATION OF A.A.'S TWELVE STEP SPIRITUALITY FOR THE  
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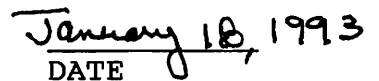
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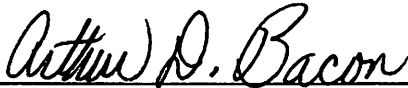
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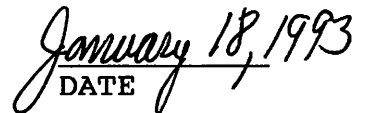



Doctor Charles T. Knippel  
Advisor

  
DATE



Doctor Arthur D. Bacon  
Reader

  
DATE



Doctor Arthur D. Bacon  
Director, Doctor of Ministry Program

  
DATE

AN EXPLORATION OF A.A.'S TWELVE STEP SPIRITUALITY FOR THE  
PURPOSE OF COMMUNICATING A RIGHT UNDERSTANDING OF LAW  
AND GOSPEL TO RECOVERING LUTHERAN ALCOHOLICS

A MAJOR APPLIED PROJECT SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF CONCORDIA SEMINARY  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

GARY WILLIAM GALEN

SAINT LOUIS, MISSOURI

OCTOBER 1992

To recovering Lutheran alcoholics, both clergy and lay.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## PREFACE

This project was motivated by a sincere desire to help recovering Lutheran alcoholics and the pastors and congregations which minister to them. During my ministry I have had opportunity to work on a personal level with recovering alcoholics, including those of a Lutheran background, and many times listened to their expressions of confusion. In my ministry I have had colleagues refer members to me who were in recovery from alcoholism because of their questions concerning the Twelve Step reference to a Higher Power. What follows is a report of a study made of the above issue, and is the fruition of much thought and discussion during the course of the Doctor of Ministry program.

Unless indicated, all Bible references are from the New International Version (NIV). In the same way the term "recovering alcoholic" used in the context of the work of the ministry does imply that the alcoholic is Lutheran. Finally, in accordance with conventional procedures, any generic reference to "man" also implies women and in no way is meant to discriminate against a particular gender.

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## ABSTRACT

This study addresses presenting Law and Gospel to recovering Lutheran alcoholics in the Twelve Step program of Alcoholics Anonymous. The Twelve Steps offer a spirituality which has often caused confusion among confessional Lutherans. This involved interviewing recovering Lutheran alcoholics, non-alcoholic Lutherans and clergy. The Twelve Steps were evaluated according to Law and Gospel. A brief study of the influence of American Civil Religion and Two Kingdom Theology gave a backdrop in which to place the Twelve Steps. Practical ways in which pastors and congregations could better minister to recovering Lutheran alcoholics were included.

## Introduction

In my ministry I have had the unique opportunity of coming into contact with many people seeking to recover from alcoholism and related addictions. Many of these are Lutheran lay people involved with Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) and A.A.'s Twelve Step Program for recovery from alcoholism. In ministering to these people, it has become apparent to me that there is much confusion concerning Twelve Step spirituality when it is compared to distinctively Christian spirituality.

The Twelve Step Program forms the basis of the recovery process in the A.A. program. The Twelve Steps also become the blueprint for living a life of recovery, especially through the use of a "Higher Power." The "Higher Power" is a "God" of each individual alcoholic's choosing. These Twelve Steps, with their reference to the "Higher Power," are articulated by their author as follows:

Here are the steps we took, which are suggested as a program of recovery:

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.<sup>1</sup>

In the Twelve Steps the question, "Who is God?," is not answered. Nor is any mention made of Jesus Christ and His saving and life-transforming work. These and related issues can cause some concern for Christians because the Twelve Steps are misleading in terms of Biblical spirituality.

Much of the confusion among Lutherans lies in the presentation of the Twelve Steps as a spiritual way to recovery. The official publication of Alcoholics Anonymous commonly known as the "Big Book," (so named because early editions were printed on cheap, thick, paper, resulting in the first published books being "big" or cumbersome) states,

If when you honestly want to, you find you cannot quit entirely, or if when drinking, you have little control over the amount you take, you are probably alcoholic. If that be the case, you may be suffering from an illness which only a spiritual experience will conquer.<sup>2</sup>

As I dealt with recovering Lutherans many of them expressed being in a dilemma concerning the issue of spirituality. Their dilemma was represented by questions

such as: Is the spirituality of A.A. compatible with the spirituality of the Scriptural Gospel message? If not, are we compromising our beliefs by practicing the Twelve Steps? If we have A.A., do we really need the Church? Since both the Church and A.A. are known as fellowships that are spiritual in nature, does the Church have anything more to offer than we can find in A.A.?

These and other questions prompted me to pursue studies that culminated in the project of addressing the confusion some Lutherans have concerning A.A. spirituality and Biblical Christian spirituality. In so doing, I have sought to identify a variety of answers to these concerns. Additionally, I sought ways of making the Law and Gospel message clear and helpful to recovering Lutheran alcoholics in the Twelve Step Program.

In undertaking this project I considered that some persons with a Lutheran background may not be asking any questions or they may not be asking Lutheran questions. This is a possibility because recovering Lutheran people come from a variety of congregational experiences. Some may have been active, others not. Some may know the Scripture teachings, others not. Some may have been hypocritical, some may have dropped out, and still others may have become Lutheran converts after they achieved sobriety. Therefore this project is a consideration of how the Law and Gospel can be presented to recovering Lutheran alcoholics even

though their backgrounds may differ from one another.

The value of this project is underscored by the fact that many Lutherans experience alcohol-related problems and that many Lutherans, as well as persons with other religious backgrounds, are recovering from alcoholism in A.A. In addition, from studies, experience, and personal observation it appeared to me that a significant number of Lutheran church members may have a problem with drinking, though the problem may not be apparent.

Dr. John O'Hara, Research Analyst for The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod's Department of Planning and Research, states that "Lutherans are middle, middle Americans. Therefore the rates of alcoholism among Lutherans reflect the national average."<sup>3</sup> A review of the statistics shows that eighty-five percent of Lutherans drink. The national average is that one out of twenty adults, or five percent (ten million), has a problem with alcoholism.<sup>4</sup> Of adults who drink, thirty-six percent can be classified as problem drinkers, some of which are included in the five percent of the population with an identifiable alcoholic problem. Nineteen percent of youth (3.3 million) are problem drinkers.<sup>5</sup> Such data provide a picture of the possible extent of alcoholism among Lutherans, and the susceptibility for many Lutheran youth in developing alcohol problems.

The A.A. influence upon recovering Lutherans varies in that they are not the only ones involved in A.A. A.A. includes people of many different Christian denominations, people of non-Christian faiths, agnostics and atheists. The result is that within A.A. there are many different understandings of Twelve Step spirituality.

Furthermore, A.A. has Twelve Traditions which form the parameters of A.A. One of these Traditions states "The sole authority in A.A. is a loving God as He may express Himself in the [individual] group conscience."<sup>6</sup> A diverse group then decides how God expresses Himself without identifying exactly who God is or the means by which God moves the group to make decisions. Each group sets the parameters by which that group functions. Since groups differ on the use of the "group conscience" there can be any interpretation of God from the specific to the general. Furthermore, as members of A.A. groups describe their spirituality in their own words, a recovering alcoholic is left with an unclear message of the complete purpose and work of God's person as it is revealed in the message of Christianity.

Is the above dilemma important enough to address? Current facts speak for themselves. Many people are admitting their addictions, Twelve Step groups are growing in popularity, and a greater interest is being expressed in spirituality. In particular our Western society has spawned a confusion about spirituality, religion, and the truth.

Christian apologist Francis Schaeffer addressed this confusion about spirituality:

The tragedy of our situation today is that men and women are being fundamentally affected by the new way of looking at truth. Especially young people are subjected to the modern framework. In time they become confused because they do not understand the alternatives [to the presupposition that there are no absolutes].<sup>7</sup>

Many people involved in the A.A. program of recovery may reflect this diversity of belief and attitude.

These considerations suggest that a way needs to be found to communicate clear Biblical spiritual truths to a recovering Lutheran alcoholic. This involves an understanding of the Lutheran alcoholic's context and thinking and then seeking ways of communicating Law and Gospel in order to meet the alcoholic's spiritual needs. For this researcher it is imperative clearly to communicate Law and Gospel. It is imperative because the fullest possible recovery from alcoholism flows only from saving faith in Jesus Christ as the Savior from sin and eternal death, and from trust in Christ as the only one who can truly transform the alcoholic's life. It is Jesus Christ, and only Jesus Christ, who provides the spiritual resources for the alcoholic person's fullest possible recovery.

In accomplishing this study of communicating Law and Gospel to the recovering Lutheran alcoholic, I will first discuss alcoholism as an illness that takes its spiritual toll by turning the alcohol abuser away from God and toward

the bottle. If he is a Christian he may gradually turn away from the church. His behavior becomes more unchristian and he no longer clearly hears the Gospel because he has a "god in the bottle."<sup>8</sup> Yet he is brought back to a concept of spirituality in A.A. and we are confronted with the question, "How, then, can the Gospel message work to bring such a person solidly into the family of God?"

Next, I present an examination of the Twelve Steps to see what doctrinal difficulties are encountered when the Twelve Steps are considered in relation to Christian Law and Gospel. The Twelve Steps appear incomplete even though they use a lot of Biblical language. They fail to provide an authentic spirituality that facilitates the optimum recovery from alcoholism made available by God in Jesus Christ. Finally, I explore ways of clearly communicating the Gospel message to the recovering Lutheran alcoholic.

As part of this study I interviewed several recovering Lutheran alcoholics and asked them their views on spirituality, the meaning and purpose of God, and the importance of the church. I also interviewed a control group of non-alcoholic Lutheran lay people asking identical discussion questions. I avoided religious terminology. The questioning followed an inductive method, allowing interviewees to describe their thoughts in their own words. I used probing questions to discover the real meaning of interviewees' concepts. While I recognize this as "soft



research" in that a selected group painted a general picture of the spiritual struggles and faith of recovering Lutheran alcoholics, the research does demonstrate a general pattern.

Following the interview of the lay people, I talked individually to Lutheran clergy and asked them similar questions based on responses from the alcoholics and non-alcoholics. The purpose was to compare and contrast lay people and pastors in terms of their concepts of God, spirituality, Law and Gospel, and how the church can be of spiritual help to the alcoholic. I adapted the interview style from a model provided by The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod's Board for Social Ministry Services. A complete description of the interview process is included in the Appendix.

For purposes of confidentiality the names of interviewees are number coded. For the same reason the location of home communities is not identified.

In all my research and study for this project I gave prayerful devotion to God for guidance to follow His will. What follows is personally meaningful for my ministry and has greatly aided me in my work in the Lord's kingdom.

CHAPTER I  
ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS' TWELVE STEP PROGRAM OF SPIRITUAL  
RECOVERY AND ITS PRACTICE AMONG RECOVERING  
LUTHERAN ALCOHOLICS

The Scope of Alcohol Abuse and Attitudes  
Toward Alcoholism

Alcoholism is an insidious addiction. The official book of A.A., Alcoholics Anonymous, describes the suffering alcoholic as a person "driven by a hundred forms of fear, self-delusion, self-seeking, and self-pity."<sup>9</sup>

Of the addictive diseases and compulsions (gambling, drugs, sex, work, eating, and others) alcoholism is the most widespread and well known. From the earliest of times people not only produced alcohol but also abused alcohol. Today, even with the proliferation of drugs, 85% of all chemical dependency is addiction to alcohol, according to a recent study reported in the St. Louis Post Dispatch.<sup>10</sup> There are ten million alcoholics in the United States with approximately ten percent of these in recovery through A.A.<sup>11</sup>

Throughout history people regarded alcoholism as a moral weakness, a lack of will power, a condition of sinfulness, and a character weakness. The American Medical

Association, however, more recently defined it as a disease. Dr. E. M. Jellinek identified alcohol as a physically addictive disease in the early 1950s and published his widely-accepted book, The Disease Concept of Alcoholism. In 1956 the American Medical Association issued a statement reiterating that alcoholism is an illness, saying, "Alcoholic symptomatology and complications which occur in many personality disorders come within the scope of medical practice."<sup>12</sup> Alcoholism became defined as a disease or condition in which a person has lost control over his use of alcohol.

Alcohol addiction affects a person not only physically, but also spiritually, emotionally, and socially.<sup>13</sup> Because of many of the above factors there has been a diversity of opinions throughout history concerning alcohol abuse, with difficulty in prescribing a system of recovery.

When we consider the spiritual effects of alcoholism it appears the bottle functionally replaces God and distorts one's position in relationship to God. The alcoholic begins to feel that he is as powerful and controlling as God. When we consider the emotional effects of alcoholism we see how the addict goes completely out of control, as alluded to in the above quotation from the "Big Book." Socially, relationships become difficult as the problem drinker looks at other people in order to define himself--that is, the drinker cannot see himself as he truly is and reacts in

response to how he thinks other people evaluate him. The physical effects are many, resulting ultimately in death from liver damage, wet brain, or some form of cancer, if not accident, homicide or suicide.

#### A Secular Addiction Model Relating to Sin

How does the alcoholic Christian approach the disease concept of alcoholism? He may think, "If alcoholism is an addictive disease, is it still sinful? The Bible does speak against drunkenness, but does it speak against being physically addicted if one does not intend to become addicted? It cannot be sinful to be sick, can it?" The alcoholic may be led to blame his addiction for any sinful behavior that results from it.

The secular world reinforces the alcoholic's sinful behavior by maintaining that the alcoholic did not cause the addiction and therefore it is not his fault. Science further confuses the issue by publishing studies suggesting hereditary and genetic factors for "becoming alcoholic." This leads one to often blame their ancestors for their alcoholic behavior while downplaying any personal responsibility for sinful actions. Though people do inherit original sin and susceptibility to disease, and though they are influenced by their parents' behavior, nevertheless they are ultimately responsible for their own actions and their own misuse of alcohol.

Recent studies from the secular world of psychotherapy provide an alternative to the medical view. It appears more compatible with a Scriptural approach to the problem of alcoholism. Psychotherapist Anne Wilson Schaef has identified all addictions as an addictive process, a generic, systemic disease of our society. She further categorizes all disorders relating to mental health (every addiction, co-dependency, mental disorder, family dysfunction, and the concept of the unequal nature of male and female roles) as under the umbrella of the addictive process.<sup>14</sup> In Schaef's model any kind of addiction such as gambling, dependency upon people, eating, and focus on material things, is a compulsion which people rely upon in order to survive.<sup>15</sup>

Mention is made of Schaef's model because the characteristics of the addictive process she describes relate well to the characteristics of the Christian concepts of original and actual sin. Characteristics of the addictive process which she describes are self-centeredness, dishonesty, confusion, fear, judgmentalism and loss of morality.<sup>16</sup>

If, by way of example, Schaef's characteristics are applied to the first created couple, Adam and Eve, a remarkable correlation presents itself between sin and the endemic nature of addiction. In the Garden of Eden after their rebellion against God, Adam and Eve reacted with self

centeredness as they tried to become as important as God by eating the forbidden fruit, blaming each other for disobeying God, speaking dishonestly to God, trying to hide from God out of fear, and becoming conscious of shame and immorality when they realized they were naked.

According to Schaef's model, Adam and Eve could be viewed as having the characteristics of the addictive process. They had a distortion of reality in the way they saw themselves in their relationship to God. Furthermore, both exhibited a male and female role identity problem because God's curse said man would rule over woman yet woman would have desire for the man. This caused man to mistreat the woman in his "ruling" and caused the woman to react in unhealthy fear and shame in relationship to man.

Further comparisons of different elements of sin with the addictive disorder characteristics which Schaef cites, suggest, beginning with Adam and Eve, that all humanity suffers from what she calls an addictive process. These addictive disorder characteristics cause pain and disruption in a person's life, just as sin disrupts our relationship with God and with one another.

Schaef classifies alcoholism as a sub-disease of the addictive process, in that a substance is used to cope with the disorder within oneself so that one achieves the remission of physical, emotional, and spiritual pain.<sup>17</sup> Spiritually, alcoholism does become a functional replacement

for the true God because, among other effects, it deadens the reality of guilt and fear resulting from sin. Alcoholism becomes a form of idolatry in the strictest sense of God's Law as stated in the Ten Commandments. All sensations are deadened to avoid the terrible self-realization that a person completely, compulsively and addictively relies on alcohol to live. When drinking, the alcoholic feels peaceful and secure in his relationship with God.

#### Alcohol Addiction As a Spiritual Sickness

Alcoholism becomes one of several possible consequences that beset man in his desperate attempt to survive his disobedience to God. Alcohol becomes a false rescuer, among other false rescuers, in man's attempt to escape the inward fears and self-delusions that plague his sin-sick soul. Isaiah gives an example of the false god that alcohol becomes when he says:

And these also stagger from wine and reel from beer:  
Priests and prophets stagger from beer and are  
befuddled with wine; they reel from beer, they stagger  
when seeing visions, they stumble when rendering  
decisions. All the tables are covered with vomit and  
there is not a spot without filth. (Isaiah 28:7-8)

The misuse of alcohol is a result of original sin which is every person's inherited and total corruption resulting from rebellion against God. In such a state of corruption man desires to be like God just as the original human pair sought to become like God. When alcohol clouds a person's

mind, he turns, in the words of Isaiah, to stumbling and a sickness of the stomach from relying on this false god, alcohol.

Alcoholism is a result of the actual sin of abusing alcohol. Solomon spoke of it in this way:

Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise. (Proverbs 20:1)

Do not join those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves on meat, for drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags. (Proverbs 23:21-22)

Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaints? Who has needless bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes? Those who linger over wine, who go to sample bowls of mixed wine. Do not gaze at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly! In the end it bites like a snake and poisons like a viper. Your eyes will see strange sights and your mind imagine confusing things. You will be like one sleeping on the high seas, lying on top of the rigging. "They hit me," you will say, "but I'm not hurt! They beat me, but I don't feel it! When will I wake up so I can find another drink?" (Proverbs 23:29-35)

These passages cite several ways in which the Old Adam, a name for our inherited sinful condition, is expressed. In an active way people try to escape their sin and its consequences by drinking alcohol to the point where physical addiction results in greater damage to bodies, lives and society.

A.A., in its official publication the "Big Book," also relates the addictive disease of alcohol to our spiritual sickness:

Selfishness--self-centeredness! That we think is the root of our troubles...so our troubles, we think,



are basically of our own making. They arise out of ourselves and the alcoholic is an extreme example of self-will run riot, though he usually doesn't think so.

Above everything, we alcoholics must be rid of this selfishness. We must, or it kills us! God makes that possible. And there often seems no way of entirely getting rid of self without His aid...We had to have God's help. First of all we had to quit playing God.<sup>18</sup>

Other facts about alcoholism may help the reader to understand why the disease is so perverse and why it affects the drinker spiritually, emotionally, and socially in addition to physical addictiveness. People do not choose to become addicted. For most people to think of themselves as addicted is like being weak in some facet of their character. Somehow the person is not "man enough" or "woman enough" to "take it" when it comes to drinking.

Additionally, alcohol distorts the alcoholic's thinking by deadening the reasoning powers, giving a false sense of strength, deadening or exaggerating fears and guilt, and in similar ways totally and insidiously removing the drinker from all reality. Because the alcoholic does not want to see that something he enjoys and feels he controls is his master, he readily denies that he has a problem and the disease runs its course.

Secularists such as Dr. Schaef may describe all of life's maladjustments as dependence on a substance, person or thing in order to survive. She describes it as an addictive disorder endemic in society. Lutheran Biblical theology tells us frankly that sin blinds us. As mentioned,

Schaefer's secular concept of "addictive disorder," is parallel to the Biblical concept of original sin. Alcohol misuse enhances man's self-centeredness to make himself the center of the universe and causes him to deny sin's deathlike progression.

For purposes of this study, the abuse of alcohol is viewed as one long-standing and popular way in which humanity is self-afflicted by its attempt to find God, be like God, or rebel against God. Alcohol, given as a gift by God for the usefulness of humankind and for moderate enjoyment, is misused by people to deny their sinful corruption and rise above their problems in order to feel "powerful" and "god-like." Active alcoholism then is a sin resulting from the misuse of alcohol.

Paul says in Ephesians 5:18, "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit." God clearly constrains us to live according to His Law when we partake of alcohol. The wrong use of alcohol deadens man's reason so that he gives himself the sinful permission to do what he wants, when he wants, wherever he wants. Countless Biblical examples illustrate the effects of alcohol abuse, such as Lot willingly becoming drunk by the encouragement of his daughters and then, with his inhibitions lowered, being led into committing incest with them.<sup>19</sup> Man, in effect, can frustrate the work of God's Holy Spirit and frustrate the Gospel message by centering

his life on alcohol.

#### Alcohol Addiction as Progressive in Nature

To understand further the alcoholic, the deadly nature of alcoholism, and alcoholism's spiritual effects, the medical field additionally views it as a progressive disease.<sup>20</sup> The human system needs more and more alcohol in later stages to produce the same effect as that gained from the lesser amount consumed in earlier usage. One of the most insidious characteristics of alcoholism, as with many other addictive disorders, is that it progressively continues to worsen even if usage is eliminated.<sup>21</sup> This may happen in two ways.

First, the individual may quit his usage for a long period. The effects of active drinking--clouded thinking, hangovers, physical damage, irrational behavior--will no longer be apparent and the individual may appear to be quite capable of normal living. He or she is not cured of his alcoholism, however. If he should choose to drink again after any period of time, even after thirty years, he will commence to drink as if he had progressively been drinking for all his sober years.<sup>22</sup> He does not pick up where he left off months or years before when he quit drinking, but his body system will continue through that period progressively to need more and more alcohol to reach the desired effect if he would choose to drink again. Of course, in a short period of time after resuming usage he

would be dead. If he did not drink for the rest of his life further damage would not be done to his body, even though alcoholism is progressive, because the addicting and mood altering chemical element of ethyl alcohol is not added to the human system.<sup>23</sup>

Secondly, alcoholism is more than abusive drinking. It also damages the character, emotions, relationships, and spiritual condition of the user. The damage and its effects do not simply disappear if a person quits active drinking. Much of the sinful attitude will remain unless it is dealt with, or it may express itself in other compulsive behavior. In this way, alcoholism continues to be a spiritually and emotionally progressive disease. The person who quits using alcohol by his own willpower, without seeking appropriate help in recovery, will continue to behave in many ways similar to his behavior during his drinking career.<sup>24</sup>

Contemporary experts in therapy agree. The latest edition of The Changing Family Life Cycle, a resource presenting a popular approach in clinical family systems counseling, says,

A drinker may not be currently drinking, but if drinking has been untreated (AA, a rehab or treatment program), presobriety or adjustment issues may need to be addressed and the family organization may be more characteristic of those early stages even if drinking has been stopped for a number of years. This often occurs in families where the drinker attended AA briefly and then stopped.<sup>25</sup>

Concerning the progression of alcoholism one can see similarities in the Biblical teaching that a person can in no way rescue himself from his sinful condition. Mankind taints all efforts to get "better" by the self-centeredness of sin. No matter what a person does to "improve" himself he or she continues in sin and the effects of sin take their course, until both physical and, possibly, spiritual death result.

This is not to say that alcoholism is the epitome of original or actual sin, nor that alcoholism is what actual sin is really all about. Rather alcoholism shows specifically and clearly the results of man's condition regarding his misuse of one particular substance: alcohol. Because of man's inherent sinful condition he cannot release himself from any of the ways in which his sinful condition may express itself. As Jesus said, "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it." (Matthew 16:25).

#### Other Important Facts Pertaining To Alcohol Addiction

Other factors pertaining to alcoholism may be of some further help for the reader's understanding. No one can predict which drinker the disease may strike. It strikes male and female, young and old, and people of every occupation regardless of race and creed. Less than eight percent of alcoholics are of the skid row variety.

Approximately sixty percent are business or professional people.<sup>26</sup> In addition, there is no known medical cure for alcoholism.<sup>27</sup> The individual either continues to drink and faces death, prison, or institutionalization, or he can become sober.<sup>28</sup>

#### Spiritual Healing as the Popular Approach to Alcoholism

According to A.A. only one successful way has thus far been found to help alcoholics become sober, remain sober, and live a productive life. That way is a healing through the power of God. All others, such as through medicine and counseling, have not been as successful as the spiritual program of Alcoholics Anonymous. A.A. explicitly credits recovery as an act which can only be accomplished by God's power.<sup>29</sup> Though other ways may be effective, they generally have not been found to have as lasting a value when compared to A.A.

A review of alcoholism's spiritual effects underscores the importance of the need for spiritual healing. From a Christian perspective the spiritual damage done to the alcoholic far outweighs the physical, emotional, or social damage because of the Christian conviction that sin destroys both body and soul, and furthermore that true life and salvation are found only through faith in Jesus Christ. The self-centeredness of alcoholism creates a wall of separation from the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Only God in Christ can provide total healing to both the soul and the body.

The same opinion is espoused in the Twelve Steps, though they do not define who God is and do not mention the work of Jesus Christ. The Twelve Steps point out the necessity of spiritual help with the singular problem of compulsive drinking and the same steps are used to rebuild a new "spiritual" life for the practitioner. The power for change in this new spiritual life comes from an undetermined God, a concept that will be addressed later. It is this concept of the spiritual healing of God according to Alcoholics Anonymous that raises the question in the mind of many Lutherans: Is this the same as Biblical Christian spirituality? If not, how can it work?

To emphasize further the spiritual damage alcoholism causes people, the viewpoint of the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions ("Twelve and Twelve"), an A.A. commentary on the steps and traditions, allows for the spiritual effects of alcoholism to be labeled "sin"<sup>30</sup> if that should be the individual's choice of labels. Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions further states that the spiritual defects can be itemized according to the Seven Deadly Sins of pride, greed, lust, anger, gluttony, envy and sloth.<sup>31</sup> It proceeds to go through the list of Seven Deadly Sins and show in detail in what ways each sin contributes to "soul-sickness."<sup>32</sup> It continues by showing that such symptoms as worry, rage, resentments, self-pity, and depression<sup>33</sup> are results of the spiritual and emotional aspects of the alcoholism illness.

Two Christian psychiatrists, Frank Minirth and David Meier, attest to these symptoms as being a result of sin and in need of both spiritual and psychological healing.<sup>34</sup> A concentrated study of Scripture substantiates Minirth and Meier's findings. In Psalm 22, for example, David expresses the depth of his depression in his attempt to keep secret his sins against God and Uriah, the Hittite. Elsewhere Scripture deals with the sins of resentment (Matthew 18), worry (Matthew 6), and rage (Colossians 3).

There are parallels between the secular, the A.A. and the Christian understanding of those things that are harmful to the human spirit, and there is a parallel between A.A. and Christianity concerning the need for spiritual assistance. A divergence, however, emerges between A.A. and Christianity concerning the importance of salvation through Jesus Christ as primary and the emphasis on sanctification in building a new life for the recovering alcoholic. This is treated at length in Chapter II.

#### The Alcohol Addict and the Church

In the section on the spiritual effects of alcoholism the "Twelve and Twelve," the popular A.A. name for Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, addresses church membership and fellowship. A.A. describes the attitude of the active alcoholic toward the church as "indifference, fancied self-sufficiency, prejudice, and defiance."<sup>35</sup> Many in A.A. will say:



We were plumb disgusted with religion and all its works. The Bible, we said, was full of nonsense; we could cite it chapter and verse, and we couldn't see the Beatitudes for the 'begets.' In spots its morality was impossibly good; in others it seemed impossibly down. But it was the morality of the religionists themselves that really got us down. We gloated over the hypocrisy, bigotry, and crushing self-righteousness that clung to so many 'believers' in their Sunday best. In belaboring the sins of some religious people, we could feel superior to all of them. Self-righteousness, the very thing that we had contemptuously condemned in others, was our own besetting evil.<sup>36</sup>

As seen, animosity often grows against those who do have active church membership, including the alcohol abuser's own immediate family. Their hypocrisy seems all too apparent to the alcoholic in his or her own self-righteousness.

Concerning those who do hold membership in the church fellowship, the "Twelve and Twelve" continues:

Now let's take the guy full of faith, but still reeking of alcohol. He believes he is devout. His religious observance is scrupulous. He's sure he still believes in God, but suspects that God doesn't believe in him. He takes pledges and more pledges. Following each, he not only drinks again, but acts worse than the last time. What, then, can be the matter?. The answer has to do with the quality of faith rather than its quantity. We supposed we had humility when really we hadn't. We supposed we had been serious about religious practices when, upon honest appraisal, we found we had been only superficial...or we had wallowed in emotionalism and had mistaken it for true religious feeling. We hadn't really cleaned house so that the grace of God could enter us and expel the obsession. We had always [prayed] 'Grant me my wishes' instead of 'Thy will be done.' We remained self-deceived.<sup>37</sup>

The question addressed by A.A. is not whether the individual is saved or not. Twelve Step practitioners identify a weakening of the faith and a laxness in the practice of the

Christian life by the active alcoholic.<sup>38</sup> The spiritual direction of the alcohol abuser is seen only as living apart from God.

In the Lutheran church we would observe the abuser gradually turning away from the means of grace, which are the Word and Sacraments. Though the abuser might benefit from some physical or emotional relief through seeking medical help or counseling, the real benefit would be the removal of alcohol as his "god" by the only One who can effect such a change, the Triune God, and a restoration of the abuser to a renewed faith in the Word and Promises of God.

There is spiritual damage for the alcohol abuser and A.A. has had a measure of success in helping people recover from alcoholism through what A.A. calls a spiritual program. A.A. is more successful than medicine, psychology, and social change combined.<sup>39</sup> However, as stated earlier, God is not defined as the Triune God, nor is the Gospel message of Jesus Christ apparent in A.A.'s program. How the Twelve Steps came to be and the nature of their spiritual impact are important questions for further understanding.

The Origin, Purpose and Parameters of the Twelve  
Steps Especially in Regard to Spirituality

The Background of A.A.

In November, 1934, a sober friend of an alcoholic named William (Bill) Wilson convinced him that through a spiritual experience he could maintain sobriety. Subsequently, while detoxifying, Bill had such a spiritual experience. It was later, in June, 1935, that A.A. had its official beginnings when Bill shared his story of his drinking and recovery with a "drunk" named Dr. Bob Smith in Akron, Ohio. Smith subsequently maintained his sobriety in the same manner as Bill Wilson.<sup>40</sup>

Smith and Wilson became the co-founders of A.A. Soon one alcoholic led another to sobriety by the method of an alcoholic sharing his spiritual experience, strength, and hope with another seeking relief from alcoholism. Those desiring sobriety often met in groups during the week to give one another encouragement in sober living.

To clarify the "Christian" context in which Bill Wilson found sobriety a further look at the history of A.A. helps us to understand. A movement called the Oxford Group Movement was active at the time Bill Wilson achieved sobriety. The Oxford Group was begun by Dr. Frank Buchman, who graduated from the Lutheran Seminary at Mt. Airy, Pennsylvania in 1902. Buchman's purpose was to form an organization directed toward prominent people to provide

help in living the life God had mapped out for them through Christ. It was hoped that since they were prominent, they would be influential with others.<sup>41</sup>

The Oxford Group sought to lead people into living a life on earth parallel to Christ's life. Their theological premises revolved around eight points: surrender [to God], sharing, restitution, quiet time, daily meditation, guidance, fellowship; and the four absolutes of love, honesty, unselfishness and purity. Christian witness and fellowship were also stressed.<sup>42</sup> Not only was it taught that one could live a better life by following the above steps, but also that any practitioners of the Oxford Group's steps who struggled with alcohol addiction could achieve abstinence. The Twelve Steps of A.A. would include some of the same principles that belonged to the Oxford Group though there would be decided differences.

It was a member of this Oxford Group who shared his recovery from alcoholism with Bill Wilson when Bill was in the throes of his addiction. Bill, through this sober friend, became acquainted with the Group and Sam Shoemaker, an Episcopal priest who was its American representative.<sup>43</sup> It was through his association with the Oxford Group that Bill Wilson had his spiritual experience that freed him from the desire to drink.

Bill Wilson focused on a spiritual solution to alcoholism. Though his interpretation of "spiritual"

differs from the Christian meaning of the term, both viewpoints believe that alcohol abuse does affect spirituality. The Oxford Group influenced Bill Wilson with a variety of Christian, conceptual language, not all of which was clearly Scriptural. Episcopal priest, Samuel Shoemaker, along with a Roman Catholic Jesuit priest, Father Edward Dowling of St. Louis, was a close associate of Bill Wilson and encouraged him in his use of religious principles. The method for recovery from alcoholism according to the Twelve Steps would come to have decidedly Christian parallels (as discussed below), though the Twelve Steps alone did not purpose to proclaim Christ or salvation from sin.

#### The Formulation of the Twelve Steps of A.A.

Bill Wilson at first attempted to follow the Oxford Group in his program of recovery. Later he broke ties with the Oxford Group for varying philosophical reasons, and in 1939 he wrote his rough draft of twelve steps for achieving sobriety that are almost identical with the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous today and similar to the constructs of the Oxford Group.

The Oxford Group had six steps which its adherents practiced during the 1930-1940 period. They were:

1. I admitted that I was powerless to manage my own life.
2. I became honest with myself as never before: made an "examination of conscience."
3. I made a rigorous confession of my personal defects

- and thus quit living alone with my problems.
4. I surveyed my distorted relations with other people, visiting them to make what amends I could.
  5. I resolved to devote myself to helping others in need, without the usual demand for personal prestige or material gain.
  6. By meditation, I sought God's direction for my life and the help to practice these principles of conduct at all times.<sup>44</sup>

Wilson and his associates summarized six ideas they heard in the Oxford Group and adapted them to the problem of alcohol:

1. We admitted that we were licked, that we were powerless over alcohol.
2. We made an inventory of our defects or sins.
3. We confessed or shared our shortcomings with another person in confidence.
4. We made restitution to all those we had harmed by our drinking.
5. We tried to help other alcoholics, with no thought of reward in money or prestige.
6. We prayed to whatever God we thought there was for power to practice these precepts.<sup>45</sup>

Wilson, in consultation with his associates, "simplified" the steps by expanding them from six to twelve in number and by placing them in the chapter "How It Works" of his book, Alcoholics Anonymous.

After Wilson wrote his first draft of the Twelve Steps, with a clear mention of God as the one who would restore sanity, a discussion arose among Wilson's recovering friends as to how "Christian" the Twelve Steps should be. One group wanted Christ's power to be mentioned for the transformation of the alcoholic. Another group, composed of atheists and agnostics, wanted no mention of God at all. A third, middle, group supported Wilson in his compromise of a

generalized "God as an individual understood Him."<sup>46</sup> This non-specified Higher Power of a person's own understanding would remove the compulsion to drink and straighten out a recovering alcoholic's life. The Twelve Steps did not include references to salvation, Christ, the church, and the afterlife.

The Oxford Group would eventually die out. It became more interested in conservative social ideology than the moral revivalism it originally sought. Its themes included anticommunism, and at one point Buchman was supportive of Adolf Hitler in his fight against Communism. Gradually it lost its cohesiveness that accounted for its early strength and then faded away to become a small Washington D.C. based group attempting to generate better morality in our nation. Some of the Oxford Group's ideology reappeared in later years through the work of evangelicals on college and university campuses.<sup>47</sup> A.A., meanwhile, would keep its fellowship-style intimacy and flourish, protected by its Traditions and Concepts, as will be shown.

#### General Influences of American Civil Religion upon A.A.

As mentioned previously, early in his sobriety Bill Wilson began a friendship with Episcopalian priest Samuel Shoemaker, who was chief American publicist for the Oxford Group.<sup>48</sup> The theological influence of Samuel Shoemaker is treated in Dr. Charles T. Knippel's research and dissertation, "Samuel M. Shoemaker's Theological Influence

on William G. Wilson's Twelve Step Spiritual Program of Recovery." It is within this study that a connection can be made between the apparent success of A.A. being in part due to the backdrop of American pluralistic religious thought, and also belonging in what Lutherans call the Kingdom of the Left hand of God.

Knippel describes A.A. as a product of pluralistic inclusivism.<sup>49</sup> This statement is an interesting commentary on American religion and society, in which the A.A. program took root. It helps us to understand that the Twelve Steps appear to have expressed a variety of opinions and movements surrounding religion and spiritual life. Furthermore the question can be raised as to how the practice and belief of a confessional Lutheran relates to this pluralism, especially as it may be encountered in a Twelve Step program.

Theologically, Knippel places A.A.'s concept of a Higher Power as consonant with a natural knowledge of God held by mankind. Thus, A.A. can be seen as belonging to the kingdom of the left hand of God, that is, God's rule over the world through temporal structures that ordinarily would not proclaim the Gospel:

There is another way, beneficial to the natural man within his potential for civil righteousness, in which Alcoholics Anonymous can be seen as having God's helping power. From another theological perspective Alcoholics Anonymous is helpful because it belongs to God's 'left hand,' secular, or temporal kingdom through which God gives good temporal gifts.<sup>50</sup>



As Lutherans we may see Alcoholics Anonymous as part of the kingdom of the left hand of God. The kingdom of the left hand of God, more fully explored in another section, is a Lutheran theological term identifying civic and secular affairs that by God's design maintain, among other things, order and justice in the world. These affairs are under the control and blessing of God. On the other hand, the Church witnesses to the Gospel in the kingdom of the right hand of God.

Influenced by Oxford Group principles and practice, the founders of A.A. also reflected the fluid pluralistic influence of the day within American society. It is unique to our American history and culture that a proposal of pluralistic inclusivism in matters concerning "God" can maintain a strong hold on society. American historian Robert Bellah writes:

Although matters of personal religious belief, worship, and association are considered to be strictly private affairs, there are, at the same time certain common elements of religious orientation that the great majority of Americans share. They have played a crucial role in the development of American institutions and still provide a religious dimension for the whole fabric of American life, including the political sphere. This public religious dimension is expressed in a set of belief symbols, and rituals that I am calling the American civil religion.<sup>51</sup>

Bellah made this distinction in reference to Rousseau's Social Contract in which Rousseau put forth as principles of society: the existence of God, the reward of virtue, and the exclusion of religious intolerance. These ideas were

incorporated into the development of American democracy. Works by theologian/historians such as Richard Niebuhr, Will Herber, Martin Marty, and Richard John Neuhaus among others, attest to the incorporation of these ideas into the mainstream of American society and the influence of these ideas upon many church denominations. The principles of pluralistic inclusivism and reductionism are firmly embedded in the fabric of American thought and are also found evident in American self-help groups.<sup>52</sup>

A.A. as a philosophy of self help through spiritual means, along with the concept of a God of each person's understanding, reflects the mainstream of American societal and religious thought and practice.<sup>53</sup> One reason A.A. remains a popular program is that it reflects our society's thought and practice concerning religious matters, way of life, and concept of self help.

Though not germane to this study, it also could be noted that A.A. has shifted its practice (but not its spiritual concepts, as they are maintained by adherence to A.A.'s Twelve Traditions and Twelve Concepts) to reflect the gradual influence of secularization in American,<sup>54</sup> which is a civil religion issue. This is counterbalanced by society's contemporary desire for more "spirituality" as mentioned in the introduction to this study. It is the influence of pluralistic inclusivism, rather than secularization, with which a recovering confessional

Lutheran would have difficulty since his faith centers in Christ and his recovery from alcoholism in A.A. also depends on a "God of his understanding" who may appear different from his Christian understanding of God.

It should be mentioned, at this point, that The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod does not consider A.A. to be anti-Christian. The position of our church body is:

Alcoholics Anonymous has no religious features. ...members are not asked to accept or subscribe to any formal creed or statement of beliefs beyond admitting that they have a drinking problem and want help...The "spiritual awakening" does not refer to conversion but to a personality change sufficient to bring about recovery from alcoholism.<sup>55</sup>

#### A Summary of A.A.'s Spiritual Road to Recovery

In summary, the Twelve Steps present a spiritual method of recovery which A.A. calls the only lasting way of recovery from alcoholism. A.A. attempts to expose all the spiritual and character flaws produced by the addiction to alcohol and propose a freedom from such flaws by a spiritual experience with a God of a person's own understanding.

The matter of religion and an explanation of God are omitted both to avoid controversy and to appeal to people of any creed or confession. Furthermore it also facilitates the recovery for people of all faiths and no faith. In A.A.'s beginnings it was felt that too much mention of religion and God would cause offense to the drunk willing to get sober before he even had a chance to investigate the Twelve Steps.<sup>56</sup> Therefore in the Twelve Steps language

about God was kept at a minimum.

Wilson, because of a strong influence by philosopher William James,<sup>57</sup> maintained only that a spiritual experience could remove the compulsion to drink. Wilson wrote:

Even so has God restored us all to our right minds. To this man, the revelation was sudden. Some of us grow into it more slowly. But He has come to all who have honestly sought Him. When we drew near to Him He disclosed Himself to us!<sup>58</sup>

Wilson had this to say about spirituality:

The terms "spiritual experience" and "spiritual awakening" are used many times in this book which, upon careful reading, shows that the personality change sufficient to bring about recovery from alcoholism has manifested itself among us in many different forms. ...With few exceptions our members find that they have tapped an unsuspected inner resource which they presently identify with their own conception of a Power greater than themselves.

Most of us think this awareness of a Power greater than ourselves is the essence of spiritual experience. Our more religious members call it "God-consciousness."

Most emphatically we wish to say that any alcoholic capable of honestly facing his problems in the light of our experience can recover, provided he does not close his mind to all spiritual concepts.<sup>59</sup>

The "Big Book" cites numerous attempts at medical and psychological cures for alcoholism with resulting failure in all instances.<sup>60</sup> Several contemporary therapists agree, such as master therapist Betty Carter,

Treatment in conjunction with referral to the programs of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) is optimal since family therapy alone is not sufficient to address the complex issues represented by alcohol addiction. In the sense that addiction represents a process that occurs on an interactional level that includes a level of feedback generated between the drinker and the alcohol,

treatment is best accomplished within a context that includes acknowledgment of this aspect of the problem. Thus AA currently provides the most effective context available for addressing the compulsive, self-correcting nature of drinking behavior. With its focus on peer support, mutuality, "correct" thinking, behavioral change, and spiritual surrender, AA fosters change in the drinker's experience of himself or herself that cannot typically be achieved within the context of therapy.<sup>61</sup>

According to A.A. most medical authorities since then have agreed. The spiritual experience of believing that God can remove the alcoholic's compulsion to drink seems for A.A. adherents to be the one successful method.

To further explain A.A.'s spiritual position an entire chapter in the "Big Book" is dedicated "To The Agnostic" to argue for the existence of God who is able to remove the compulsion to drink and change an alcoholic's life. Wilson clarified his argument for God by stating: "We represent no particular faith or denomination. We are dealing only with general principles common to most denominations."<sup>62</sup> 44

Questions, a piece of A.A. General Service Conference approved literature, states:

AA is not a religious society, since it requires no definite religious belief as a condition of membership. Although it has been endorsed and approved by many religious leaders, it is not allied with any organization or sect. Included in its membership are Catholics, Protestants, Jews, members of other major religious bodies, agnostics, and atheists.<sup>63</sup>

A.A. seems like a religion because it operates on spiritual presuppositions. The principles of A.A. have religious characteristics in that they claim a God to whose will the alcoholic surrenders. A.A. has religious roots and

some people outside A.A. may have called it a religion, but it does not define itself as such. For detailed questions and concerns about religious matters and God, A.A. suggests that one find a minister or priest.<sup>64</sup>

A.A. further says that as the fog of alcohol lifts, the person begins to understand and appreciate God and then he can seek further spiritual strength from a minister, priest, or rabbi. The Twelve Steps are used to maintain a continual spiritual road to recovery.

Translated into Christian terms, the Twelve Steps ask us to acknowledge God as all-powerful; encourage us to live by God's will; encourage confession to God and others; encourage the seeking of forgiveness from God and restitution to those who have been wronged; encourage the daily practice of prayer, meditation, and selfless love to others; and finally, encourage the spreading of the message of recovery.

Specific prayers are suggested for use with Steps Three and Six.<sup>65</sup> Additionally, the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi and the Serenity Prayer are suggested for regular use along with the Twelve Steps. Most meetings and gatherings of recovering alcoholics open and close with the Serenity Prayer and the Lord's Prayer. Though prayer is not the essence of Christian belief, many Christians interpret the use of prayer as somehow "connecting with the Church."

## A Typical A.A. Meeting

A brief description of an A.A. meeting, whether open or closed, shows how the A.A. program is put into action. A newly recovered person is encouraged to attend ninety meetings in ninety days. Typically, a recovering alcoholic will attend up to three meetings a week for the first several years of sobriety, never attending less than one a week. Furthermore a recovering alcoholic will have a sponsor with whom he meets regularly, a list of friends in A.A. to call, a social life centered on activities with other A.A. people, regular readings on a daily basis in the "Big Book," the "Twelve and Twelve," other A.A. approved literature, and books for daily meditation purposes.

A typical "recovery" bookstore, found in increasing numbers even in smaller cities, will contain several hundred different titles, dozens of meditation books, plus t-shirts, bumper stickers, and numerous mementos. Recovering alcoholics purchase ample amounts of literature. A.A. tracts and books are also on display at each group meeting. Every small geographic region has annual or bi-annual conferences and conventions.

The A.A. meeting is central to the program. Generally it lasts an hour and a half, with an additional monthly group conscience business meeting for home group members. Here in the Midwest an A.A. meeting opens with the Serenity Prayer and a reminder of anonymity that no one can reveal

the name of anyone present without their consent. Each meeting has the verbal announcement at the beginning of the meeting that, "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."<sup>66</sup>

Following this, newcomers or guests are recognized and welcome kits given to them. Anniversaries of sobriety are noted with a special card or "coin" presentation. The first three pages of the chapter "How It Works" in the "Big Book" are read along with the Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions. A meditation appointed for the day is either read from Twenty-Four Hours A Day, an all inclusive devotional book, or from As Bill Sees It, a compilation of sayings from the co-founder of A.A. This latter book appeals to secularists because it minimizes talk about God.

A topic is decided by the chairperson or brought up by a member, each person is free to comment on it with no across the table talking, and a free-will offering basket is passed. Sometimes there is a recovering alcoholic who is the featured speaker. Other meetings regularly discuss readings from the "Big Book" or the "Twelve and Twelve." The meeting closes with announcements, and the Lord's Prayer spoken with the group standing in a circle holding hands. Coffee is plentiful throughout the meeting. This description gives the reader an indication of the context in



which we explained the Twelve Steps and will explain the Twelve Traditions which follow.

Traditions as the Parameters for A.A.'s  
Spiritual Recovery

The Twelve Traditions which deal with spiritual matters are Traditions Two, Ten, and Twelve:

The "12 Traditions" of Alcoholics Anonymous are, we A.A.'s believe, the best answer that our experience has given to those urgent questions, "How can A.A. best function?" and, "How can A.A. best stay whole and so survive?" Our A.A. experience has taught us that.

Tradition Two--For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority--a loving God as He may express Himself in our groups conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.

Tradition Ten--Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the A.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy. **Long Form:** No A.A. group or member 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. The Alcoholics Anonymous groups oppose no one. Concerning such matters they can express no views whatever.

Tradition Twelve--Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities. **Long Form:** And finally we of Alcoholics Anonymous 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 genuine humility. This 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.<sup>67</sup>

God speaks through the A.A. group, Tradition Two maintains, to give the group guidance and direction.<sup>68</sup>

It may be noted that though the long form of Tradition Ten says that no mention be made of sectarian religion this

dictum is usually overlooked. The A.A. group as a whole will not have an opinion on religion, but individual members are generally free to speak their opinion. There can be objection made, however, if an individual sounds like he is "telling" another person what to believe about a sectarian religion. Members of the A.A. group are sensitive to the beliefs of others because A.A. is seen as a place where people of all beliefs come with the common problem of alcoholism.

The interpretation of Tradition Twelve adds, "The spiritual substance of anonymity is sacrifice."<sup>69</sup> It suggests that a result of being spiritual is to sacrifice oneself by maintaining anonymity.

A.A. maintains its constancy on these issues as leaders serve rather than govern, each group is autonomous, there are no membership requirements other than a desire to stop drinking, and anonymity is upheld.

The Twelve Concepts as the Third Legacy of A.A.

What holds A.A. together are the Twelve Concepts. There is nothing germane to spirituality in the Twelve Concepts. They are, however, the important rules for cementing all of A.A. together into a service organization, and as Concept I reads: "Final responsibility and ultimate authority for A.A. world services should always reside in the collective conscience of our whole Fellowship."<sup>70</sup>

A.A., as an organization, is turned "on its' head"<sup>71</sup> and

the same form of group conscience, as mentioned before, collectively runs A.A., rather than having supervisors or executives directing the affairs of A.A. Concept I relates to Tradition Two, which is one of the spiritual Traditions.

The Twelve Steps, Concepts, and Traditions form the Three Legacies that are the corporate possession of A.A. World Services and thus of each A.A. member. The triangle symbol of A.A. is based on these Three Legacies of Recovery, Unity, and Service. The Three Legacies protect the spiritual concept of A.A. allowing the organization to maintain a firmness and vitality in an American social atmosphere of pluralistic inclusivism.

A Sampling of Lutherans in Twelve Step Recovery and  
Their Concept of Spirituality and the Church

Background of the Sampling Procedure

In exploring Twelve Step spirituality consideration was made of how recovering Lutherans viewed both the spirituality of the Twelve Steps and the message of the Church. All interviewed alcoholics were active in both A.A. and in the Lutheran Church. I interviewed a control group of an equal number of non-alcoholic active Lutheran church members for comparison. Ten people were in each group according to a suggestion made by an executive staff member of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod Board of Social Ministry Services. Each interview was individually

conducted.

I asked several questions at the beginning of each interview concerning what the interviewee liked about church, A.A., and their particular church volunteer work, if any. Further questions were asked concerning their concept of God, Jesus Christ, and the doctrine of Law and Gospel. They were all asked to state their definition of alcoholism. I conducted each interview with the same order of pre-set questions though I encouraged the interviewees to further elaborate with their responses.

The interview process had the intent of picturing how a sample group of Lutheran recovering alcoholics in A.A. viewed their spirituality and relationship to God and the Church within both institutions of which they were members. A full report of the interview process is included in the Appendix. For reasons of confidentiality all persons quoted in this section are number coded according to the categories of alcoholic, non-alcoholic, and clergy.

First I interviewed recovering Lutheran alcoholics from a small geographic area of the Metro-East Illinois area of St. Louis, Missouri. They represented different Lutheran congregations, occupations, ages, genders, longevity as church members, and were involved in church offices such as elder, chairman, and trustee. Each of them had a minimum of four years sobriety.

The second group interviewed was composed of non-alcoholic Lutherans from my own congregation in the Metro-East Illinois area of St. Louis, Missouri. A variety of people based on age, occupation, sex, and degree of leadership in the church constituted this group.

Finally, a third group interviewed was composed of clergy including parish pastors in Illinois, a church district official, and professors at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. I asked them similar questions asked of the lay people concerning the definition of alcoholism and whether they felt alcoholism was a disease or a sin. Specific questions were posed about their interpretation and use of the concept "spiritual" and their reactions to the use of this concept in the Twelve Steps. Clergy were asked how the church could best help alcoholics, whether they felt the church posed any hindrances to ministry with alcoholics, and what they felt about the Lutheran alcoholics' concerns over the quality of fellowship in the Church.

Special interview questions addressed to clergy dealt with doctrinal concerns, specifically the use of Law and Gospel and the placing of A.A. in the context of either Natural Theology or Two Kingdom Theology. Reactions were invited to several statements that recovering Lutheran alcoholics had previously made to the interviewer.

## Interviewees' Positive Comments About Church/Twelve Step Program

Both alcoholics and members of the control group found the church a necessary place to receive spiritual sustenance. Non-alcoholic Lutherans reflected upon the fellowship and social activities, while alcoholic Lutherans said the church complemented and completed their spiritual life. Only one of the control group prioritized the worship life and sermons as most important for him.

Both groups emphasized that the Bible and Church were the highest priorities in their lives, followed by the family. One non-alcoholic admitted his struggle to keep the Bible and Church first in his life.

The alcoholics all placed Christ or the Church at the center of their lives and several alcoholics emphasized their sobriety as a close second. Two people also placed their sobriety as one of their highest priorities stating if they were not sober they would have minimal relationship with God.

## Concept of God

The question was asked about each person's concept of God. All, both alcoholic and non-alcoholic Lutherans, identified God as the Trinity, and God as loving. People were asked if their concept of God changed during their lives. Many non-alcoholics stated they used to have a slightly different view as children, but alcoholics reported

the most dramatic change in concept from a fearsome, legalistic, punishing, and powerless God to a loving, comforting God who is Father of all.

#### Importance of Jesus Christ

Both alcoholic and non-alcoholic Lutherans responded with a simple and sound Lutheran expression of the importance of Christ. What stood out, in particular, was Christ's sacrifice on the cross, his complete atonement for us, salvation as a free gift not dependent upon man, the importance of both His humanity and divinity, and the importance of the cross of Jesus Christ as a symbol for new life.

#### Law and Gospel

Both the control group and the recovering Lutheran alcoholics identified God's Law with the Ten Commandments. Both groups referred to Luther's Small Catechism designation of curb, mirror and guide for the three uses of the Law. The recovering alcoholics mentioned our helplessness when confronted with the Law: "no way to fulfill" (Alcoholic #4), "drives us to repentance" (Alcoholic #1), and "shows what I've done wrong" (Alcoholic #6).

The control group also commented that "knowing the need for forgiveness" (Non-alcoholic #9) and "it shows how much I need a Savior" (Non-alcoholic #10), were uses of the Law that direct us to a Savior. Only one of all the

interviewees, a member of the control group, commented that the Law meant we "should try and live right." (Non-alcoholic #3). Control group members, commenting on the Gospel, mentioned its forgiveness (Non-alcoholic #1), good news (Non-alcoholics #3 and #8), right way to live (Non-alcoholic #2), grace and our doing (Non-alcoholic #7).

The recovering alcoholics differed by calling the Gospel serenity (Alcoholic #2). the Bible (Alcoholic #6), what the creed says (Alcoholic #2). The remaining responses were similar to the control group: grace (Alcoholic #7), promise (Alcoholic #6), the message of Christ (Alcoholic #9), and release from the Law's penalty (Alcoholic #1).

#### Knowledge and Concept of Alcoholism, A.A., and the Twelve Steps

The definition of alcoholism varied among respondents in the control group. Some called it a disease; others said definitely it is no disease. Still others said alcoholism is a matter of discipline or will power, a chemical problem, and a weakness for which you can get help.

Non-alcoholic #10, trained in the area of adolescent alcohol abuse at the Johnson Institute in Minnesota, believed alcoholism to be a disease, but the actions of the alcoholic to be sin. Conversely Non-alcoholic #1, acknowledging the possibility of alcoholism being a disease, said that "according to Jay Adams it [alcoholism] is a sin problem which needs a spiritual solution." The replies were



in contrast to the responses, below, of alcoholics and clergy to the same question.

Only half the Lutheran alcoholics interviewed called alcoholism a disease, contrary to the official "disease concept" generally espoused by the medical community and treatment centers. Alcoholic #2 said alcoholism is a sin and forgiveness is found in Christ. Alcoholic #1 emphasized "it is not a disease. It is an illness from a sinful life style. An active alcoholic may not be saved." Alcoholic #5 called it a sin and Alcoholics #6 and #9 called it a spiritual sickness.

Clergy also had a mixture of replies. Some like Clergy person #1, #2, #5, #6, and #10, called it a combination of sin and disease. Two clergy called it a simple disease and the rest called it a sin. One, Clergy person #3, called it a moral weakness.

Apparently the recovering Lutheran alcoholics were more straight forward in acknowledging alcoholism as resulting from a sinful condition and in one case, overstated the issue by denying that an active alcoholic could be redeemed. It also appears that many clergy may be trying to reflect both good theology and medical research in their opinions.

#### Concept of the Twelve Steps

The non-alcoholics were asked if they were familiar with the Twelve Steps and A.A. The intent was to inquire whether they felt A.A. is like a religion. The non-

alcoholic group had very limited familiarity with A.A. and the Twelve Steps. Several commented, from what little they knew, that the Twelve Steps were "a good way" or "a spiritual way" in which to live. Only one, Non-alcoholic #1, stated that A.A. was somewhat like a religion in that the Twelve Steps were a spiritual way in which to live. The recovering Lutherans were naturally familiar with both A.A. and the Twelve Steps.

#### Is A.A. Like a Religion?

Concerns have been raised by some Lutherans that A.A. may be like a religion. As stated, no lay person, alcoholic or non-alcoholic thought of A.A. as a religion, except one, Non-alcoholic #1. Several alcoholics did remark that others in A.A. considered it their religion. Several did say that there is a distant relation between A.A. and religion because both are a spiritual community (Alcoholic #3), have a Higher Being (Alcoholic #5), and stress fellowship (Alcoholic #8). One individual, Alcoholic #7, went as far as to say, "A.A. has a closer relationship between people, thus it is more spiritual than religion." Another, Alcoholic #9, remarked that A.A. was not a religion because there is no hierarchy and there are no cliques. His concern was about cliques in religion and he said, "If there are cliques in A.A. they do not survive; cliques rely on fear."

The Lutheran alcoholics said A.A. was not a religion because there was no hierarchy, dogma, principle, or formality. Though there is no hierarchy, one may take issue with the statement that there is no principle or formality, since the Twelve Steps themselves are called "principles."

Clergy responses are also of interest because some clergy stated A.A. was not a religion. Clergy person #2 stated A.A. belonged under the Kingdom of the Left, though he felt some may use it as a substitute church. "Civil religion" is what Clergy person #10 called A.A. Clergy person #4 offered the opinion that A.A. isn't a religion, but religious principles are taught. Clergy person #5 felt A.A. was not a religion, but he felt A.A. encourages people to find a religion.

Others, like Clergy person #7, thought that, although the Twelve Steps are a positive help to the recovering alcoholic, A.A. could become a cult movement for some people. Clergy person #3 elaborated further:

I have mixed feelings. A.A. and the Twelve Steps is [sic] a psychologically powerful tool. Can you really have God without Jesus? Or is it merely a psychological statement. It can possibly be a natural religion--indeed God can heal those who don't truly believe. Still the question remains why A.A. uses salvation and theological terms so heavily. Yes, A.A. is like a religion with a God and with the background history of A.A.

This underscores that although the commentator felt it was like a religion, he did not approve of it being the same as the genuine Christian religion.

Another, Clergy person #9, spoke more positively, but with some reservations, of A.A. as a religion, "I see a lot of Lutheran doctrine in the [Twelve] Steps. It's like a religion because of the use of a Higher Power. This is okay, if it leads to the Christian God."

#### Use of the Term, "Spiritual"

Several times the term "spiritual" came up in the interviews with alcoholics. Early in the interviews it became necessary to have people indicate whether they used the term "spiritual" in their thought and conversation and in what way they defined the term. Pastors and professors, too, were asked this. Most Lutheran alcoholics used the term "spiritual" while it was not part of the Lutheran lay people's vocabulary.

Alcoholic #1 remarked that "spiritual is the intangible...A.A. is accepted as a religion [by some] because it has dogma, principle, and formality."

Other alcoholics remarked that "spiritual" means community, or being one with God, or living according to God's plan. Alcoholic #3 said that since both A.A. and church had community they are "spiritually" similar. Alcoholic #4 stated that the "spirituality" in A.A. is between people, while in church "spirituality" is between people and God. Alcoholic #7 said that A.A. is "spiritual" because in A.A. there is a closer relationship between people. One Non-alcoholic, #7, remarked that "spiritual" is

putting our beliefs into action.

### Meaningful Church Membership

Control group Lutherans had a variety of replies for what they considered meaningful church membership: a place for the family, worship, people, closeness to God, missions, Christian education, and Bible interpretation. Non-alcoholic #1 replied in particular, "My membership means being connected with other people. This is how I can be strengthened spiritually because I can ask anything of anyone at anytime because of our relationship in Christ."

In contrast, recovering Lutheran alcoholics focused on Word, Sacrament, and prayers as most important in church membership. Most recovering Lutheran alcoholics expressed reservations about the quality of fellowship and acceptance of alcoholics by other members in the church. One person, Alcoholic #1, in response to being asked what is meaningful and important about church [congregation] replied, "Not a whole lot. The invisible Body of Christ is what is important!" Apparently non-alcoholic active Lutherans found the focus of their fellowship and family values in the church, while Lutheran alcoholics found their fellowship in A.A.

### How The Church Can Best Help With Spiritual Life

All interviewees were queried concerning how the church can best help with their spiritual life. This elicited a

lot of response. Non-alcoholic #1 gave a good description:

The church firms my relationship with God. It is a setting for my communing with God. A private time for meditation. At this time I have no special need but do want to be involved. Spirituality is a more personal thing. The organization is not primary, but useful. In a sense we could do without the organizational church, but it provides a framework.

Other people, like Non-alcoholic #10, called for the church to "have a personal caring ministry...religion is the mere formality." Additional ones were: "At church I can pick up what I need for my Christian life," (Non-alcoholic #5), and, "The Church is to motivate, to excite, especially the pastors should motivate us," (Non-alcoholic #4). Non-alcoholic #2 agreed as he said, "The church shows us and illustrates for us our religious life."

Though two or three Lutheran alcoholics were positive about the church helping a person in their spiritual lives, most were not. Alcoholic #1 stated:

The congregation has failed to do anything. The quality of Bible study, worship, outreach and personal spiritual assistance are nil. The church needs to involve people on the personal level in outreach. Lutherans need to be more spiritually together.

Alcoholic #9 added:

The Church should educate the laity about the alcoholic. In church one has to dig around for the help. Many churches are bogged down with the material cares and concerns.

Along the same vein Alcoholic #4 said, "The church can [be of help] where people practice their faith, but it can't where a congregation focuses on material things."

Others drew a blank. Both Alcoholics #5 and #7 said they really did not know what the church could do, because it does not do anything. Alcoholic #10 added that "the church doesn't help the alcoholic," and Alcoholic #3 emphasized, "The church can't, people aren't honest with each other."

Only two, Alcoholic #6, a convert of several years, and Alcoholic #8, a recent convert, said that preaching of the Word helped them grow as spiritual people. Alcoholic #8, from the same congregation as the Alcoholic #6, said that the church was especially helpful for families of alcoholics. When encouraged to explain, it was apparent that his pastor was especially warm and receptive toward Alcoholic #8. Alcoholic #2, employed by a Lutheran congregation, appreciated the fellowship found with the other staff members.

#### Summary of Thoughts Expressed In Interviews

The overriding sense from speaking with the alcoholics was that, though they believed church was important because of the Word of God and the preaching of Christ, they felt more "spirituality" and "fellowship" in A.A. What was at issue was their concept of the lack of fellowship and genuine spirituality among many people in the church, coupled with a feeling that the alcoholic was either not understood or not accepted.

The recovering Lutheran alcoholic author of a pamphlet put out by the Lutheran Layman's League states that people who do not know much about A.A. conceptualize A.A. members as "weak" (58% interviewed), "unhappy" (58% interviewed), "neurotic" (54% interviewed), and "sensitive" (50% interviewed).<sup>72</sup> Though the Lutheran alcoholics identified with the Body of Christ as the family of God, they said their earthly family was found in A.A.

It is at this point that the confusion becomes more apparent. The term "spiritual" is applied to the Twelve Steps which call on God's help for recovery. In Lutheran language, even among pastors, the term "spiritual" is not often used, but when used it is generally in the context of one's relationship to the Triune God. This fact may be of no consequence. However, it is in A.A. meetings and fellowship, which are built on the Twelve Steps, that confusion results. "Spiritual" is identified with "working the steps" and the "fellowship of the program."

The "connection" to the concept "spiritual" is made in Step Twelve, "Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps...", though the term "spiritual" is not used in the rest of the steps. Steps Two through Twelve imply a spiritual path to follow. (Although Step One is considered a spiritual step, and has a Biblical connection, the concepts, "powerless" and "unmanageable" can be used in a psychological sense to mean that one cannot control a



physical addiction once it has started, nor can one control and manage other people, places, and things.) The Twelve Traditions add the term spiritual only once, in Tradition Twelve, connecting spirituality as the foundation of anonymity. By the time the three sides of the A.A. triangle of Recovery, Unity, and Service are closed with the A.A. Steps, Traditions, and Concepts, A.A. literature refers to the foregoing as the "Spiritual Foundations."

The "Big Book," in the portion that is read at every meeting from the chapter "How It Works," states:

The point is, that we are willing to grow along spiritual lines. The principles [Twelve Steps] we have set down are guides to progress. We claim spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection.<sup>73</sup>

As Clergy person #3 stated, the literature gives mixed messages. Though the Twelve Steps do not intend to be anything religious, they contain talk of God in the text surrounding the Twelve Steps and Step Twelve refers to the other Steps as spiritual.

Though all the recovering Lutheran alcoholics had a proper Biblical and Lutheran understanding of God, Jesus Christ, the function of the Church, and Law and Gospel, they still received a mixed message when the term "spiritual" was used in the A.A. program. Since the term "spiritual" is not often used in Lutheran settings, it receives its major definition in A.A. for those recovering Lutherans who hear at almost every meeting that A.A. is not a religion but

spiritual.

The recovering Lutheran alcoholic connects "spiritual" with a relationship to God, with the Twelve Steps, and with the fellowship of recovering alcoholics. On the one hand the Twelve Steps are maintained as the spiritual road of recovery and connection with God, and on the other hand the relationship with Jesus Christ who has won salvation for them also gives Lutheran alcoholics "spiritual" meaning. As Clergy #3 stated above, the Twelve Steps give a double message.

Lutheran alcoholics, though they believe they are connected to Jesus Christ by faith, "feel" outside the Church fellowship. Besides, as seen in the next section, the Twelve Steps unwittingly emphasize a spiritual "law" as opposed to both Law and Gospel as taught by the Church. The Lutheran alcoholic, therefore, can receive a message at almost every meeting that the Twelve Steps speak of some spiritual truths about God, and this kind of spirituality somehow seems more genuine to him.

As an example, a recovering Lutheran, Alcoholic #11, (not in the above sample) of eleven years sobriety, reported to this author that he had been raised in a Lutheran Church, went to a Lutheran School, and had many relatives and friends at his congregation. Over two years ago he quit the church because he "felt the real spirituality was all I needed and it is right here at A.A." However, he was

troubled by an empty feeling, like something was missing, though he followed the A.A. program as best as he could. Since he heard it often said that the A.A. program is all the spirituality he needed, on the basis of his intellect he said A.A. provided enough spirituality. (He does still read Portals of Prayer, a Lutheran devotional booklet, on a daily basis).<sup>74</sup>

In much the same way, but not central to this report, non-alcoholic Lutherans can receive a non-spiritual message from a Lutheran congregation that overemphasizes programs and principles outside the pale of Law and Gospel. Sometimes, as apparent in some interviews, this can lead to a reduction of the Gospel either in practice or even in belief. This consideration is valuable as the church and the pastor plan styles of ministry for the recovering alcoholic.

The recovering Lutheran alcoholic is highly conscious of the place of sin as the central problem of his alcoholic illness and conscious of the results of staying in that condition. He hears the Law very clearly. The recovering Lutheran alcoholic also realizes his need for the Gospel as he hears it in His Lutheran congregation. The Gospel becomes confused because official interpretations of the Twelve Steps speak of God's grace and forgiveness, when in actuality the Steps apply the Twelve Steps as Law. The alcoholic is left with the close fellowship of A.A. on the

one hand and the thirst for the Gospel in Word and Sacrament on the other hand. When it comes to the church the alcoholic finds the comfort of Word and Sacrament, but he is not offered the same kind of fellowship he finds in A.A., though the church may intend to have, or maintain that it has, fellowship. Then too, people in the church may view the alcoholic indifferently or negatively.

In summary, Law and Gospel become confused for the recovering alcoholic who follows the Twelve Step Program, not only because mention of Christ is omitted, but also because A.A. and the church seem to be in conflict over the practice of spirituality. In Church, the alcoholic identifies his spiritual faith with belief in Jesus Christ. A.A. calls the Twelve Steps "spiritual" and these Twelve Steps are in practice Law that sounds like Gospel--law directed by man. This, coupled with the difference in the experience of fellowship between A.A. and the Church, seems to be at the heart of the confusion. The spiritual principles of A.A., meanwhile, are tightly encased in the Traditions of A.A. and supported by the group conscience, which alone is the "spiritual" voice of A.A.

None of the above is to indict A.A. as an invalid program, a bad program, or a program that seeks deliberately to mislead. The participant does not need to "agree" with the group conscience that repeatedly emphasizes spirituality. Simultaneously, as I shall indicate, the

recovering Lutheran alcoholic can participate in A.A. to his benefit if a way is found clearly to communicate Law and Gospel to the alcoholic in his church context.

## CHAPTER II

### A THEOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF THE TWELVE STEP PROGRAM OF SPIRITUAL RECOVERY

#### The Twelve Steps and Their Relationship To Natural Theology

If A.A. is not a religious denomination yet calls itself a spiritual program, exactly what is it? Charles Knippel concludes that A.A.'s concepts, though derived from a mixture of Christian theological thought created by the Oxford Group, can be viewed by the Christian as though it were derived from the natural knowledge of God. A.A. can thus be viewed as a gift from God for mankind:

Alcoholics Anonymous can be regarded as having the power to produce recovery from alcoholism because it can be viewed as a gift of God like other gifts derived from the natural knowledge of God. Even though Alcoholics Anonymous derived many of its beliefs from the theology of a Christian movement and not solely from the natural knowledge of God, this approach appears to be a strong possibility because A.A.'s beliefs are in large part expressions of those beliefs that have been identified as flowing from the natural knowledge of God.<sup>75</sup>

#### Does A.A. Belong Under Natural Theology?

The use of the natural knowledge of God in A.A. is a distinct and likely possibility. The question remains whether A.A. truly belongs in the realm of Natural Theology.

Luther's Small Catechism describes man as having a natural knowledge of God from the existence of the world and the testimony of conscience. Man has an knowledge that there is a Higher Being and knows that there must be a moral code for behavior. The Small Catechism refers to Psalm 19: "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork, Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge." (KJV) and also Romans 1:19, "That which may be known of God is manifest in them [the Gentiles]: for God hath showed it unto them." (KJV)<sup>76</sup>

Natural knowledge of God does have the cosmological argument that this world must have a Creator to make the world orderly. Natural knowledge of God also has an aesthetic argument based on the beauty of creation as requiring a loving God. In the realm of the natural knowledge of God, however, one can use much language about God and attribute many characteristics to God without defining God.

Reflective of the natural knowledge of God the Twelve Steps do call God the "Higher Power" and the A.A. literature states that God is the Creator and Father of all. The first step, which states the alcoholic's "powerlessness," and the subsequent A.A. literature which marks out self-centeredness as the cause of the alcoholic's problems, attests to the knowledge of God through conscience. A.A. literature mentions sins and "wrong doing" that alcoholics may have

committed against others.

In regard to "defining" God, the Scriptures, as the revealed knowledge of God, specifically identify God and his name. The Old Testament, in Exodus 3:14, says God is known as "Yahweh" (in the Hebrew original) or "I Am Who I Am" (in English translation), to distinguish the real God from all the other concepts of God. The New Testament, in John 10:30, declares that Jesus reveals God as His Father ("I and the Father are one.") Furthermore, Jesus in John 10:9 reveals all of God's plans for salvation through Himself as the Son of God ("Whoever enters through me will be saved.") A.A.'s Twelve Steps use a manmade God of one's own understanding and use general descriptive language about God with a concept different than that of Yahweh or the Triune God.

Can God then use A.A. for His purpose, even if it expresses natural theology? Yes, God can move in mysterious ways such as through psychology or A.A. as will be seen.

A prominent recovering Lutheran layman says that A.A. is "God's instrument for the alcoholic," and "He [God] rushed to my side and led me to A.A."<sup>77</sup> God indeed can will to do whatever He desires whether among the believers or the unbelievers. Perhaps God will help the alcoholic through a temporal blessing, such as A.A., by keeping him sober for a time. During sobriety, the A.A. may have an opportunity to hear the Gospel. It is God initiating the



action, not man.

When this Natural Theology concept is applied to A.A., its members would respond by stating that A.A. is not a religion nor is it associated with the Scriptures. Having stated such, A.A. seems to remove itself from any connection with both the natural knowledge of God and the revealed knowledge of God in Law and Gospel. Yet A.A. still calls on a Higher Being who is the Creator and who is loving.

#### A.A. as a Stepping Stone

According to both clergy and alcoholic authors, some of whom were interviewed for this project, the Twelve Steps can be an aid toward a more complete knowledge of the Christian Gospel precisely because they can be seen as falling under the doctrine of Natural Theology. A.A. does mention many things about God. In the "Big Book" and the "Twelve and Twelve" it states that God has power and will, that He is Creator, the giver of new life, full of grace, our Father, the giver of blessings and the motivator of good works from faith. These are general truths about God that many people express who are seeking to understand God without the benefit of His Biblical revelation.

These truths can be referred to in making a witness or a defense of Christianity at A.A. meetings. Christmas with "new birth" and Easter with "new life" are often popular topics around A.A. tables. The opportunity does exist for any Lutheran to make a witness for Christ in the A.A.

context.

For example, the following could be given:

I know we all have a special feeling at Easter time because of its emphasis on resurrection and hope. Though I know I now have new hope because I have been sober, this has an even more special meaning for me because I believe in Jesus who rose on Easter morning. I believe he has wiped clean my slate of all the stuff I've done wrong and through His rising from the dead He has shown He's defeated all the sin and wrongdoing of my past. Not only that, He's given me a lot of new hope, not only for being sober but also for being given the gift of faith by Him. So not only do I have a new sober life, for which I'm grateful, but also that God has given me a new spiritual life through His Son.

The use of the first person remains within the parameters of one's own opinion and also opens up the opportunity to express more clearly the real Law and Gospel meaning of Easter. If this subject would come up in an informal way, such as a one on one encounter, more detail could be added. In addition, questions could be asked to discover where the other person is in his thinking about God.

#### Attempts to Explain and Use A.A. Religious Concepts

How helpful is it to understand A.A. as though it were derived from a natural knowledge of God and to use it as a stepping stone? In studies of this possibility there is divergent thinking as to how A.A. "appears" in a Christian context.

Dr. Anderson Spickard, a committed Christian who is the medical director of Vanderbilt Institute for Treatment of Alcoholism, comments on the Twelve Step process and A.A. when he says:

Despite A.A.'s unparalleled success with alcoholics, some Christians avoid participating in its program because of its seemingly vague spirituality and the use of phrases such as "Higher Power" and "God as you know Him." These people are convinced that the only bona fide recovery programs are those that name Jesus, and when Jesus doesn't specifically get credit for the alcoholic's sobriety, they have trouble believing that the recovery is legitimate.

From my perspective as a physician, this view is shortsighted. Alcoholics Anonymous has helped thousands of alcoholics from all religious persuasions, and Christian alcoholics have no trouble understanding the "Higher Power" as the Lord Jesus. I have never known any alcoholic whose faith was damaged by the spiritual program of A.A., but I know dozens of Christians who first committed themselves to Jesus Christ because of their contact with Christian A.A. members and because of the spiritual progress they made by following "The Twelve Step." As one recovering alcoholic told me, "Alcoholics Anonymous won't get you to heaven, and it can't keep you out of hell, but it can keep you sober long enough to make up your own mind."<sup>78</sup>

Dr. Spickard's point is that the content of A.A.'s Twelve Steps may be accepted as expressing a natural knowledge of God and they can be a stepping stone to Christianity, as stated earlier. St. Paul used this concept, in Acts 17:16-34, when he mentioned the Athenian "Unknown God" in his preaching to the Athenians. The Athenians acknowledged some sort of God and had a reasonable legal and ethical code. Paul portrayed the true God as becoming known as the One who sent Jesus, His Son, to die for us. Paul used the example of the Athenian "Unknown God" as a "stepping-stone" to proclaim the true Gospel. The realm of Natural Theology can be a stepping stone, not as a part of Biblically revealed knowledge, but as a special way

in which man recognizes there must be a Higher Being.

For example, if we would accept the program of A.A. as a well-proven and well-tested concept of psychological support to maintain sobriety, which also happens to suggest some sort of natural knowledge of God as important, it is likely an opportunity may exist for making a witness of the pure Christian Law and Gospel. A connection can be made as to what in reality God and His power are all about.

There may be a problem in how this connection is made. The quote from Dr. Spickard, above, supporting the use of A.A. in bridging the gap to genuine Gospel presentation, is from the Resources for Christian Counseling series, edited by Gary Collins. In the context of his presentation it is understood that a Christian counselor is present with the alcoholic to encourage the alcoholic to have contact with the Christian faith and the Christian church. A Lutheran, or any Christian, who desires sobriety may or may not have connections with a Christian counselor or a Christian church. With the added influence of a legalistic spirituality found in the Twelve Steps, the recovering Christian may feel that this way of spirituality is all that is necessary. There are many examples, like the young Lutheran man described in Chapter I, who decided that A.A. spirituality was all he needed.

It may be justifiable to view A.A. as belonging to the realm of Natural Theology but that approach may not always turn out to be a positive element in A.A. The element of natural knowledge of God in the A.A. Twelve Step program does not necessarily lead to faith. After all it was Paul who brought the revealed knowledge of God to the Athenians, who previously had not discovered that knowledge of God after they built their "Unknown God" altar. Those in A.A. need a committed Christian to make a clear statement as to who God is, and simultaneously the Christian needs to refrain from trying to communicate in, or give credibility to, the confusing theological language of A.A. literature.

For example, if I, as a committed Christian (defined as a person who has saving faith in Jesus Christ), were to read the "Big Book" I might naturally reinterpret it in Christian terms. A manager for the International Lutheran Hour, who is a recovering alcoholic, reports that his "Higher Power" automatically became Jesus Christ and that "when I finally turned to Him and the Spirit of God worked a new faith in me, my life took on a real meaning for the first time."<sup>79</sup>

If I were not a committed Christian or were non-Christian, I would probably treat A.A.'s spiritual program with a negative attitude, and at best use the "spiritual" program as a psychological extension of my will power that "finds" a Higher Power and projects upon this Higher Power the power to keep me sober.

On the other hand, the A.A. spiritual program could cause me to think and seek out the answer so that when I hear the Gospel message I will receive it with joy because I hear that I have been received by my heavenly Father. I will find the answer to my search for a genuine spirituality in the Gospel whether I read about it in the Scriptures or hear it proclaimed to me in another clear way through preaching, personal witness, tract, or mass media. Then I will learn that it is God searching for me and calling me through the Gospel, not me finding God through my own effort. Therefore, if A.A. is to be of any genuine use as Natural Theology, the members must come into contact with the pure Law and Gospel.

#### Further Attempts to Explain A.A. Religious Concepts

Coming into contact with Law and Gospel does not always happen, even with committed Christians. As an example, John Keller, a Lutheran pastor formerly with the alcoholic rehabilitation program at Lutheran General Hospital, Park Ridge, Illinois, and holding tenure on the faculty of Rutgers, addressed some of the above issues. In his study of the Twelve Steps he carefully separated A.A. and the Twelve Steps from religion, Christianity, and salvation from sin, but then, in an attempt to integrate the Twelve Steps with Biblical truths, used the same language for both when he wrote: "[The] Twelve Steps are marks of inspiration," and "A.A. is a way of salvation from alcoholism."<sup>80</sup> Keller

then made the point of the necessity for the alcoholic to participate in Word and Sacraments and join the fellowship of the church for a fulfilled life.

Unfortunately Keller's approach sidesteps the clear use of the Gospel in creating and sustaining justifying faith. Keller also gives credibility to A.A. as some sort of revealed knowledge of God, rather than as one of His temporal blessings to help people become sober. As shown in the interviews for this study and the reference literature, though recovering Lutherans are well indoctrinated in Lutheran theology, the constant repetition of A.A. as a spiritual fellowship also leaves a mixed message about the "fellowship of the church." It appears from the interviews that this is the case. Often the weak point in the congregation ministry is in the area of Christian fellowship and the recovering alcoholic is attracted to that place, in A.A., where he does find the fellowship for which he is looking.

There are numerous different kinds of reactions to the Twelve Steps because of their use of Natural Theology concepts. Some people react with distaste to this mixture of different spiritual connotations in the Twelve Steps and disregard the program as important for the recovery of alcoholics. Some Christian fundamentalists decry the Twelve Steps as tools of the devil.<sup>81</sup> Those in the middle attempt to integrate the Twelve Steps with Biblical concepts and

completely ignore the problem of the recovering alcoholic trying to make sense of the double message that results. Other people may not realize that the A.A. program displays only a natural knowledge of God, made confusing by the unclear use of Christian terminology. The alcoholic needs direction and explanation about the relationship of A.A.'s Natural Theology language and Christian faith.

There are many examples of how the "Natural Theology" use of the Twelve Steps becomes distorted in different directions by many who study the A.A. program. On the one hand, general commentators on spirituality, such as M. Scott Peck, tend to make spirituality a New Age style of finding God "within us,"<sup>82</sup> a concept sometimes used in A.A. settings. It is worth noting that the theology of Peck and others is rapidly gaining popularity. An example of this New Age theology is expressed in the following:

One way or another, these concepts [grace] have been set forth before--by Buddha, by Christ, by Lao-tse, among many others...The fact that there exists beyond ourselves and our conscious will a powerful force that nurtures our growth and evolution is enough to turn our notions of self-insignificance topsy-turvy...This something [force] we call God...the reality of grace indicates humanity to be at the center of the universe...God is the goal of evolution.<sup>83</sup>

In another attempt to find a middle road, Duane Mehl, a recovering Lutheran alcoholic clergyman, writes:

If we have any feeling for God as the "force controlling the world, " then let that force become active in our life. Whatever we think God to be, we must let that God control our life. We must stop thinking or believing that we have control over our life or that we manage our life. <sup>84</sup>



This quotation equates a natural knowledge of God with the Triune God thus overstepping Lutheran doctrinal bounds. Many people in A.A. circles are using their own effort to create a power outside themselves since the true nature of God cannot be found outside God's revelation.

There are different reactions by alcoholics. Within A.A. circles one often hears talk about man charting his own recovery. The comment, "This is a selfish program," is frequently heard at A.A. meetings. This issue of a selfish or self-sufficing attitude is quite controversial within A.A. Many newer members use this jargon. They usually are the ones who have come through treatment centers where they have been taught self-sufficiency. Those who have been in A.A. for a long time express an uncomfortable feeling with the selfish and self-sufficient attitude. Early A.A. members express the more traditional grace and power of God alone in making one sober.

For people such as Pastor Mehl, in reporting his recovery, his A.A. experience is enriched and strengthened through his belief in the Gospel. His A.A. program offers him fellowship and suggestions for leading a good life which Pastor Mehl reinterprets in the context of his Christian faith. Other recovering people may not be that clear about A.A.

## How Recovering Lutherans See The Twelve Steps in a Natural Theology Context

Not all recovering Lutherans reinterpret the Twelve Steps in the context of their faith. There is the earlier example of the young Lutheran man who quit the church after eleven years of sobriety because he was taught real spirituality was in A.A. There also are the reflections of the alcoholic interviewees who expressed confusion over true spirituality. It is as if alcoholics find parts of spirituality in the Word and in the context of the Church, but find other parts of spirituality in A.A. likely because the church may be deficient in the area of fellowship, a concept equated with spirituality by alcoholic and non-alcoholic interviewees. The ideal set forth by commentators of the A.A. program, which relate Biblical principles in a beautiful way to the Twelve Steps, is not the reality for people receiving another constant message weekly at A.A. meetings.

Those who have done much work, like Pastor Mehl, in reporting on A.A. and its relationship to Christian faith are not to be criticized precipitously. He himself acknowledges Christ as the only Way:

If we leave Christ out of our lives, however, we leave everything out...God cannot be found within our culture at large. God can be found only in Christ and in the fellowship and sacraments of the church...My best 'secular' friend told me repeatedly that he believed in a "Higher Power" and tried to turn his life over to it. But he couldn't come to terms with a God who entered history at a particular time in a person with a particular name--who lived, died, and rose, and asked

for a response to those actions...Since I [Mehl] couldn't pray to 'H.P.,' I had to do what my emotions led me to do: pray to God through Christ..When I [Mehl] began each day to see myself mirrored in the person of Christ, I began by his grace and power to recover from my failures.<sup>85</sup>

Mehl and others have made their recovery program work in a marvelous way. Not all are able to achieve this ideal. It is fortunate that the recovering Lutheran alcoholics interviewed had a strong grounding in Lutheran doctrine, so that they themselves reinterpreted their recovery process in a true Christian context. Others, such as a Christian alcoholic interviewed by Dennis Morreim, expressed fears of relating their faith in terms of relationship to Christ.

In Morreim's book, The Road to Recovery, an alcoholic, Gunner T., talks about accepting God as his Higher Power and he refers to Christ. What is omitted from Gunner T.'s quotation in Morreim's book is included in Morreim's original doctoral dissertation: "But in A.A. I never mention Jesus Christ or the Holy Spirit. Sometimes that bothers me because I feel like a hypocrite."<sup>86</sup> Many Christians may be hesitant to explain who God is because of the A.A. emphasis on a general spirituality and disparaging remarks about religion made by A.A. adherents.

The Twelve Steps must still be viewed in the realm of natural religion and cannot and will not communicate truths about God consistent with the Law and Gospel as presented in Scripture. Scripture clearly teaches that God's Law condemns us for our sinful rebellion against God and that

the Law cannot save us. The Gospel is the good news that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, sacrificed Himself on the cross in payment for our sins and the curse of the Law. Further, what may come out in the use of the Twelve Steps, though a Christian participant has a correct view of the Triune God, is a reduced Gospel and a possible distortion of spirituality. What is meant by reduced Gospel is the omission of the sacrifice of Jesus because of our sins. Instead we try to do good by obeying the Law and then feel God, who is love, will accept our efforts instead of the sacrifice of Christ.

#### An Example of an Attempt to Apply The Twelve Steps as a True Christian Lifestyle

The Twelve Steps are reduced Gospel because they teach that God accepts our good efforts at living a better life rather than the need for Christ's atonement (the reunion of offended God and sinful mankind, earned by Christ's obedience unto death). The following example shows what happens when the Twelve Steps are applied to a person's life. In the Bible we are told that God has full responsibility for conversion (God's turning man from sin and unbelief to faith in Christ). Once converted, a person's life changes. One Bible phrase (Matthew 7:16) says, "By their fruits you shall recognize them," to show that a Christian's life has been changed through the gifts of faith and justification. Paul, in Galatians 5, also

contrasts fruits of the flesh and fruits of the spirit.

In this example we make the observation that sanctification (defined as the Holy Spirit, by faith in Christ, renewing the heart so the believer can overcome sin and do good works) is a growth process, unlike justification (defined as God no longer charging or imputing sins to us, but declaring us righteous) which is instantaneous in terms of salvation. Since we are still pulled by the reins of the sinful flesh, in addition to the reins of the Spirit, we do not live out a life of perfection. Since we are not perfect it is difficult to judge another individual who may stumble in his growth process.

If the Twelve Steps are truly God's working of the new life in the alcoholic, as A.A. claims, we would notice some moral and behavioral changes, though not perfection, in a person's life. However, generally the changes one notices in A.A. participants are changes that are more in conformity with civil law, societal mores, and common courtesy.

Current civil law, societal mores and common courtesy may allow for language, viewpoints and actions concerning sex, and attitudes toward others that are not consistent with God's Law. This "openness" in our society is quite often in direct disobedience to the "rest" of the Law of God. If the Twelve Steps are truly the power of God at work in granting saving faith and moving people to perform good works, one should observe individual people beginning to

conform in regard to almost all of the parts of God's Law. Instead many A.A. adherents change in areas covered by civil law and societal mores, while still using bad language, engaging in immoral sex conduct, and expressing bad attitudes toward others.

Another example of reduced Gospel is that of A.A. co-founder, Bill Wilson, who still expressed an unChristian attitude and practice toward sex long after he became sober. This explains why he wrote:

Now about sex. Many of us needed an overhauling there. But above all, we tried to be sensible on this question. It's so easy to get way off track...One set of voices cry that sex is a lust of our lower nature. Then we have the voices that cry for sex and more sex...One school would allow man no flavor for his fare and the other would have us all on a straight pepper diet. We want to stay out of this controversy. We do not want to be the arbiter of anyone's sex conduct. We all have sex problems. What can we do about them?...We subjected each [sexual] relation to this test--was it selfish or not?

To sum up about sex: We earnestly pray for the right ideal, for guidance in each questionable situation, for sanity, and for the strength to do the right thing.<sup>87</sup>

What Wilson says may sound good. A practicing Christian could interpret it according to the Sixth Commandment and God's institution of marriage. But it is also possible to interpret what Wilson says, for example, as including living together without benefit of marriage with only one person at a time, or having sexual relations only when one is committed, or striving to be unselfish in a heterosexual or homosexual relationship. Certainly one can be unselfish in these options! None of those options disregard current

civil law of most states (unless one has sex with a minor), current societal mores, or common acts of courtesy.

There is a difference between living a life by Natural Theology and living according to the revealed knowledge of God through Jesus Christ and the Scriptures. It is imperative that the recovering Lutheran be able to distinguish the simple elements of Natural Theology from a mixture of confused theology. There is also the opportunity for the recovering Lutheran, realizing that A.A. can be viewed as an expression of Natural Theology, to be instrumental in providing a clear witness to the Gospel to those searching for God. This would fit into what A.A.'s call "Twelfth Step work" of sharing the program with others in need, a true ministry to both the physical and spiritual needs of others.

In summary, though A.A. can be seen as expressing the tenants of Natural Theology, it could be misleading to attempt to integrate the Natural Theology concepts of A.A. into the Biblical message of God's revelation. Natural Theology is not the same as or "like" what we have in church or the Bible. However, even though the language of Natural Theology is used within A.A., this does not necessarily mean A.A. does no good. What is imperative is knowing the participant could become confused, but only because he lacks an understanding of the difference between Natural Theology and Revealed Theology. The interviewees apparently accepted

Revealed Theology but were affected in their reactions by either being misunderstood by fellow lay people in the church or by not feeling included in church life. The church needs to respond to the needs of the alcoholic, and to all who have special needs, with the fullest measure of church life. The next section underscores the reality of Natural Theology within our culture and the need to be more responsive in ministry.

#### The Twelve Steps and Two Kingdom Theology

Placing A.A. in the framework of Natural Theology may be of some help in providing an understanding of A.A., the Twelve Steps, and the challenge of proclaiming clear Law and Gospel. In turn, Two Kingdom Theology, which is related in significant ways to Natural Theology, can add to our understanding of the contemporary dynamics of A.A. to further aid our task of clear proclamation of Law and Gospel.

#### The Lutheran Perspective

Concerning the Two Kingdom Theology, Lutherans teach that through the Kingdom of the Left hand of God, that is through governments and other orderly institutions of society, God can and does provide temporal blessings. These areas of the Kingdom of the Left allow for law and order, advances in medicine, science, and other learning, and useful commerce.



The Kingdom of the Right hand of God is the Church and the communication of the Gospel message through Word and Sacrament. The Kingdom of the Right may provide temporal blessings but its primary purpose is to provide eternal, spiritual blessings. Lutheran theologian, Edmund Schlink comments this way on civil and ecclesiastical government, which express the same tenets as Two Kingdom Theology:

It is legitimate for Christians to use civil ordinances, just as it is legitimate for them to use the air, light, food, and drink. For as this universe and the fixed movements of the stars are truly ordinances of God, and are preserved God, so lawful governments...are preserved and defended by God against the devil...The second table of the law, even in the distortion of the natural knowledge of the law, is the norm in the laws of the lawful pagan government...While the treatment of civil government in the Confessions does not answer more than this to the question about the norm of the laws and of the activity of legitimate government, we dare not forget that they do not give political advice to pagans, but profess the content of the church's proclamation about civil government.<sup>88</sup>

Schlink warns that the Lutheran Confessions speak against mingling the two:

Both offices are also mingled when civil power presumes to exercise spiritual power...The principle of not mingling the two offices [ecclesiastical and civil] is expressed in general terms and applies with equal obligation to each of the two offices over against the other...The prohibition not to interfere with the office of the other applies also to the civil government, and it was 'a serious neglect of the Lutheran theology of the past that it did not always and everywhere teach distinctly what consequences result from the principles of A.C.XXVIII, e.g., that according to the sense civil government must be admonished: Let it not abrogate the laws of the church; let it not abolish lawful obedience...' Civil government has no right to exercise spiritual power...the civil office develops into a pseudo-spiritual office.<sup>89</sup>

Because there was the mingling of the religious and the political in Luther's day by both the established Roman Church and Calvinism, he set about sharply to distinguish between the "Kingdom of God" and the "Kingdom of Caesar." This mingling was initially the intrusion of the Roman Catholic church in the civil realm. The Calvinistic movement would have the civil realm interfere in the ecclesiastical realm. The Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms' purpose is to provide a theological response wherever, whenever, and however there is the mingling of the two kingdoms.

Lutherans in America, though appreciating the freedom of religion, feel themselves alien to such a political spirit which often mingles the Two Kingdoms (or the civil and ecclesiastical realms). As mentioned in Chapter I, the teachings of Calvinism, which emphasized God's rule through both the church and the civil government, was extremely influential in the development of our nation. The fathers of the Missouri Synod rejected the moral assumptions of American political philosophy as incongruent with their theology.<sup>90</sup> In an essay Dr. Carl Meyer wrote:

Americanism contained in itself patriotic and religious strains which were taking on the complexion of a nationalistic religion. Apocalyptic and messianic aspects are found in it. With it is the concept that America is the 'darling of divine providence' favored by God with a manifest destiny and mission of its own...The extent to which politicians and governmental officials have used this mixture of patriotism and religiosity has raised serious questions in the minds of some students. 'Piety on the Potomac' has made for

an increase in the blurring of the distinctions between the functions of the church and the state in this country.<sup>91</sup>

The distinction between the Kingdoms of the Left Hand and the Right Hand of God is confused within our nation because of the historic identification of America as God's special instrument and as God's Kingdom on earth. The Scriptures point to the Kingdom of God as not being of this earth but of heaven. Christ rules His one invisible Church, both Militant and Triumphant. True salvation is found in what the cross of Christ symbolizes, not in a national people. The purpose of the state is to bring order to God's creation. It is an agent of God for the welfare of the body, not the soul. In this nation we often see a confusion of the two kingdoms, and we also see that reflected in A.A. In this way A.A., as a temporal blessing of God for the body, is often viewed as speaking to issues of the soul.

#### Difficulties for the Recovering Alcoholic Regarding the Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms

Almost every alcoholic, of course, would have difficulty in distinguishing between the Two Kingdoms and between natural theology and revealed theology. Those concepts are not part of our daily living, and, as both my ministry and the interviews attest, even the active Lutheran Christian is not always aware of them. The difficulty for the alcoholic begins when he admits his powerlessness. He discovers through A.A. that only a "Higher Power" can

restore him to sanity. From the beginning the recovering alcoholic is on a spiritual journey of recovery and most generally this will begin in a treatment center or through the kind efforts of someone in A.A. Keep in mind that the alcoholic is also ordinarily either unchurched or, because of his or her alcohol usage, disconnected from the church. By the time many alcoholics reconnect with the church they have already found a spiritual recovery in A.A.

#### A.A.'s Place in the Kingdom of the Left

If we return to the Twelve Steps, which have a vague notion of spirituality, and take note of A.A.'s principle that the whole purpose of the program is to help people stay sober, perhaps we can place them in the Kingdom of the Left. Hypothetically, if everything relating to God were removed from the Twelve Steps, we would be left with a support group designed to help people give up alcohol and lead a better life. This fits into concepts of God's Kingdom of the Left Hand providing order and temporal blessings through an organization in society.

Recovering Lutherans may become confused by others in A.A. from a cross section of American society when they speak of spiritual matters, and most likely have been exposed to generalized religion. Even the problem of secularization in the public sphere is currently reflected in A.A.<sup>92</sup> A Christian, within A.A., can be free to believe, think, and even say whatever his interpretation and

use of the Twelve Steps may entail for him. The recovering Lutheran meets with different people with different opinions. This is no different than the Christian coming into contact with people of differing opinions, attitudes, and life styles in our public schools, government, work places and places of recreation.

#### The Challenge for the Recovering Lutheran Who Operates in A.A. as an Organization in the Kingdom of the Left

The recovering Lutheran is in a program that may prove to be a blessing to him. However he comes into contact with a world where people exhibit moral and immoral behavior and hold atheistic and religious ideas. The question for the recovering Lutheran is how he will interact with this diversity of views and values, just as he must decide how to interact with people on all levels of life. What will become clear for the recovering Lutheran is that the genuine spirituality and Gospel are found only within the Kingdom of the Right Hand. In this Kingdom God equips His people to function within the rest of the world, and to be a light and a witness to the Gospel. Meanwhile the recovering Lutheran takes advantage of God's providential blessings within the Kingdom of the Left, in this case, A.A.

Should a Lutheran participate in A.A.? There is nothing in A.A. that binds a Lutheran, or anyone else for that matter, to a certain belief except that they are powerless over alcohol. A.A. says of itself:

A.A. is not a religious society, since it requires no definite religious belief as a condition of membership. Although it has been endorsed and approved by many religious leaders, it is not allied with any organization or sect. Included in its membership are Catholics, Protestants, Jews, members of other major religious bodies, agnostics, and atheists.

The A.A. program of recovery from alcoholism is undeniably based on acceptance of certain spiritual values. The individual member is free to interpret those values as he or she thinks best, or not to think about them at all...Alcohol had become a power greater than themselves, and it had been accepted on those terms. A.A. suggests that to achieve and maintain sobriety, alcoholics need to accept and depend upon another Power recognized as greater than themselves.<sup>93</sup>

Also, in the pamphlet "A Clergyman Asks About A.A.":

Most members use this phrase ["spiritual side"] to describe the spiritual meaning of the Twelve Steps. Many alcoholics find sobriety even though they may balk at the need for help from a personal Deity. These men and women get sober because they have admitted that their drinking is unmanageable and that they need help--and because of the help they find in the sharing at A.A. meetings and the personal interest of older members...Others find that sobriety is attained more easily if they reorient their lives spiritually with special reference to the spiritual "disciplines" suggested in the Twelve Steps.<sup>94</sup>

The Twelve Steps are suggestions. A.A. states it has no opinions on any issue, and that the opinions expressed at meetings are the opinions of each individual speaker and not A.A. as a whole. An A.A. meeting reflects spiritual pluralism in that any person can have his own opinion on what constitutes his own spirituality and faith.

Lutherans live in a nation that maintains the philosophy of the free expression of religious thought. In some quarters people may wish this free expression of religious thought limited in public, a philosophy that is

allowable within the framework of our liberal democracy. As citizens we do mix with and work with all sorts of organizations and institutions, because we live in the Left Hand Kingdom. We make judgments in our environments whether we are compromising our faith or if in that place we have an opportunity to make a credible witness.

A.A. may present the danger for some individual to make it his religion. A.A. may become confusing because of its use of religious terms. At the same time a person can make any institution in our country his chief priority or may become confused by its principles. We could remove ourselves from this society, like the Amish. We could refuse the pledge of allegiance, as do some religious groups such as the Seventh Day Adventists.

We also can be spiritually fed through the Church, God's Kingdom of the Right, so that we can show forth the light of the Gospel in our proclamation and our living in the Kingdom of the Left. Lutherans can bring to light the meaning behind the providence of God within the Kingdom of the Left. The Lutheran view of spirituality is always connected with being in a state of faith and grace, which is bestowed by God.<sup>95</sup> This state of grace and faith always continues under the influence of the Holy Spirit who helps the Christian grow in his or her spiritual life through Word and Sacraments.

When we feel weak in our faith, we still must be strengthened by the Triune God through Word and Sacrament in the fellowship we have in the Kingdom of the Right and with fellow Christians who give us mutual support. The fellowship of Christians, that is, how Christians treat one another, appears to be the weak element that cause some recovering Lutherans to value more highly the fellowship of A.A. The Church may have the opportunity to strengthen its fellowship and communicate Law and Gospel to recovering Lutherans so they are not confused. We also need to be clear to state that the Twelve Steps do not reflect a right understanding of Law and Gospel. The following section gives particular emphasis to the relation of the Twelve Steps to Law and Gospel.

#### The Twelve Steps in Relation to Law and Gospel

There appears to be some congruency in a comparison of Law and Gospel with the Twelve Steps. After all the Twelve Steps speak of surrender to the Higher Power, confession, restitution and rules for good living. However, if the Twelve Steps are carefully compared to the Doctrine of Law and Gospel they confuse Law and Gospel by their use of the Law oriented language and Natural Theology, as mentioned earlier. In reality many recovering alcoholics do view the Twelve Steps as the "whole of spiritual living," which would encompass both Law and Gospel if we interpret "spiritual" as everything as needed for our relationship to God. Comments



are made at meetings that, "Everything I need to know is in the 'Big Book'," and "God is spelled G.O.D., which means Good Orderly Direction."

#### The Twelve Steps and the Law

The Twelve Steps speak in a legalistic way--a person is powerless over alcoholism and must produce a better life. Indeed the Law alone when applied to a person leads to either work-righteousness or despair, as Edmund Schlink comments:

'Others become blind and presumptuous, imagining that they can and do keep the law by their own powers...Hypocrites and false saints are produced this way' (S.A. III, ii, 3). Especially the First Commandment is eliminated; they 'look at the second table and political works; about the first table they care nothing, as though it were irrelevant' Ap. IV, 121; cf. 35). When the first table is segregated, the commandments of the second table are changed also. Works of obedience to the isolated second table are something entirely different from the obedience which God demands in the second table. They are merely externa opera civilia-politica-honesta, which in their outward appearance correspond to the works demanded by the law and which serve the preservation of civil life...In the place of the first table and, accordingly, of the entire Decalogue, man thus places the inventions of his natural religion, whose essence consists in beguiling men with an illusion of fellowship and peace with God apart from the atonement procured by Christ's blood.<sup>96</sup>

At the beginning, when the alcoholic knows he needs help, he is aware of his depravity before God by means of conscience. This leaves him nowhere if the alcoholic does not then hear the reason for the condemning nature of the Law, and then hear the salvation promise through the Gospel, as George Stoeckhardt writes:

Nothing is farther from the truth than to present the Law as an introduction to the Gospel, the effect of the Law as the beginning of the reform which is perfected in faith. The Law indeed is called, and truly is, 'our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ' (paidagogos), (Gal. 3:22). That does not mean to say that the Law brings the heart of man into a certain moral disposition in which it is receptive for faith and salvation in Christ.<sup>97</sup>

The alcoholic seeking recovery needs a review of the depth of the Law of God sometime early in his recovery, not necessarily to bring further condemnation and recrimination, but to help him realize the depth of his guilt before God. The recovering alcoholic has already realized despair, and despair is not a good work nor is it the basis for forgiveness. He does not have to recreate his emotional and spiritual agony for the benefit of onlookers, but must understand the full focus of God's Law. He can be reminded that:

The justitia civilis of which man is capable is, in the sight of God, neither good nor a cause for pardon. Therefore the extent of this enslavement of the will dare not be underestimated, as is done when the Reformation concept of 'will' is interpreted psychologically in accordance with present usage, perhaps by distinguishing emotion, volition, and intellect.<sup>98</sup>

#### The Twelve Steps and Forgiveness

The Twelve Steps ask that forgiveness be sought from God for the sins of the past, the sins of the day and the power of God sought to live better. This process is begun with Step Three when it is implied that we ourselves begin to turn ourselves over to the will and power of God. Step

Three implies that it is by man's effort that he can come into contact with the grace of God which has "always been there."

Forgiveness for the alcoholic is appropriated by his confessing of his wrongdoing. Steps Five, Six, and Seven leave the impression that as soon as the alcoholic confesses to God what he has done wrong and is willing to "turn it over to God" (though they may engage in a repetitive game of taking it back and turning it over again), that forgiveness is received from God. Thus man's "doing" is considered enough to receive forgiveness. Of course the matter of making amends and changing one's life is also emphasized. In the whole process the death and atonement of Jesus Christ for our sins is completely overlooked because of A.A.'s attempt not to reflect anything of the "religious." It is at the beginning of this trio of Steps (Five, Six, and Seven) that an alcoholic is told he may begin to feel forgiven."

The recovering Lutheran alcoholic, according to the interviews, appears to be clear about the subject of justification. However, it is a good idea for him to reflect upon both justification and sanctification in order not to be confused by comments made by others. Therefore it is necessary to reiterate that Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions teach forgiveness is accomplished only through the merit of the total obedience, the bitter suffering, the

death, and the resurrection of Christ our Lord, whose obedience is reckoned to us as righteousness.<sup>100</sup> It is not merely knowing this but as The Apology of the Augsburg Confession XXIV says:

It is rather the remembrance of Christ's blessings and the acceptance of them by faith, so that they make us alive [sed est meminisse beneficia Christi, eaque fide accipere, ut per ea vivificemur]<sup>101</sup>

If the recovering alcoholic misunderstands the Law of God, he will delve into works righteousness and misunderstand the Gospel, reducing it to a mere story. The spiritual experience which Bill Wilson talks about as necessary in overcoming the desire to drink is not the same as justification. Edmund Schlink talks about the use of such experiences when he discusses the psyche:

'Velle' in the concept of faith does not indicate a more precise psychological delineation of faith, but signifies the surrender and abandonment of the pysche to the glory of God. 'Velle', as bracketed with knowing, consenting, daring, relying, etc., does not safeguard the peculiarity of a specific psychic process, but it does safeguard the divine permission for the sinner to believe the promise, no matter what may distress him, be it the agony of despair, the distress of decision, or the torment of doubt...By using apparently psychological terms all accomplishments are in fact excluded, all sinners are invited, and every sinner is told that he has been completely surrendered to the grace of God and that he may expect and receive everything from this grace...Justifying faith is not a 'feeling'...But 'faith is conceived in the terrors of a conscience that feels God's wrath against our sins' (Ap. IV, 142).<sup>102</sup>

Even though Step Three talks about the will of God, the alcoholic is misled because he is actually invited to use willpower to find God, to turn his will over to God, and

uses his confession and his feelings in order to appropriate forgiveness. Through this implication the Gospel is in fact becoming a cheap grace--a grace discovered through man's knowledge and his own effort, as painful as he thinks self-revelation of wrongdoing may be.

### The Twelve Steps and Conversion

William James' Varieties of Religious Experience, referred to by A.A. founders as an example of how one finds spirituality, should not be given the credibility for outlining how one experiences God. It was Bill Wilson himself, having had a spiritual experience that he thought fit a type mentioned by James, who later wished to recreate this experience through LSD, with the outside hope that LSD could be given recovering alcoholics to provide a spiritual experience for them.<sup>103</sup>

With the history of LSD<sup>104</sup> in our culture, one can see that such manmade inventions cannot substitute for the real faith given as a gift of the Triune God. It might be noted that individuals in the 1960s and beyond who used LSD called the use of it a "spiritual experience." In fact, many hard drinkers will jokingly say they are having a spiritual enhancement when they are under the influence!

God has not ordained any other way to come to faith and true spirituality except through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The term "spiritual experience" was removed from mention in the Twelve Steps not too long after they were written, but

the idea of having a "spiritual experience" was still encouraged, and of course not spelled out since A.A. does not tell a person how he must work his program.

Rather change is made in our lives by God's Holy Spirit causing us to see ourselves as spiritually blind, dead and enemies of God, and seeing our own sinfulness as separating us from God. We see that Jesus Christ took all our sins upon Himself, became cursed of God in our place, and that it was our enmity with God which resulted in Christ sacrificing Himself for us because of His perfect love for both us and His heavenly Father and because of His perfect obedience upon our behalf. We learn that there is no effort of our own which can atone for our sins. One cannot excise alcoholism and its behavior from that which needs to come under the condemnation and grace of God through the work of Jesus Christ, and place such alcoholism in a special category to avoid "religious" overtones and finally imply that the whole experience is the same as the rest of God's work.

Though, as pointed out in Chapter III, the Twelve Steps appear to alter the doctrine of sanctification, they can mislead a person in understanding how he is saved. In effect they may nullify the entire doctrine of justification if the recovering alcoholic has not prior to this time come to faith in Jesus Christ as Savior from his sins and if the recovering alcoholic bases his whole relationship with God

upon that expressed in the Twelve Step program. For the recovering Lutheran not only does it sound confusing but additionally may lead him away from the cardinal Scriptural truths expressed through the doctrine of justification. Thus, as indicated in Chapter III, a clear understanding of both justification and sanctification is necessary.

Finally, the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions explicitly state that it is God's Holy Spirit which creates faith in the hearer through Word and Sacrament, and that it is only through faith which we can be saved. It was co-founder Bob Smith who set the stage for a "gradual acquiring of faith" and who studied the writers of all religions to derive from them his spirituality.<sup>105</sup> Smith's activity set the context for the interpretation of Twelve Steps along the same vein. The Lutheran Confessions do not in any place argue for the work of God's Holy Spirit outside of what we Lutherans know as the "means of grace," through the Gospel message and the power of the Sacraments of Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper. A review of C.F.W. Walther's Law and Gospel clarifies this matter. The following thesis of Walther applies to this project:

Thesis IX - In the fifth place, the Word of God is not rightly divided when sinners who have been struck down and terrified by the Law are directed, not to the Word and the Sacraments, but to their own prayers and wrestlings with God in order that they may win their way into a state of grace; in other words, when they are told to keep on praying and struggling until they feel that God has received them into grace.

Thesis XIII - In the ninth place, the Word of God is

not rightly divided when one makes an appeal to believe in a manner as if a person could make himself believe or at least help towards that end.

Thesis XVI - In the twelfth place, the Word of God is not rightly divided when the preacher tries to make people believe that they are truly converted as soon as they have become rid of certain vices and engage in certain works of piety and virtuous practises [sic].<sup>106</sup>

The above may apply primarily to the preaching of the Law and Gospel, but we can also see how this faulty mixture of Law and Gospel can be misleading in other spiritual or religious programs and literature.

#### The Result of Justification

The Lutheran Confessions state that new obedience is a natural and absolutely necessary result of justification. Solid Declaration IV, 12, of the Formula of Concord, a Lutheran Confession, says:

This the Holy Spirit works by faith, and therefore without any coercion a man is willing and desirous to do good to everyone, to serve everyone, to suffer everything for the love of God and to his glory, who has been so gracious to him. It is therefore as impossible to separate works from faith as it is to separate heat and light from fire.<sup>107</sup>

Faith, renewal and good works are together. The working of the Twelve Steps, if they are seen as good works, are valid only as the Christian exercises them in response to the gift of faith, the result of justification, and the instruction of God's Word. It may be that recovering alcoholics remember the problems they had with dishonesty, inappropriate anger, fears, and resentments. The recovering



Christian alcoholic's life under the grace of God may seek to give special attention to these areas, and if the Twelve Steps suggest giving attention to these areas of "character defects" they can indeed be helpful, but only as they work in concert with the individual's relationship to God through Jesus Christ.

The recovering Christian alcoholic talks about these areas of his life at a meeting with the knowledge and potential witness that he has been changed in some particular behavior or attitude through the power and grace of God in Christ Jesus. He may relate his struggles in these areas in reference to the pull of his "Old Adam" and his deliverance found in the "Second Adam." He will not say, when relating his struggles, that it is "the addict in me" or "the alcoholic in me" that is doing these things, but he himself is going contrary to the will of God (wrongdoing) and that God directs him in the right path. Werner Elert clarified the use of the Gospel for the above task:

The Pauline distinction between the new and old man reveals a new facet of the relationship of law and gospel in its application to ourselves. 'Sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace' (Rom. 6:14)...But how are the children of God supposed to live without law? The answer of the Gospels is clear: wherever the 'Holy One of God' enters, the demons are rendered speechless (Mark 1:24 f.). He assumes the role of 'master' for his disciples, i.e., he is the personal measure for all things...The disciple of Jesus no longer need be told that he ought not to practice idolatry, commit adultery, or bear false witness against his neighbor.<sup>108</sup>

(The question may be asked how the third use of the Law is

applied. The Law still functions as a guide for the redeemed because he is still pulled by the Old Adam. Because of this reality the "third use of the law designates its significance for the regenerate in his earthly empirical existence."<sup>109</sup>) What happens inside the redeemed recovering alcoholic when confronted with his sin (often referred to as "character defects" in A.A. circles, a term which neutralizes the damning effects of sin) is this, according to Lutheran theologian George Stoeckhardt:

A Christian, knowing Christ, at once flees from sin, Law, wrath, damnation, to Christ and seeks and finds in Him protection and grace. Whoever believes carries Christ in his heart, and when the curse and wrath of the Law, a real wrath, cut into his conscience, he reminds himself of his liberation through Christ from sin, curse, wrath, and thus extinguishes the fiery darts of the Wicked One with the shield of faith at the very moment in which he feels the heat within himself. ...A Christian takes sin, aroused by the Law, into his hand and prayerfully places it before God and signs out of his renewed heart, yes, in the power of the Holy Ghost, concerning the evil which still clings to him, saying: "Oh, wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24.) However, into this sigh is mixed the prayer of thanksgiving for redemption by Christ Jesus, our Lord, saying: "I thank God through Jesus Christ, our Lord." (Rom. 7:25).<sup>110</sup>

St. Paul, in Romans 7, puts it in words through which the recovering alcoholic and every other redeemed Christian can see himself:

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do...For what I do is not the good I want to do; no the evil I do not want to do--this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it...What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord!

As the recovering Lutheran alcoholic uses the Twelve Steps he keeps in mind his struggle with sin and his reliance on the strength and hope found in Jesus Christ who overcame sin and helps him change his particular behavior or attitude that is so troubling.

The Needs of Recovering Lutheran Alcoholics in The  
Twelve Step Program with a View to a Right  
Understanding of Law and Gospel

Exactly what does the alcoholic need for a better understanding of his faith, his spiritual growth, and the relationship of his recovery to his life in the church? The needs, of necessity, must be restated in consideration of the theological evaluation in Chapter II. The question of needs was addressed to all interviewees: alcoholic, non-alcoholic, and clergy. Careful listening was utilized at meetings and in speaking with other recovering Lutherans and numerous recovering Christians.

Recovering alcoholics mentioned several needs which they felt the church fulfilled by the following means: Word and Sacrament, the care of the pastors for the members, and the instruction in prayer life. The basic use of Law and Gospel was also understood and valued. Obviously a thorough understanding of faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ was treasured by most of the recovering Lutheran alcoholics. Their testimonies of faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior and how they saw His love move in their lives

through Word and Sacrament give credibility above all to the work of God's Holy Spirit and the clear proclamation of Law and Gospel by the Lutheran Church.

### The Need for Fellowship

The alcoholics mentioned a need for fellowship which they felt was missing in the church. They felt they belonged to A.A. but were only attenders at church.

The subject of fellowship is popular key element in the life of the church. Christian fellowship, according to Erwin Lueker in the Lutheran Cyclopedia, (revised) is:

The common sharing in the Gospel, in faith, and in other spiritual and mutual gifts. God creates it by calling us into fellowship or partnership with His Son, so that we share in all Christ's works, blessings, glory, and goods. It is a union of believers in Christ through fellowship of the Spirit. Christian fellowship involves participation in the experiences of Christ and of fellow Christians. Fellowship of the Spirit in Christ manifests itself in action. Its mark is love. It is a fellowship of feelings, a sharing of burdens, and a communication of help. It is activated by desire to bring others into its fellowship.<sup>111</sup>

Christian fellowship results when a person is called by the Gospel into Christ's one, holy Church and then joins with other believers around Word and Sacrament. The quality of fellowship of the people gathered around the Word and Sacrament may vary. A poor quality of fellowship does not diminish the fact that there is proper preaching and teaching of the Word in that congregation. However, the differences in the practice of Christian fellowship among members of a congregation may cause some people to call into

question the understanding and practice of sanctification in that parish.

At no place in this author's contact with churches involved in this project was it the case that a church was remiss in providing Christ-centered proclamation. This was further substantiated by this author's experience as a circuit counselor and long time pastoral ministry in the area. Certain members of different parishes reflected different degrees of Christian growth and maturity, but none of the parishes with interviewees appeared to have been severely deficient in the practice of Christian fellowship. Certainly some members of those congregations engaged in public unChristian conduct, but not to the point of discrediting the reputation of the congregation to which they belonged.

One may legitimately ask why we should even be concerned with fellowship as a need since it is secondary to Law and Gospel. The situation is two-fold: First, the recovering alcoholic is being confused by the mixing of the temporal and spiritual at A.A. meetings. He or she is constantly in a position to receive all kinds of mixed messages about spiritual life and conduct. For this reason there is a need to communicate the Law and Gospel to the recovering Lutheran alcoholic for a clear understanding of how we speak of God, the kind of language we use, and how clear the alcoholic is about how he came to faith, his

Christian life, and how it relates to others in the fellowship of the Gospel.

Secondarily, and more covert, is what happens if, in clarifying the issues mentioned in the previous paragraph, the impression is given that the spiritual fellowship of A.A. may not be genuine spirituality. At the same time nothing of similar nature to the close fellowship of A.A. may be found in one's congregation that would provide a clear Christian alternative to what the alcoholic finds in A.A. Conceivably the alcoholic would find good fellowship and caring at the A.A. meeting, but should find even deeper relationships in the fellowship of a Christian congregation.

The question of fellowship is important since lay people on a daily basis, live, work, play, and generally mix with others. People also desire to experience the same mixing in the church, which hopefully practices a Christian fellowship rather than just a social fellowship or no fellowship at all.

Christian fellowship, as defined above by Lueker and as indicated by Scriptures, below, begins with us being bound by faith in Jesus Christ with Him. As we are with others who have saving faith in Jesus, we become spiritual brothers and sisters. The focus of our Christian fellowship is our gathering around Word and Sacrament to receive forgiveness, strength and power from Christ, who alone can make such fellowship possible. From that focus our relationship with

our spiritual brothers and sisters in Christ is modeled by Christ in caring for one another, serving one another, bearing one another's burdens, and reflecting Christ's love to one another in all matters. This is accomplished through hundreds of specific ways from providing physical necessities to emotional and spiritual comfort, through prayer and listening, generosity and sensitivity, and in whatever way one can reflect Jesus Christ's love to another.

We are indeed encouraged by Scripture to gather with others around Word and Sacrament (Hebrews 10:25). We are also encouraged by Scripture to be in a caring relationship with other people (1 John 3:11-24).

This Christian fellowship blossoms and grows after the individual has been declared justified by God for Jesus sake through the gift of faith. It is then that the Holy Spirit begins his work of sanctification through the process described above. The Christian is now in fellowship with God through Jesus Christ. That fellowship is nurtured through Word and Sacrament. The Scriptures say that a new, spiritual being has emerged. Our relationship with God through Christ following our conversion is a spiritual experience or a spiritual existence.

Naturally, as pointed out above, we grow together in the Body of Christ, within the fellowship of fellow believers. That fellowship becomes spiritual in nature because it reflects our oneness in the Spirit of God.

Though Lutherans do not often use the term, "spiritual" or "spirituality" are best used in the realm of the Holy Spirit's ministry of sanctification that takes place within the fellowship we enjoy with God and with fellow believers. For the Lutheran that is true spirituality rather than some feeling of closeness and friendship with others.

While alcoholics may indeed have a fellowship with other alcoholics, it is not genuinely a spiritual fellowship unless it is rooted in Christ. Therefore a Lutheran alcoholic needs to be clear in terms of the meaning of fellowship, of spirituality, and in the true spiritual fellowship found in Jesus Christ and among faithful Christians. Because faithful Christians still carry sin within them, they still have the continued need for growth in the practice of their spiritual fellowship. Our true spiritual being will be fully restored in the image of God in heaven.

This matter of fellowship may cause some difficulties for the recovering Lutheran alcoholic. If the spirituality of the church does not appear genuine to recovering alcoholics, it may cause them to question why they should not value the fellowship in A.A. more highly than that of the church. From the alcoholic's perspective the church may in fact be doing exactly what a lot of unchurched people in A.A. complain about in their opinions at meetings: the church is more interested in rules and form than in



spirituality.

The book of James it says, "Faith without works is dead." This quotation is often used in A.A. meetings. A life of sanctification naturally flows from justification. From the alcoholic's perspective people in A.A. are honest, even though they may be honest by their own effort, but many people in church are not. The person may think, "Well, we can overlook one thing," but soon all the other "faults" of the church surface in glaring contrast to his relationships at A.A.

At this point it does not do much good for the pastor to say, "Well, we have to accept the good with the bad." The pastor may not have to live with other lay people on a daily basis. Rightly or wrongly, many lay people will place pastors in a special category and place them on a pedestal. Since lay people do not ordinarily put one another on a pedestal, words and actions are liable to reflect the glaring reality of sinfulness moreso than in the presence of a pastor. In turn, the recovering alcoholic may react with a degree of sensitivity to the words and behavior of others.

The non-alcoholics interviewed also attested that people and family relationships are very important in the church. One talked about the spiritual benefits of being connected with other people because of their relationship to one another in Christ (Non-alcoholic #1). The fellowship of the congregation is important to the non-alcoholic also.

What stands out is that the non-alcoholics mentioned their fellowship in church as most important, while the recovering alcoholics mentioned their own fellowship in A.A. as most important, even more so than the invitation of the church to be involved in the church fellowship. Certainly, as mentioned earlier, the roots of spirituality in faith and grace are nurtured within the Church, which is composed, visibly, of a fellowship of believers. Acts 2 points out clearly that from the beginning believers expressed the fellowship which they had with one another by daily gathering together for prayer, worship, instructions by the apostles and eating. This issue cannot easily be bypassed because the fellowship of worship and mutual care are essential to the life of the Christian. The necessity of dealing with this issue of fellowship and spirituality is underscored by at least three of the recovering alcoholics who emphasized that A.A. is more spiritual because there is deeper fellowship in A.A.

When members of the non-alcoholic control group were asked about their needs, they emphasized fellowship. Personal, caring ministry was listed as a priority and as the result of the Holy Spirit at work through the Word and Sacraments of the church. (Non-alcoholic #10).

Some members of the alcoholic group expressed a desire for more fellowship and working together in the church. In the section on the interviews I reported the criticism of

congregations for failing to do anything that involved people together in ministry. Others called for more education of the church about alcoholism and a ministry of helping each other in all their needs. "Too much material [concern about the physical looks] emphasis in the church" was the consensus of recovering Lutherans.

Yet most of these same people wanted the Church to be their focus, wanted fellowship, wanted to be part of a fellowship that helps others. Those were their priorities and the "people part" was being met in A.A. and not in the Church, where many of the recovering Lutherans felt it should be.

#### The View of Pastors on the Need for Fellowship

Pastors interviewed had mixed reactions on the subject of fellowship. Several pastors agreed with the recovering alcoholics that fellowship was lacking, though the pastors' viewpoints varied. Clergyman #3 stated that the alcoholic's concept of fellowship was too narrow; that fellowship is a fruit of faith. Certainly fellowship is a result of justification. Clergyman #3 further stated the alcoholic's concept of fellowship was narrow, but a look at A.A. fellowship "gives lie" to that premise. Fellowship in A.A. involves listening, sharing, helping, contributing of time, energy, and money, and outreach to other suffering alcoholics.

Along the same line Clergyman #4 criticized the

alcoholic for not allowing the fellowship to happen in the congregation. Clergyman #4 stated, "The church is not designed for that kind of fellowship." Clergyman #6 even remarked that the church is a different situation and fellowship is not necessary. He continued by saying, "The openness in A.A. is part of treatment. A congregation is geared for growth."

Others, like Clergyman #8, suggested the pastor help the alcoholic live with the situation, while Clergyman #10 encouraged the alcoholic to "come in and help." Clergyman #2, giving much thought, stated, "Help him see that the kinds of fellowship may be different. Fellowship is two ways. What can he give? Certainly the fellowship in A.A. is valid, but it is not your whole life."

Apparently clergy are not in agreement on the subject and at best are resigned to the fact that the lack of fellowship is a problem in the church and probably will not improve. One of the needs of recovering Lutheran alcoholics is for pastors to be more sensitive to fellowship and, for that matter, the fellowship of the entire congregation. The pastors need to take this need a bit more seriously.

#### The Need for an Understanding of Spirituality and Law and Gospel

A second need for the alcoholics mentioned above, is an understanding of what spirituality is all about. If there are actual examples of spirituality at work in the church it

will help make the explanation of spirituality more clear to him. Hopefully through the process there will be a mutual understanding that the congregation and the alcoholic need each other. Whether it be on the alcoholic's initiative or the congregation's initiative or both, it is necessary that the people of God be integrated into a caring fellowship.

In addition, the teachings of Law and Gospel need to be communicated as absolutes so that the alcoholic is sure what the Law and Gospel are all about. More than just alcoholism is at stake, since the alcoholism is an addiction that resulted from a person's way of coping with the disease of sin.

The recovering alcoholic needs direction to clarify for himself or herself the difference between A.A., which is to help a person stay sober, and the Christian Church, which has the means of grace by which God's Holy Spirit creates saving faith and nurtures a person in the faith and moves him or her to do God-pleasing works. In this way the alcoholic can see the "working of the Twelve Steps" in another light rather than succumbing to an implied legalism. The alcoholic also needs to have it explained why certain actions and behaviors that they may hear about at A.A. meetings are not acceptable. The patient application of the Law is needed with the promise of the Gospel.

### Other Knowledge Needs

Further, the alcoholic may need help in identifying Natural theology, New Age theology, issues of civil religion and secularization, as he or she may be exposed to them at an A.A. meeting. The proper distinction between Law and Gospel is important, as is an understanding of the doctrine of the two kingdoms.

### The Need for Christian Counseling

The recovering alcoholic may have a whole range of problems, the need to discuss past wrongs, the need to build relationships with people and the need to work through issues of shame and grief from a Christian perspective. The pastor can listen to the Fifth Step (the admitting to another person the exact nature of the alcoholic's wrongdoing) of the alcoholic as he confesses his wrongs. The pastor also can counsel the alcoholic in his family setting and make referrals to other professionals for more intensive treatment of the alcoholic's problems.

### The Need for Direct Intervention and Understanding

Pastoral intervention and support are needed at the beginning of treatment. When the congregation member seeking sobriety encounters the A.A. talk of spirituality, there is a need patiently to begin discussing the spiritual side of the program in light of Law and Gospel. The initial, obvious need is for the church to respond when the

alcoholic realizes he needs help, seeks help, or is beginning to receive help. The need is there for the pastors and the members more fully to understand alcoholism, related problems, and at least the basic function of a treatment center or of A.A. just as they would have some knowledge of a hospital or a civic organization.

Christians need to be more positive in their attitudes toward alcoholics. Lutherans may view too many people in recovery as persons who are somehow sick, weak, deficient, or fragile.

#### Witness Needs

There is the need for alcoholics to be empowered to be clear witnesses for Jesus Christ if and when such witness is appropriate. Alcoholics need to be motivated with a yearning to share their Christian spirituality with those who are in need of real hope. Attention needs to be given to welcoming alcoholics into the church. The need for focused evangelism and assimilation is there.

## CHAPTER III

### SUGGESTIONS FOR COMMUNICATING THE GOSPEL TO RECOVERING LUTHERAN ALCOHOLICS

This study initially focused on finding direction from the Word of God for helping recovering Lutheran alcoholics who are also in the Twelve Step Program. Without the proper Law and Gospel "direction," any kind of help to the recovering alcoholic will result in mere advice or moralistic and legalistic prohibitions. When we connect anything to the Christian faith and Christian life the source always needs to be the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. This includes clear Law and Gospel.

All this is to be taken seriously and actively pursued by the pastor or the congregation which initiates a ministry to recovering alcoholics. Too often the foundation of the revelation of God through Jesus Christ is seen only as a "theological backdrop" to the Christian life or an abstract doctrinal teaching to which we give lip service before we get on with life.

It is also possible to perform theological "overkill" in proclamation. Certainly the intricacies of interpretation and thought are necessary, as are the volumes



of dogmatics and Walther's twenty-five theses on the distinction between Law and Gospel. Scholars are needed to study and teach about Law and Gospel and pastors need to be well trained. With that depth of knowledge kept in mind, the focus here is on a practical theology. It is written for the lay audience to grasp and understand.

Communicating a Right Understanding of  
Law and Gospel

More theological clarity is required in communicating Law and Gospel to recovering alcoholics. First, the pastor and the Church need to be aware that certain strengths are already evident in the Church's ministry to and with Lutheran alcoholics. We need continually to build upon those strengths.

As evident from the interviews, the Christian doctrinal foundations, Biblical teachings, emphasis on liturgical worship, and proper instruction for and administration of the Sacrament are tremendous strengths of the Lutheran Church. These strengths have been obviously communicated through thorough instruction of both youth and adults. Most Lutherans clearly understand who Jesus Christ is and what he has done. Further, they understand what the Lord's Supper is about and the importance of worship.

These strengths have also been communicated through our worship life. The emphasis on the liturgical church year with Christmas, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost, have made a

meaningful impact upon most active Lutherans. The proper Lutheran use of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper stresses the doctrine of the Real Presence. The music and hymnody are also rich in Biblical teaching about all three persons of the Triune God.

These strengths have been communicated through a well trained and caring ministry. Pastors have been thoroughly trained in our seminaries in the areas of Bible interpretation, theology, and the communication of the Word of God through sermons and personal witness. The preparation of pastors for using strategies and techniques of education is perhaps a bit weaker, but the knowledge and clarity of the doctrinal content is strong. Lutheran pastors historically have been faithful in their dedication and service to God, in their faithfulness to the Lutheran Confessions, and in their care for the souls God has placed under them. Certainly pastors apply these strengths as they interact with members in general, and with those suffering from alcoholism.

There are some people who may not have had a thorough grounding in the Word. Some alcoholics may have dropped out of church because of their disease or may have been problem drinkers already when they underwent Christian instruction, participated in worship, and interacted with the pastor. Pastors and people are fallible, and many times people do "fall through the cracks" because of the human element

present in pastoral and congregational ministry. Perhaps the pastor did not explain something thoroughly or was going through a "dry period" in sermonizing. The liturgy of a particular congregation may have grown into mere habit with lackadaisical worship. Any number of other reasons can be given.

The ministry has two beginning goals of strengthening the positive proclamation already present and to reclaiming those recovering alcoholics who have not yet heard the proclamation of Law and Gospel. Timing and patience are two important factors in this action. Reclaiming will be addressed in the next two sections along with styles and methods of ministry to alcoholics. The strengthening of the Law/Gospel message will be addressed first.

#### Clarification of the Law

As was mentioned earlier, Lutheran alcoholics understood the basic use of the Law as that of telling us our wrongdoing and understood that the Law acted as a curb and rule. The purpose of the Gospel was understood to tell us the Good News of salvation through the Son of God, His death and resurrection.

What needs to be emphasized further in clarifying the Law is the connection between sinfulness and alcoholism. It needs clearly to be stated, as was argued earlier, that problems, illnesses, trials, and difficulties are a natural result in the lives of all people on account of original

sin. The abuse of alcohol, because it is a false god, further adds to the sinfulness of man in addition to idolatry of active addiction. Of course, as pointed out in Chapter I, once an alcoholic is addicted he always remains addicted even when not drinking. However, once the alcoholic quits drinking and finds peace and forgiveness through Christ as Lord of His life, the alcohol addiction no longer maintains its tenacious hold upon the person since (the Triune) God establishes Himself first in his heart, mind, and soul.

The pastor must be a good communicator. The pastor should visit with the alcoholic either prior to or during treatment, when he is released from treatment, and at least every other week for a brief period of time. In this way the pastor stays in active contact and can be prepared to address spiritual questions as they arise in the alcoholic's treatment or A.A. experience. Individual sessions need not be lengthy. The alcoholic will appreciate the care shown by the church.

Timing is very important in applying the Law. If one insensitively attempts to point out sinfulness, the alcoholic will become defensive and hear the pastor moralizing. If one attempts to apply the Law immediately after drinking stops, the alcoholic may be still in denial about his drinking problem, and react defensively.

Once the alcoholic learns more about his addiction, the

pastor can begin to show the sinful result from continuing an addiction of something that has replaced God. A good time to make this application of the Law to alcoholism and the sins committed by the alcoholic is during the alcoholic's work on the Fourth and Fifth Steps. At this point an explanation of the Law may be made in regard to alcoholism, sinfulness, and the difference between his active addiction and his progressive addiction while sober, a difference explained in Chapter I.

The alcoholic may choose the pastor to hear his Fifth Step, especially if the pastor has been in regular contact with him. As many alcoholics repeat their Fifth Step on an annual basis, or engage in periodical inventory taking (Tenth Step), a more detailed discussion can ensue. It is recommended that Christian pastors exclusively focus upon God's grace during the initial treatment stages, moving on to questions about issues of Law, sin and one's relationship with God issues three to six months into recovery.<sup>112</sup>

This recommendation is made because it takes many months for the alcoholic mind to become clear. Many studies have indicated five years of sobriety as necessary before the alcoholic thinks clearly about eighty percent of the time.<sup>113</sup> Otherwise he still may have a host of emotional and relational issues which get in the way of a clear understanding of himself in relationship to God.

If the alcoholic suffers from codependence (almost all do)<sup>114</sup> or other emotional issues, even more time is needed. Some authorities emphasize up to seven years of recovery if the individual has major issues such as abuse.<sup>115</sup> We keep in mind that the person is never completely cured of alcoholism. Patience and time are a very important factor. The alcoholic does not need to understand everything in a few short weeks. The pastor must be aware of when the alcoholic is ready for the next step in giving spiritual assistance.

#### Clarification of the Gospel

In addition to the Law, the emphasis of the Gospel needs to be clarified with regard to the difference between justification and sanctification. Often there is confusion concerning why one leads a good life, whether one should lead a good life, and what constitutes the difference between the sins of the Christian and the non-Christian. As mentioned earlier, none of the Twelve Steps addresses the problem of sin and the need for God's grace in Jesus Christ. Furthermore there is the tendency for the Twelve Steps to view God as simply a friendly spiritual being who makes everything perfect as soon as the alcoholic turns his will over to Him (Step Three).

First, the Lutheran alcoholic clearly needs to know and understand that he has been saved by Jesus Christ through baptism. When as the result of the Holy Spirit's converting

activity he confesses his faith in God--Father, Son and Holy Spirit--he is saved. As seen in the sample of interviews, generally this is not a problem for recovering Lutheran alcoholics. Perhaps credit is due to good Christ centered preaching and teaching. However it is necessary, especially as the alcoholic encounters Steps Two and Three, thoroughly to review all elements within the doctrine of justification. This is precisely for the reason of potential confusion on the alcoholics' part as discussed throughout this study. The alcoholic can especially have his attention drawn to the preaching of the cross and the portions of the church year centering on the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The interviews have shown that this has had an important impact upon several recovering Lutheran alcoholics.

More specific problems may arise of which the pastor needs to be aware. My experience suggests that many Lutheran alcoholics are initially confused by Steps Two and Three and may be led to mix the message of those two steps with justification. The alcoholic's thinking is, "I was not saved until I took Steps Two and Three because only then I found a Higher Power. Before that, alcohol was my Higher Power." Treatment centers fuel this thinking by trying to explain to the alcoholic that first he must believe that a Higher Power can help him (Step Two) before deciding upon a concept of a Higher Power. It is good to be aware that A.A.

and treatment centers have a natural linear thinking pattern and methodically take one step at a time, in progressive order. If the recovering Lutheran alcoholic says he believes in the Triune God (perhaps because prior to this he thoroughly was indoctrinated by the church) the reply, by those working with him, may be that this is unacceptable because of the inference that before this time he did not accept a Higher Power. It is in Step Three that the alcoholic is coached to develop a concept of a Higher Power and often encouraged not to become too hasty about it, for whatever reason.

From this we see that A.A. is very traditional and conservative. The danger is that the person new to sobriety might get disgusted at what others in treatment centers and in A.A. are teaching him and go back out to drink. If he does drink, others in A.A. might call this self-centeredness and close-mindedness. It is a Catch-22 situation since, in defense of his beliefs about God the alcoholic drinks, he in fact is letting the power of alcohol hold sway over him rather than the Triune God.

If the pastor is clear about the steps of A.A. he can step in and encourage the recovering Lutheran alcoholic to progress patiently. The pastor can go over those areas covered by the doctrine of justification to reassure the recovering Lutheran alcoholic that his faith is grounded in Jesus Christ, whose power alone can restore the alcoholic.



Perhaps the alcoholic can be coached first to admit that a Higher Power can restore him to sanity. He may already know in his heart that it is the Triune God, but for the sake of the understanding of those working with him, he may break it down into two different statements repeated several days apart, if they prefer that method.

It is especially important that the alcoholic be instructed to use the term "God" rather than "Higher Power." It is true that God is some kind of higher power, but the term "God" is preferable. God does have a name by which He is called. Individually the pastor reminds the alcoholic that the term "God" refers to the Triune God. By using the designation "Triune God," we do not here mean the pastor must explain the Trinity. Rather the term is used here to emphasize that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, rather than some general higher being. Creation, redemption (justification), and sanctification are all emphasized by our use of the term "Triune God." Because A.A. is not the church, different agnostic and atheistic alcoholics may use other different "higher powers," even though these powers are not the Triune God. That situation in itself may provide a future opportunity for a witness to the Triune God. Meanwhile the pastor can work with the alcoholic, assuring him of Christ's redemption, the power of baptism and the Holy Spirit's activity through Word and Sacrament.

The working of the Twelve Steps poses another difficulty for the Lutheran alcoholic in the area of the Gospel. A.A. first introduces God as a Higher Power, in the next step talks about turning one's will over to the Higher Power, and then encourages the recovering alcoholic to "take one step at a time." The alcoholic can be left with the impression that he is going through a process in order to be in good standing with God again. There is a complete lack of understanding the depravity of sin and the necessity of sacrifice by the Son of God. Furthermore, the Christian faith does not translate God's activity of conversion into such a series of steps which communicate something man must do in order to be converted.

The important consideration for the pastor, working with an alcoholic recovering in A.A., is to stress that all of a Christian's faith and understanding does not have to be tied up in several neat lessons or steps. It is a life-long growth begun at the time when a person places his faith in Jesus Christ as Savior from sin. Pastors also need to adjust to that understanding if they are of the type of pastor who like to find fast solutions to problems. If there is one thing the church can learn from A.A., it is patience and working with a person when that person is ready.

Robert Kolb in Speaking the Gospel Today argues for this very point in the presenting of a Christian witness to

the needs of people over a period of time and after discovering their spiritual needs.<sup>116</sup> Almost every New Testament letter, discourse, or sermon usually adds something to the effect that the apostle continued to instruct, exhort and talk with people over a period of days and weeks. Following the clarification of the Gospel, issues of Christian living can be addressed to the alcoholic.

Here is where the pastor can relate the Christian life to the term "spirituality" which the alcoholic hears in A.A. Gradually the idea of true spirituality can be communicated to the alcoholic. True spirituality consists in being in the correct relationship with God, who accepted the once-for-all act of sacrifice of Jesus for the sins of mankind.<sup>117</sup> True Biblical spirituality is focused on justification through Jesus Christ. This definition of the Biblical nature of spirituality can be of great help to the alcoholic who hears the term "spiritual" in A.A. which may mean something different to every user of the term. Once again, the alcoholic redefines the term in his own Christian context, rather than meshing it with all sorts of general definitions and he begins to bridge from justification to an understanding of sanctification.

#### Clarification of Sanctification

The doctrine of sanctification needs to be made clear. Sanctification can only be understood after a person has

come to faith in Jesus Christ and his sacrifice on the cross (justification). The pastor should make sure the recovering Lutheran alcoholic is clear in all matters relating to justification. The alcoholic also needs to disregard the confusing language used in Steps Two and Three, and disregard the phrase "God as we understood Him." As mentioned in Chapter II, he needs mentally to restate these steps in terms of Law, Gospel and justification as he hears them spoken at the A.A. meeting.

As the Lutheran alcoholic, mindful of the teachings of the doctrine of justification, works the Twelve Steps he becomes aware as to how he is living the sanctified life. After the alcoholic has gone through several of the beginning steps and is in the program for a little while the pastor can speak with the alcoholic about the Christian life. A good time will be following the Fifth Step, as mentioned previously, since that point is equivalent to opening up about one's life. At this point the alcoholic confesses wrongdoing and seeks absolution. The pastor will then have discussed matters covered by the doctrine of justification and can then emphasize that all good works, including those listed in the Twelve Steps, are a result of faith. The Twelve Steps can only be truly worked, in a beneficial way, by one who has been justified through faith in Christ Jesus.

It is apparent, from the interviews, that this connection between justification and sanctification needs to be made. It may be just the bridge the alcoholic needs for discovering the fellowship within the church, rather than solely in A.A. This can be implemented in several practical ways that involve the fellowship of the congregation. The recovering alcoholic should be encouraged to become part of a small Bible study group and be involved in some kind of helping ministry with others, such as the aged, hungry, and needy. This helps him to begin to focus on helping other people and turns his attention away from himself. He also will find it quite rewarding.

At the point where the pastor begins to involve the alcoholic within the fellowship of the congregation, an introduction should be made of the recovering person to a caring individual or two within the congregation that understands the alcoholic. They will be the prime people to be with the alcoholic at a Bible study group or in some helping ministry. In this way a bridge is being developed into the fellowship life of the congregation.

The pastor needs to help in an ongoing way as the alcoholic attends A.A. meetings. In Chapter II, reference was made to sources that relate the Twelve Steps to some Biblical teaching or passage, or which explain the Twelve Steps as examples of the Christian life. It has been seen that these methods of relating the Twelve Steps have been

confusing because they attempt to integrate the Twelve Steps with Christian teaching. Such comparison may be interesting and fruitful for reflection but it would be far better to pick some model or models from the Christian life itself upon which to consider the Christian use of the Twelve Steps.

Christians are exposed to much literature about how to lead the Christian life, plus good secular literature which gives direction toward decent and happy living. The Twelve Steps can be suggested as not the same as the Ten Commandments but a good resource to reflect upon for decent and happy living. The Bible itself is the best resource, but Christians have used other helpful literature and suggestions down through the ages, including the personal stories of individuals concerning either their living or their Christian faith. Healthy Biblical models are the best place to begin.

One might model the Twelve Steps according to the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer. For example as the alcoholic "works" the steps he can think of what the Lord's Prayer or the Ten Commandments teach about turning his life over to the will of God, the supremacy of God above all else, prayer and worship of God, and how we live in relationship to the neighbor. In a special way Step Ten encourages the alcoholic to live according to standards that remind one very much of elements of the Ten Commandments.

As the alcoholic reads and discusses this step, he can reflect or reinterpret it according to what he knows the Ten Commandments to say. Thus it reinforces his Christian faith rather than give another message that "sounds like" the Christian faith.

Another model to be used in the alcoholics self-reflection in A.A. can be relating the Twelve Steps to elements of Luther's Small Catechism. We are encouraged to continue to use this catechism in our daily living. Instead of merely focusing on the first three steps as written, the Lutheran alcoholic may remind himself of the First Commandment, the First Article, and the Third Petition which speak more clearly about who God is, the nature of God, and the will of God. A discussion of the Fourth and Fifth Steps may cause the Lutheran alcoholic to remember the preferred clarity of Confession and Absolution.

Rather than A.A.'s confused spiritual language in the Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Steps, the Lutheran alcoholic can bring to mind the richness of the Second and Third Articles on justification. The Sixth and Seventh Steps also can remind him of most of the Ten Commandments, and all the exhortations for living the life of the Spirit in the New Testament. The Eighth, Ninth, and Tenth Steps remind the alcoholic of his neighbor, and he can reflect on the Ten Commandments and see his need for making amends based upon Scriptural principles. The Eleventh Step encourages us to

remember regular worship reminding us of the Third Commandment, the Lord's Prayer, and the Sacraments. In discussing or reading the Twelfth Step the alcoholic remembers Christian outreach and specifically the Third Article and the Second Petition.

The Lutheran alcoholic always brings to mind his anchors that are found in Scripture rather than the "Big Book" or "Twelve and Twelve." He avoids saying the Twelve Steps are "like" anything in Scriptures or the Catechism. Rather the Lutheran, as he learns about the Twelve Steps, is reminded of the richness of Scripture or the explanation in the Small Catechism. He thus learns how to reinterpret or reprocess the Twelve Steps and other recovery literature in the language of his faith. When the alcoholic speaks about any of the Twelve Steps he then finds it easier to speak in terms of his Christian faith rather than the cliché ridden language of A.A. He continually reprocesses the recovery process into genuine Law and Gospel "language" which give valid reason for his sobriety and life. As the alcoholic progresses with his sober life, the pastor, in individual sessions, can guide the alcoholic in this Christian approach to the Twelve Steps.

In sermon proclamation the pastor will go beyond presenting a mere biography of Jesus, but help the hearer encounter Jesus, participate in his living and loving, share his dying and rising, grow in intimacy with him. The Gospel



lessons are invitations to know Jesus, and knowing him is eternal life. The hearer needs to know that Jesus is in our midst, healing, comforting, welcoming sinners and outcasts, confronting those who lay heavy burdens on other people's backs.<sup>118</sup> Besides proclamation, the alcoholic can be given opportunities to grow in Christian education as the pastor fulfills his teaching role.

#### Clarity in Teaching

The pastor can be instrumental in teaching the alcoholic how to be patient and clear when it comes to distinguishing Christian faith and the Twelve Steps. One thing an alcoholic is not, is clear. In fact he has a tendency to mesh yesterday, today and tomorrow into one thought. He often thinks and speaks at random. He is what we call unfocused. This is not to say that others are not unfocused, including pastors!

For example if, as a pastor, I am having a Bible Class on prayer I may be reminded of hymns, worship, prayer books, and lots of things that relate to prayer. If I go off onto those related subjects I lose the focal intent of the lesson. It is best to focus on one thing at a time instead of going off all over the place. Most pastors can identify themselves as people who have struggled with being unfocused and with this keen awareness can patiently help the alcoholic to be more clear and focused on elements of the Christian faith. In this way the pastor begins to clarify

the Gospel as to how the alcoholic is saved from his sins if that be his immediate need, or teach the alcoholic how to live the Christian life (sanctification).

The best way the pastor can accomplish this task is to invite the alcoholic for a refresher new member class. In most churches there are always regular church members who avail themselves of such an opportunity. He can then describe in brief private meetings the relationship of doctrinal material to the Twelve Steps, as we are describing in this section.

A second element of clear teaching is distinguishing authentic Law and Gospel from Natural Theology. The alcoholic can readily learn about, in the explanation of the First Commandment and First Article, a natural knowledge of God. Examples can be used to identify how this natural knowledge is expressed in various organizations and institutions of our American culture. The pastor makes it clear that the Twelve Steps and their talk about God is not the same as the Triune God of the Scriptures.

In an ongoing way the Christian alcoholic needs to be aware of other denomination's teachings, new age theology, Satanism, perhaps other faiths, and other kinds of religious aberrations. He can quickly identify them, or at least note that something is out of the ordinary for which to ask explanation from his pastor, so that he can be clear about his own faith in the context of Scriptures. This can be an

opportunity to prepare for a Christian witness as the alcoholic begins to mix with society.

If the pastor has been to A.A. meetings he can become familiar with the phrases, slogans, and sayings. The same ones have been around for years and are perpetuated through the literature that groups use, such as the Twenty-Four Hour a Day meditation book.<sup>119</sup> For example, one of the many thoughts in that book, which is almost standard fare for every alcoholic, is "God is within me." A thought like that can be misleading or it can be Scriptural. Who knows what any one person means who uses that phrase. However, it is a common saying around A.A. tables. Those phrases and sayings need to be discussed so as not to be misconstrued when heard according to any number of different interpretations.

In the interview process one Lutheran alcoholic used the phrase, "God is in everything." I took that phrase and asked each clergyman what he thought about it. Some thought it was a good statement and others thought it was pantheistic. One or two said they would find out what the speaker meant. Once again, we are cautious not to take too much for granted instead of discovering first what the speaker means.

A third element to clarify for the alcoholic is the destiny of one who has been justified. The converted individual is brought into the the Body of Christ, through baptism. The importance of the Body of Christ, the

Christian Church needs to be emphasized because it is the body into which the Gospel calls us. This helps define how the Holy Spirit is active in the Word through calling of by the Gospel. This helps define how the Holy Spirit is active through the Word in the Church which the Gospel calls us. In the Church we are in a renewed fellowship with God through the atonement of Jesus Christ. Having been gathered into the Church we also have a fellowship with others who have been brought to faith in Jesus Christ.

The whole meaning of the holy Christian Church and the visible church which gathers around Word and Sacrament needs to be carefully explained (the Small Catechism itself provides the best explanation) for an understanding of how the redeemed fellowship together. How this fellowship will be lived out with others in the visible church is the one big challenge facing those who minister to recovering Lutheran alcoholics. A section below addresses this.

Pastoral Resources for Communicating the Law and Gospel to Recovering Lutheran Alcoholics

Some solid educational resources for use with the alcoholic are available. The pastor would do well to work through a special workbook with the recovering alcoholic entitled Rapha's 12-Step Program for Overcoming Chemical Dependency.<sup>120</sup> This workbook is a comprehensive Christ-centered approach with a large amount of Biblical material

for self-application. This is not meant to substitute A.A.'s Twelve Steps, but rather to help the pastor and alcoholic work together on Biblical reinterpretation of the Twelve Steps.

Good Christian devotional material can be suggested (or given) to the recovering alcoholic instead of the standard fare which mixes together a multitude of religious and theological ideas. The Serenity Meditation Series, available in most Christian book stores, have day by day devotions for recovering alcoholics, and other books for people recovering from almost every kind of addiction or abuse. They are all Christian and Biblically oriented, with a tinge of Millennialism, but far better than what is in the standard recovery fare. The ones for alcoholics are written by Christian psychiatrists, Paul Meier and Frank Minirth.<sup>121</sup> Meier and Minirth emphasize the complete and free grace of God and atonement through Jesus Christ. The occasional references to the Millennium or the Rapture can be pointed out to the alcoholic and explained.

It is my contention that a specific program format for work with the alcoholic would be difficult to lay out. Every alcoholic, pastor and congregation is different. Throughout this paper are various theoretical and methodological suggestions which may help the pastor format his own individual approach. The Christian literature referenced in this paper is extremely helpful for the pastor

to use with both the recovering alcoholic and with the congregation where appropriate for educational purposes.

Some pastors may wish to have in hand a Christian interpretation of the Twelve Steps. This may give them some thought as to what to talk about with the recovering alcoholic when they sit down and work through the steps. Following is a suggested Christian rendition of the Twelve Steps with some Bible references appropriate to the Christian version. This is not meant to substitute A.A.'s Twelve Steps nor to attempt to apply the Bible to A.A.'s Twelve Steps. The theological reasoning against attempting to integrate the Bible with the Twelve Steps has already been addressed.

A.A.'s Twelve Steps, except for those references to spiritual matters which are contrary to Christian teaching, are still seen as helpful only for suggestions of good living for the Christian who has been saved through faith in Jesus Christ. Here is a Christian presentation of the Twelve Steps, with Biblical references from the New American Standard Bible:

1. We admit that by ourselves we are powerless over alcohol--our lives have become unmanageable. "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not." (Rom. 7:18)
2. We come to believe that God, through Jesus Christ, can restore us to sanity. "For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." (Phil. 2:13)
3. We make a decision to turn our lives over to God

through Jesus Christ. "I urge you therefore, brethren by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship." (Rom. 12:1)

4. We make a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves. "Let us examine and probe our ways, and let us return to the Lord." (Lam. 3:40)
5. We admit to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs. "Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed." (James 5:16a)
6. We commit ourselves to obedience to God, desiring that He remove patterns of sin from our lives. "Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you." (James 4:10)
7. We humbly ask God to renew our minds so that our sinful patterns can be transformed into patterns of righteousness. "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." (Rom. 12:2)
8. We make a list of all persons we have harmed, and become willing to make amends to them all. "And just as you want men to treat you, treat them in the same way." (Luke 6:31)
9. We make direct amends to such people where possible, except when doing so will injure them or others. "If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to you brother, and then come and present your offering." (Matt. 5:23-24)
10. We continue to take personal inventory, and when we are wrong, promptly admit it. "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." (1 Cor. 10:12)
11. We seek to grow in our relationship with Jesus Christ through prayer, Word and Sacrament, praying for wisdom and power to carry out His will. "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him

ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind." (James 1:5-6)

12. Having had a spiritual awakening, we try to carry the message of Christ's grace and restoration power to others who are alcoholic, and to practice these principles in all of our affairs. "Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted." (Gal. 6:1)<sup>122</sup>

There are many other things that a pastor can do to help the alcoholic. Initially, he should accept the alcoholic as he or she is. Not that he must condone the wrong that alcoholism can produce, but rather accept that the alcoholic is sick and needs the redemptive activity of Jesus Christ in his life.

There are some things the pastor can avoid: moralizing, simplistic platitudes, confusing salvation with recovery, trying to get the alcoholic sober himself, and giving up if the alcoholic resists his approach.<sup>123</sup> A.A. suggests certain approaches the pastor can make:

1. Recommend A.A. to the alcoholic for help.
2. Urge the alcoholic to keep an open mind in A.A.
3. Stress that A.A.'s primary purpose is to help drinkers maintain sobriety.
4. Remind the drinker that A.A. represents a cross section of society.
5. Assure the drinker of personal anonymity in A.A.
6. Help him to understand that according to medical evidence he can never drink again.<sup>124</sup>

The pastor may be interested in knowing where the alcoholic is spiritually. What follows are some suggested questions which the pastor can discuss with the alcoholic.



He may want to format it so that the alcoholic can fill out his own answers to the questions before discussing.

What are your most important relationships?  
When have you experienced broken relationships?  
What significant losses have you had?  
How do you feel about yourself?  
How have your religious activities been helpful or troubling to you?  
What is your relationship with God?  
How has alcohol affected your values and behavior?  
What are the most painful areas of your life?  
Which of the following do you think affect or hurt you the most:

- low self-esteem
- distrust
- defiance
- phoniness
- self-centeredness
- overwork
- resentments
- feelings of shame
- fear/worry
- pride
- need to control
- loneliness
- hopelessness
- self-pity
- dishonesty
- sexuality
- anger
- guilty feelings
- stubbornness
- irresponsibility
- procrastination

What have you done that you feel badly about?  
What have you done that you feel good about?  
Describe your prayer life, your worship life, how you view Jesus Christ, and your general spiritual history.

The pastor can discuss any of these matters which appear important within a Christian context. The above should give the pastor enough material to work with for a long time as he seeks to communicate clearly all the elements of Law and Gospel in a personal way with the recovering Lutheran

alcoholic.

### Education of the Clergy

The importance of education for the clergy in regard to alcoholism and A.A. is paramount to any kind of ministry. Looking at it from his viewpoint, the pastor may feel that this is not a necessity because he thinks he rarely comes in contact with an alcoholic, sober or using. If he does believe that he never comes into contact with an alcoholic he should consider whether he is really in touch with the needs of his people. It is estimated that eighty-five percent of Lutherans drink and one out of eight adults in America is alcoholic.<sup>125</sup> It is also estimated that one out of five Lutheran families is affected by an alcohol abuser.<sup>126</sup> The concern is that pastors are suppose to shepherd those God has placed under His care. Just as the Chief Shepherd, Jesus, knows His sheep, the undershepherd pastor must also know the sheep.

If the pastor really knows his sheep he knows the problems of alcohol abuse. Many pastors have come up through the Synodical system and the cultural German or Scandinavian Lutheran community which fosters drinking. If the pastor drank a lot in his college days, or still does so to "relax," he is apt to be lenient with those he shepherds who also enjoy drinking, perhaps even to excess. He will not see excessive drinking as a problem and rationalize it

away.

Through this author's experience with alcoholics and alcoholic families, especially among Lutheran pastors, it appears that many pastors indeed do rationalize away the problem of excessive drinking. This author is aware of at least five clergy families in the Metro-East area who have exhibited an alcohol abuse problem in recent years and one family who reported a former abuse problem. None of the families, except one, would admit there ever was a problem. Most of them rationalized the amount and usage for themselves and then projected that rationalization upon their lay people as the "cause" of the pastor's need for alcohol in order to relax.

Another factor that often blinds the pastor from noticing a person with a drinking problem is that many people will be careful around church and church functions if they have a problem with drinking. Problem drinkers are smart enough to know how to look good, but not able to see their denial about having a craving for alcohol. They may have two drinks with the church crowd and go home and have several more, or limit their drinking with those who approve of excessive drinking. Does the pastor know these people exist? One pastor reported in the interview that no one in his 400 member congregation had a problem with alcohol (Clergyperson 4). However, considering the statistics about

Lutherans who drink, the high level of drinking of the community in which the church was located, its German cultural heritage, plus the goodly number of recovering Lutheran alcoholics in the area, his assumption may be in doubt.

The pastor needs to be educated about alcoholism on two levels: the seminary and during his service in the parish. When curriculum is planned for the Seminary program chemical dependency may understandably not be of primary importance since knowledge of alcoholism is not a core requirement for a well rounded ministry. Right now it is an elective in both of our seminaries. The elective is good for a very basic foundation. Chemical dependency does need to be stressed in the required pastoral counseling course. Perhaps a text on alcoholism could be required reading for the required course with at least a couple sessions dedicated to alcoholism.

Vicarage bishops can also be sensitive to training the vicar by showing the vicar his own type of ministry with alcoholics. If the vicar has not had a chance to attend an open A.A. meeting as part of a seminary course, vicarage is his opportunity to do so.

Once the pastor is in the parish he should avail himself of a thorough study of alcoholism by attending several open A.A. meetings and freely asking questions. If there is a recovering Lutheran alcoholic in his parish the

pastor can learn also from him. Most treatment centers offer pastoral seminars in alcoholism that are excellently done.

Of course nobody can require a pastor to do anything outside of his basic call. However, district presidents and circuit counselors can continue to encourage pastors to become informed and alcoholism can be the topic or study of a circuit meeting or district pastoral conference. With a systematic approach, eventually the clergy will become well trained in this area.

Good references for understanding the Twelve Steps would be the first 164 pages of the "Big Book" and "Twelve and Twelve." These two books, plus others dealing with alcoholism, would be excellent additions to the church library. Reading these two books, attendance at A.A. meetings, plus speaking with at least some recovering alcoholics, even if they are not Lutheran, will help the pastor better understand the alcoholic.

Through education the pastor's attitude toward alcoholics, and A.A. can begin to change. Another Lutheran denomination, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS), is also a conservative church body. The attitude of their pastors is commendable as one representative WELS chaplains says of A.A.,

Alcoholics Anonymous has developed the support group concept and applied it with considerable success. AA has its pros and cons but not many groups have done as well as AA. There is a need to retain contact with the

member who goes to AA. Of major concern is AA's so-called "god." Without Christ the program develops self-righteousness. Whether the pastor refers individuals to AA or not, members would do well to make use of the program. The pastor will need to supply what is lacking in AA and what it does not intend to supply, namely, the particular individual's understanding of God. [The pastor] must reinforce principles of AA biblically, taking people through the twelve steps and making applications to them as Christians. [Meanwhile] alcoholics need help with their immediate problem.<sup>127</sup>

The author gives clear direction for a theological and common sense approach for pastors to learn in their ministry to alcoholics.

#### Priorities for Ministry

The education of the pastor in the subject of alcoholism and in the needs of parishioners is important. Using that education in a practical way is essential. A caring pastor who diligently ministers to people through Word and Sacrament goes a long way toward helping Christians in solid growth. This, of course, is not just for the alcoholic but for all people. Word and Sacrament were identified as the number one priority in ministry by most interviewees, alcoholic and non-alcoholic alike. Problems result when parishes prioritize money making, material things, church government, and statistics instead of people concerns.

In those parishes the pastor would do well to review his goals of ministry and help the congregation clarify its goals. With his knowledge of the members and with clear

goals for his ministry he has a key function in helping the alcoholic. The pastor may be one of the first, outside of an immediate family member, to realize that a parishioner has a drinking problem. Because of this knowledge he may find himself involved in an intervention, that is, in the confrontation of the alcoholic by those who are most affected by his drinking.

#### Intervention

The pastor is in a unique position to be in contact with the alcoholic in that unlike other professionals he has access to his members any time of day and any day of the week. He may know several generations of the same family, and may know the family dynamics very well as the family goes through different developmental stages and different crisis. Therefore he is in a unique position to help with an intervention.

An intervention is a confrontation of the alcohol abuser by those who are most affected by his drinking. It should only be done with the instruction of an intervention counselor from a treatment center since it requires skilled practice. If none is available, contact should be made with the local district answering system of Alcoholics Anonymous (in the phone book, white and yellow pages). Explain the situation to the answering service and await instructions.

Generally the A.A. answering service will instruct the caller to wait until the problem drinker is receptive to

help, usually during the hangover, and they will send a couple recovering alcoholics over to visit him. The pastor and the client's family need not be present, and probably should not be. It is said that the unique success of Alcoholics Anonymous is the sharing of one recovering alcoholic with another person who is an active drinker. After one or more visits the people from A.A. may take the problem drinker to a meeting, if he is willing to go.

If the problem drinker goes to an A.A. meeting the pastor has a marvelous opportunity to be supportive of the alcoholic from the start. If the pastor is educated in understanding the Steps, has patience, and gives his time to supportive listening, a lot can be accomplished in bridging some of the potential Law and Gospel problems mentioned in the preceding chapters.

Supportive listening is a method where neither sympathy or advice is shown or given. Rather the pastor, as listener, simply hears and accepts what the alcoholic is saying. Questions for clarification are good, but one must be careful they are not leading or manipulative--for example trying to discuss God's Law in the very first encounter because the pastor feels it is so very important. The newly recovering person may not be quite ready to discuss Law and Gospel. He may just be trying to stay sober. Nor on the other hand, should the pastor simply let A.A. take care of all the alcoholic treatment and forget about the person.



This will help exacerbate the alcoholic's problems with fellowship and the organized church later on. Rather the pastor continues his support through Seelsorge (the pastoral care of souls) and counseling.

#### The Pastor as Confessor

Part of the initial Seelsorge ministry by the pastor will be that of confessor. The alcoholic, in his Fourth and Fifth Steps, is encouraged to admit to God, to another human person, and to himself, all of his past wrongdoing. This is quite an undertaking, and many alcoholics are quite serious about this. The alcoholic, in giving ("giving" is the term alcoholics use in this context) his Fifth Step, may take anywhere from one to five hours, and sometimes more! The pastor is in a unique position to offer the comfort, grace, and forgiveness of the Gospel, plus pastoral understanding and encouragement to the alcoholic. This process is important as Walter Koehler writes:

Acknowledging one's sinfulness in vague generalities does not cut to the quick, and admitting one's sins to God alone, from one's own slanted perspective, may be relatively painless. However, the situation undergoes a drastic change when confession is made before another person. That other person in all his concrete corporeity reminds us both of the seriousness of our sins and of the reality that we have not sinned against some nebulous "divine power," but against the "living God."<sup>128</sup>

The pastor then may give the absolution. In the absolution the Cross of Jesus Christ is central. In seeing the cross, all pride is destroyed in the alcoholic and in

the confessor, as both together humble themselves before their Savior, Jesus Christ. Since confession and absolution doctrinally "connect" with justification, it is at this point that the pastor can begin to share all the grace and love of Jesus Christ with the penitent alcoholic. As pastor, the confessor also exercises the Office of the Keys, which further empowers the penitent alcoholic. Here is where Law and Gospel come together: the Law destroying all pride and revealing all sin, while the Gospel pronounces God's complete forgiveness through Jesus our Savior.

#### Counseling

Besides that of being confessor to the alcoholic, counseling is important. Two approaches to counseling are important with the alcoholic. The approach the pastor can best employ is that which was mentioned, Seelsorge--the care of souls. Seelsorge is the accepted form of counseling for Lutheran pastors in a parish setting as the noted author of a pastoral theology book, Armin Schuetze, writes:

Pastoral counseling is that pastoral care (seelsorge) of individuals as they face their problems, troubles, griefs, burdens, fears and illnesses, which involves not simply giving advice, but assisting them to find help and healing from the word of God.<sup>129</sup>

The pastor can make himself available in an informal way for guidance, spiritual encouragement, attention to the alcoholic's family, availability for questions, encouragement in worship and the like.

The other approach to counseling falls into two

categories, individual and family (relationships). If the pastor practices Seelsorge he may be providing all the individual counseling that is necessary for the alcoholic. A.A. provides the rest with a sponsor, meetings, and contact with other recovering alcoholics. From these sources the alcoholic receives guidance, direction, and suggestions for sobriety and sober living. The alcoholic does his catharsis with other alcoholics or with the A.A. group.

More serious emotional problems for the individual alcoholic, early in his recovery, generally fall into disorders described by DSM III-R,<sup>130</sup> that commonly include depression, anxiety, manic-depressive disorder, and others. For these problems the general parish pastor is usually unprepared and should refer them to the proper psychiatrist if medical treatment is needed, or to a trained therapist.

It is at the point of referral that the pastor can help. If the alcoholic came through a treatment center, the pastor can direct him to that center for referrals to a proper resource as the center usually has a list of counselors that recognize the problems of alcoholism. It would do well for the pastor to make note of the resource people who do understand alcoholism.

The pastor may also wish to refer to a Christian counselor. At this stage, Christian counseling need not be a priority, since the therapist will be treating a specific disorder. The pastor in his Seelsorge can fill in the

Christian aspect. What is chiefly important is that the therapist understands alcoholism. Therefore it would not be advisable, initially, necessarily to refer someone to the local Lutheran Social Service agency or to the Ministerial Health resources, because if they do not understand alcoholism they will not be treating the alcoholic according to his primary disease.

Many practitioners do not see alcoholism as a primary factor. If the practitioner does not think alcoholism is all that important he will not focus upon it and may counteract what A.A. is trying to do. Many therapists feel the person can drink normally if his other problems are cured or the therapist thinks alcoholism is just a symptom of stress. This lax attitude toward alcoholism in the mental health field is changing.

The pastor can be instrumental in family counseling. By family counseling we mean attention given to the alcoholic in relationship to his spouse, children, parents, grandparents and grandchildren, and all other important or key relations including even friends and associates such as co-workers, a boss, and neighbors. Relationships with others, especially the family and in the work place, are most difficult for the recovering alcoholic, because they are: 1) relearning how to interact with others, and 2) because within a nuclear and extended family system when one person begins to change the others will naturally resist the

change and sabotage the process.

The pastor may not be skilled in family systems counseling but can refer the person (and spouse) to a family systems counselor. Here the local Lutheran Social Services or Ministerial Health may have better resource people since most are schooled in family systems work. Pastoral counselors (AAPC) are not schooled primarily in family systems approaches, but in psychodynamic individualistic approaches.

The pastor may be able to do some of the counseling if he is skilled in marriage counseling, parenting skills, education needs of parents and children, setting limits for adolescents, helping with physical needs (food, job, shelter) and the resulting stress of those issues. Only in the case of extreme conflict, complicated situations, multi-problemmed situations, and physical and sexual abuse, should the pastor let somebody else handle the counseling. The reasons for this are because of time and because of lack of expertise on the part of the pastor. Once again, in all family systems counseling done by an outside therapist the pastor plays a key role between counseling sessions with his supportiveness, listening, direction to parish resources to help the family, and providing spiritual help. Most family systems counselors welcome this added help unless the pastor, for some reason, is part of the problem.

Earlier I mentioned my conviction that spiritual recovery is key for alcoholism and for any problem. It is still my conviction, though mental health professionals may provide many good skills in treating individuals, that God is able to provide the best care. Healing of the emotions and relationships can be best accomplished by God's intervention. This fits hand in glove with A.A.'s dictum that spiritual healing is the only way. The church can provide the real strength and power for this healing.

Many mental health practitioners, even Lutheran clergy counselors, may state they believe spiritual healing is possible but rarely ever see it happen. However, within A.A., the participants who have sought spiritual healing through Law and Gospel, the Bible, and their Church, will attest to the fact that God can and does heal. The pastor may want to keep this in mind and observe how God can and does work. Meanwhile the pastor will continue to make good use of the resources around him while actively and patiently applying spiritual care to the recovering alcoholic.

#### Re-evaluation of Fellowship

The pastor also needs to reevaluate his attitude toward and conception of fellowship within the church in order to see if it is in line with Christian teaching (see below) Many pastors seem resigned to the fact that with large congregations nothing can really happen in the area of fostering Christian fellowship. Many lay people are looking

for congregations to practice distinctive Christian fellowship, which earlier was defined as caring and nurturing for one another within the framework of faith and love for God, who nurtures and cares for us through Word and Sacrament. For example, the non-alcoholic spouse of a former alcoholic stated, "The pastor needs patience and needs to be non-judgmental. Lay people are too rigid and judgmental. Pastors and lay people need to be more caring [toward the alcoholic]."

The attitude and work of pastors toward Christian fellowship is a special area of consideration and one that can very fruitful as the pastor works with alcoholics and all people in their needs. Many in the congregation are looking for the fruition of this very important facet of Christian life. What follows are some ways in which the congregation, as a whole, can make some beginnings.

#### Ministry Approaches by the Congregation to Recovering Lutheran Alcoholics

##### Fellowship

The major approaches of congregational ministry are needed in the areas of fellowship, education, developing specific ministries and Christian witness training. A few general things need to be said first about fellowship. One pastor remarked there is a difference in the fellowship of the congregation and that in A.A. The main differences,

however, are in the size of the congregation as compared to A.A. and in the theology and practice of the Christian faith of the church.

Many congregations are so large it is difficult to know others as well as one might in one's own A.A. home group. This may be one style of fellowship which the congregation lacks--small groups to foster the intimacy and fellowship needed for support purposes. This is one of the challenges which needs to be met in developing stronger congregational fellowship.

Fellowship does have characteristics. These are honesty, common purpose and acceptance. These can be found at almost any A.A. group. This is the kind of fellowship, in the context of the Christian faith, which may be lacking in many congregations. The common purpose also dictates that the members of the congregation grow together in the Christian faith and share that faith with others. With that substance and purpose in mind one would think that in many groups within the congregation one is free to express oneself concerning Christian faith and living. This is the kind of attitude which needs to be fostered in the congregation so that the focus of the congregation is not on material things, business, social strata, or cliques.

If there are cliques, party politics, or overpowering budget concerns the spirit of fellowship will be lost and the loss may pervade the entire congregation. If there is



racism, distrust of outsiders, or a pecking order for service in the congregation, this also will react against the purpose of Christian fellowship.

It was mentioned that the attitude of the pastor is important. The pastor cannot do it alone. The church leaders need to be an additional model for improved fellowship within the congregation in the goals and objectives of ministry and in the manner which congregational business is conducted.

This is not to say that every person should act and think the same or toe the line for some ideal of the perfect fellowship. In A.A. that is not the case--there are a lot of people that an alcoholic may disagree with or not like. What is important is the spirit that pervades most A.A. meetings. If that spirit is not there, the group may slowly disintegrate.

As the alcoholic integrates into the congregation there needs to be realization that the congregation is different in terms of size and the underlying purpose of Christian relationships and growth. The entire congregation does not have to be seen as a gigantic closeknit A.A. group. If the alcoholic is cognizant of the diversity in A.A. he can see that, likewise, there is diversity within the congregation. There are other people in the congregation that have problems, behave politically, reflect diversity or argue. Congregation business meetings may become heated. Not

everyone will agree. If the alcoholic sees that A.A. groups are not perfect he can be led to see that the congregation does not need to be ideally perfect because it is made up of fallible people.

In the congregation, however, the attitude of common purpose and concord must be fostered. Much of the recent church growth material has emphasized this. As a result of our being in fellowship with God through Christ there does need to be an emphasis on caring for others, on mission and ministry to the needs of people, on corporate worship, and spiritual growth. This needs to be a reality and cannot be an ideal written in a brochure or stated occasionally in a sermon.

If the issue of fellowship is overlooked in a congregation, it needs to be dealt with in serious fashion. The question can be raised: Is there something intrinsic within the congregation, the minister, or the denomination that may prevent such fostering? What is the identity of the problem and what can be done to solve it? Indeed, David Murray, a lay minister, has this to say about the church:

I would contend that alcohol is a substance in abuse within the church. With such large numbers of clergy using and abusing it, it would seem to me they would inculcate an alcoholic mentality through the policy and leadership they espouse. I would further suggest that the laity have adopted these behaviors.<sup>131</sup>

Perhaps, according to Murray, because of alcohol abuse some of the same characteristics of an alcoholic's family may be apparent in a congregation, not unlike Schaef's model of the

addictive process mentioned in Chapter I. Whether it is to a great degree or not, the problem must be addressed. The ideas expressed by Murray and Schaef may help as the congregation examines itself, especially in terms of Biblical principles of fellowship.

Fellowship is necessary in the life of the congregation. It provides a sense of belonging. William Hulme writes:

In a day when we speak nostalgically about extended families, the congregation provides an extended family in our midst. Families in isolation cannot be for their members what each of them needs for their healthy development. The nuclear family of mother, father, and children is subjected to too many overpowering cultural and societal influences to function autonomously. When a child is brought to baptism, they are witnessing the role of the congregation as their larger family.<sup>132</sup>

Fellowship within the congregation needs to be defined as one in which the members care for one another, just as God intended family members to care for one another. Many models of the church relate the congregation to the family of Christ, to a body or single organism, to a marriage, and to a vine and branches. Of course, there are healthy and unhealthy families, and likewise a congregation fellowship can be healthy or unhealthy. In a healthy family, however, and in a healthy Christian fellowship the caring of people for one another is more than just an ideal, since the Christian fellowship has the Lordship and power of Jesus Christ and His Holy Spirit at work in its midst.

What a wonderful blessing a congregation with a healthy fellowship can be to people by assuring them that the love and care shown for each other in that congregation is genuine! In A.A. people who have suffered from alcoholism help others. In a healthy congregation people who have suffered from sin and other troubles can help one another. If there is no denial of sinfulness (i.e. self-righteousness) members of the congregation family can be a wonderful blessing to one another. In this effect, A.A. is a secular institution with a kind of fellowship that is honest, accepting, and caring.

The Christian fellowship has Jesus Christ and His redeeming and sanctifying power at work in its midst. Hopefully in the Christian congregation we can be honest about who we are (sinful and struggling human beings who are under the grace of God), and can be accepting (that our fellowman has followed down the same road as we and is also a recipient of God's grace), and caring (showing love for the unloved, the unworthy, the spiritually malnourished). In some Twelve Step groups a line in the opening introduction to the meeting goes: "We may not like each person, but we love each other in a special way." Though that particular "way" is not defined by these groups, the Christian congregation does have that "way" stemming from the special love found alone in Jesus Christ. We may not exactly "like" everybody in the congregation, but do have a

special love that is willing to be present and, if necessary, suffer all with our brother or sister.

The question of church fellowship is one that affects all people, alcoholic and non-alcoholic alike, as reflected in the interviews. Christian fellowship issues are problematic in many Lutheran congregations. Because of the breadth of the issue, it would be impossible in this report to cover all the ways possible for a congregation to recover the full expression of Christian fellowship. Each congregation is uniquely different and each can discover a variety of ways in which to address the issue. Following are a sample of special ways in which programs addressed to Christian fellowship issues may be of some help to recovering alcoholics.

#### Small Groups

One of the chief helps in fostering fellowship will be the establishment of small groups for special fellowship purpose.<sup>133</sup> As congregations grow in size the tendency may be for the membership to become impersonal as members do not always know other people. Societal changes in the mobility of the family, the increasing number of women in the workforce, single parent homes, various stresses of contemporary living, and the difficulty of establishing intimate relationships with other people have led to stress on families and individuals. Therefore, if the congregation offers support groups for Christian fellowship, Christian

growth, and common needs, intimacy may be fostered. These groups best remain small ranging anywhere from seven to thirty members.

Thus a congregation may create opportunities for the recovering alcoholic to engage in meaningful relationships with others in order to satisfy fellowship needs and needs for Christian intimacy. These can be as varied as a general social fellowship, prayer group, Bible study group, or group of people recovering from alcoholism, another compulsive illness, or codependency. These are not necessarily to replace A.A., or similar Twelve Step groups, but to form a Christian context for the expression of fellowship.

For a group specifically centering on addictions, a similar Christian format of the Twelve Steps may be used,<sup>134</sup> here again not to provide an alternative critical of A.A.'s Twelve Steps, but to provide a context in which the Twelve Steps may be readily understood in terms of Christian teaching, Law and Gospel. Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Service of Milwaukee has begun a pilot program like this in their area.<sup>135</sup>

The pastor and parish leaders may provide the impetus for beginning such groups at a grass roots level in response to "needs" expressed by members. The pastor or parish leader may connect recovering alcoholics with others in the congregation with similar needs. Successful groups are small in size, have accountability to the leaders

of the congregational ministry, and have a set time of a year or two duration so that the groups does not become cliquish or stagnant.

Church Growth's "Shepherding Program for Care and Counseling" is a good resource to help congregations discover the needs of members and the process for developing small group ministry. The model for such a ministry is taken from the success of the early church. Groups of Christians met daily together for prayer, the study of God's Word, mutual support, and fellowship.<sup>136</sup>

#### Personal Witness Training

In addition to small groups ministry the congregation may provide more formalized training in Christian witness. The Church Growth's "Master's Plan" and The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod "Gospel Communication Clinics" may provide samples of training in an individualized personal method of witness. These styles are among several different programs which focus on one-on-one contact with friends, relatives, and neighbors over a period of time.

With this kind of training the alcoholic can be better equipped to approach other individuals within the A.A. fellowship with a genuine concern about the authenticity of a faith centered in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Such training does not have to be an exclusive group for alcoholics. Rather, the recovering alcoholics can lend their unique experience for the edifying of fellow church

members. Many alcoholics may be ready for such a venture after a year or two of sobriety or when they begin to feel more comfortable in expressing their faith.

#### Education of the Congregation

As the members of a congregation become knowledgeable about recovering alcoholics in their midst, their attitudes are important, especially in terminology with which they label those with a drinking problem, in their reactions toward individuals who are recovering. It would not be proper for one congregation member to put a label of "alcoholic" upon another, as such labeling sets them apart. This is a label alcoholics use among themselves. Rather, these are fellow members who happen to have the disease of alcoholism, just as other members have diabetes or cancer or heart disease, or may be of a different culture or race.

With that more common understanding there will be a lesser issue. Alcoholics wish to be accepted just as anybody else within the congregation. Nor do they need moralizing or lecturing. They have the same emotions as the rest of us and these emotions may be used for the bad or the good. It is just that in their state they were led to use alcohol for what they thought was relief.

The parable of the Prodigal Son is a good example of how we receive others into our fellowship and community. Just as Christians have been forgiven and received by their heavenly Father, so have repentant alcoholics been restored.



It is good for members to understand alcoholism, to understand how those addicted feel, and to understand the help that is available. Above all, the alcoholic's problem is his problem and does not need another person's analysis, either bad intentioned or well intentioned.<sup>137</sup> The Christian community needs to become a healing and redemptive community for these people as the love of Christ finds expression among His people.

Through education the congregation becomes aware not only of matters surrounding alcoholism and A.A., but also learns to grow in a better understanding of Law and Gospel, of justification and sanctification. New methodologies can be utilized for adults: faith sharing, Scripture interpretation, and androgogical strategies that include utilization of the experience of the adult learners. These can be used within the general format of Bible Classes, seminars, and workshops.

The Stephen Ministries of St. Louis models lay ministry on a person to person, caring level, for many different needs of people, such as single parenting, terminal illness, and numerous others. Alcohol is one of the modules that can be developed if a congregation is involved in the Stephen Ministries.

Congregations wishing not to buy into the entire Stephen Ministries program might avail themselves of the Congregational Assistance Program (CAP) offered by Concordia

University of Wisconsin. One course offered was for certificate training of alcohol intervention and to help with referrals. It is geared for the congregation level.<sup>138</sup> It provides for setting up a core team in a congregation to educate people on alcoholism, help with interventions, and act as referral for community treatment.

Bible Classes.

Members can be encouraged to reach out to the alcoholic. An adult Bible Class study guide states:

A person who has admitted dependency still needs your help. Firmly insist that he or she stay with the program and do what you can to help see that he or she does not regress. Plan to support the chemically dependent person during the many crises that surely will follow. Treatment centers and AA will help the dependent person develop a new life-style. It's important for those who had been enablers of the dependency to become enablers of this new aspect of life.<sup>139</sup>

Other opportunities may present themselves through a recovering alcoholic sharing his story, especially his faith in Jesus Christ as his Savior. Different groups of the congregation can be targeted for a presentation on alcoholism such as the youth. Members will need to be instructed in respecting anonymity as the congregation grows in its fellowship practice of including all members, no matter what their needs. Above all, we need to encourage our lay people always to show genuine Christian love to all a people, including the chemically dependent person.

## Conclusion

In this study I have addressed the confusion which a recovering Lutheran alcoholic may encounter in A.A.'s spiritual Twelve Step program, particularly as it may conflict with Lutheran beliefs and practices. A sampling of interviews was made to determine how recovering Lutheran alcoholics, non-alcoholic Lutherans, and Lutheran clergymen felt about these issues.

After an historical account of the formation of A.A. and the Twelve Steps, a doctrinal study was undertaken to see how the Twelve Steps measured up against Law and Gospel, including the doctrines of justification and sanctification. The issue of the Lutheran Two Kingdom theology was explored to help clearly focus on why A.A. may be successful in fostering a program of nebulous spirituality and how a Lutheran may rightly view and use such a program.

Finally some practical strategies, methodologies, and techniques were shared as to how a Lutheran pastor and congregation could minister beneficially to the recovering Lutheran alcoholic. This ministry keeps in mind both the alcoholic's understanding of Lutheran doctrine and the issue of fellowship, which appeared to be a major stumbling block for many alcoholics.

A congregation, in a practical way, can create a ministry which fosters the clear communication of Law and Gospel to the recovering alcoholic. Above all a

congregation needs to express a ministry and care for others in need. A sermon message by a colleague of mine in the parish which I serve emphasized this:

[Remember times of feeling lonely and left out?] You might even feel that way about this congregation, this group of worshippers with whom you are gathered here this morning...It would be sad because it would mean that we haven't been doing very well at being the church of Jesus Christ to you...To many, we appear to be much more like feuding clans than loving families...Nevertheless we are still the family of God, the body of Christ, because Jesus Christ has made us so. In our baptism God has washed us clean and brought us into the body of Christ with whom we are in the process of rising to new life as we learn better how to live as his body here on this earth [sic]...There are people in our families having trouble with alcohol, and with drugs, to say nothing of disease and death....It is our differences that give each of us unique functions in the body and make us inseparable from it. Your bodily strengths and weaknesses are what you are and fit you for your place in the body. We need to pick up the burdens of the weaker ones. We need to share our strengths with one another.<sup>140</sup>

Hopefully this project may give some direction and encouragement to others, as it has done for me, as we deal with recovering Lutheran alcoholics, especially out of our concern clearly to proclaim Law and Gospel.

## APPENDIX

### THE TWELVE STEPS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

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 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.

## THE TWELVE TRADITIONS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

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.

## THE TWELVE CONCEPTS FOR WORLD SERVICE

1. Final responsibility and ultimate authority for A.A. world services should always reside in the collective conscience of our whole Fellowship.

2. When, in 1955, the A.A. groups confirmed the permanent charter for their General Service Conference, they thereby delegated to the Conference complete authority for the active maintenance of our world services and thereby made the Conference--excepting for any change in the Twelve Traditions or in Article 12 of the Conference Charter--the actual voice and the effective conscience for our whole Society.

3. As a traditional means of creating and maintaining a clearly defined working relation between the groups, the Conference, the A.A. General Service Board and its several service corporations, staffs, committees and executives, and of thus insuring their effective leadership, it is here suggested that we endow each of these elements of world service with a traditional "Right of Decision."

4. Throughout our Conference structure, we ought to maintain at all responsible levels a traditional "Right of Participation," taking care that each classification or group of our world servants shall be allowing a voting representation in reasonable proportion to the responsibility that each must discharge.

5. Throughout our world services structure, a traditional "Right of Appeal" ought to prevail, thus assuring us that minority opinion will be heard and that petitions for the redress of personal grievances will be carefully considered.

6. On behalf of A.A. as a whole, our General Service Conference has the principal responsibility for the maintenance of our world services, and it traditionally has the final decision respecting large matters of general policy and finance. But the Conference also recognizes that the chief initiative and the active responsibility in most of these matters should be exercised primarily by the Trustee members of the Conference when they act among themselves as the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous.

7. The Conference recognizes that the Charter and the Bylaws of the General Service Board are legal instruments; that the Trustees are thereby fully empowered to manage and conduct all of the world service affairs of Alcoholics Anonymous. It is further understood that the Conference Charter itself is not a legal document: that it relies instead upon the force of tradition and the power of the A.A. purse for its final effectiveness.

8. The Trustees of the General Service Board act in two primary capacities: (a) With respect to the larger matters of over-all policy and finance, they are the principal planners and administrators. They and their primary committees directly manage these affairs. (b) But with respect to our separately incorporated and constantly active services, the relation of the Trustees is mainly that of full stock ownership and of custodial oversight which they exercise through their ability to elect all directors of these entities.

9. Good service leaders, together with sound and appropriate methods of choosing them, are at all levels indispensable for our future functioning and safety. The primary world service leadership once exercised by the founders of A.A. must necessarily be assumed by the Trustees of the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous.

10. Every service responsibility should be matched by an equal service authority--the scope of such authority to be always well defined whether by tradition, by resolution, by specific job description or by appropriate charters and bylaws.

11. While the trustees hold final responsibility for A.A.'s world service administration, they should always have the assistance of the best possible standing committees, corporate service directors, executives, staffs and consultants. Therefore, the composition of these underlying committees and service boards, the personal qualifications of their members, the manner of their induction into service, the systems of their rotation, the way in which they are related to each other, the special rights and duties of our executives, staffs and consultants, together with a proper basis for the financial compensation of these special workers, will always be matters for serious care and concern.

12. General Warranties of the Conference: in all its proceedings, the General Service Conference shall observe the spirit of the A.A. Tradition, taking great care that the conference never becomes the seat of perilous wealth or power; that sufficient operating funds, plus an ample



reserve, be its prudent financial principle; that none of the Conference Members shall ever be placed in a position of unqualified authority over any of the others: that all important decisions be reached by discussion vote and whenever possibly, by substantial unanimity; that no Conference action ever be personally punitive or an incitement to public controversy; that though the Conference may act for the service of Alcoholics Anonymous, it shall never perform any acts of government; and that, like the Society of Alcoholics Anonymous which it serves, the Conference itself will always remain democratic in thought and action.

(The above Concepts have extensive official explanation).

## THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

For the interviews I chose ten recovering Lutheran alcoholics active in church and in A.A., ten Lutherans active in church, and ten parish pastors of varying responsibility in the church at large. Attempts were made to have a variety according to age, gender, education, and occupational background. People were interviewed separately and orally. It was "soft" research in that it is a picture of how certain people in a certain context think. It was not intended to be statistical research. Certainly one can test other contexts to see how people with similar and dissimilar backgrounds respond.

An introduction was made by saying what, why, and how the information was to be used. Confidentiality was assured. It was explained that there were no right or wrong answers, but that these were their opinions. Questions were kept as objective as possibly.

The initial question was of non-threatening nature such as an inquiry of what they liked about church or A.A. or the particular area of church work in which they served. They were encouraged to talk at length about this in order to feel comfortable with the interview process.

An inductive process was used in questioning, keeping the questions personal, and moving in sequence from past to present to future, where applicable, to changes in their opinion throughout their life span. Each question was initially asked in a general way in order not to imply a subjective response. More specific questions were then asked in each category to encourage the interviewee to expand.

Religious terminology was avoided. Body language was observed, and where necessary either I clarified my comments or asked them to clarify their comments. For example, the term "spiritual" elicited many different meanings as used by either the interviewer or interviewee. If interviewees had no specific reply they were invited to imagine what any particular situation would be like. Special attention was given to their images of God and how they verbalized God. Their prior comments were always double checked to test their validity.

Interviewees were invited to get in touch with me if they thought of something else to say. They were thanked. Throughout the process I remained casual, kept good eye contact and was careful not to reinforce them with my own ideas.

The following is a general outline of the type of questions asked:

1. What do you like best about the church/Twelve Step program?
2. What is most meaningful and important for you in your church membership?
3. How can the church best help you in your spiritual life?
4. Are you familiar with the Twelve Step program? Do you think A.A. is like a religion? Are you used to the term "spiritual"? How do you use it?
5. When you think of God or pray to God what kind of image do you have of God? What is your concept of God? How has this changed during your life?
6. How is Jesus Christ important in your life?
7. What does the term "Law of God" mean?
8. What does the term "Gospel" mean?
9. What are some of your priorities of life?
10. What is your concept of alcoholism? Do you consider it a sin, or a matter of will power, or a disease, or a moral problem, or something else?

Additional questions for clergy:

1. Do you feel the church puts stumbling blocks in the way of recovering alcoholics? How can the church best meet the needs of recovering alcoholics?
2. What concerns do you have about the Twelve Steps and Biblical teaching, especially in reference to Law and Gospel?
3. If an alcoholic would say that the lack of openness or honesty in the church is a problem and that real fellowship is in A.A., how would you respond?
4. If a recovering alcoholic states he receives all the spiritual help he needs through worship, Holy Communion, and preaching, but has no use for church organizations, fund drives, and elections, how would you respond?
5. If a non-alcoholic states that his or her main benefit from church is a Christian education for the children, support of the family, friendliness and opportunity for involvement with other people, how would you respond?
6. Do you see any relation between A.A. and the Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms?

7. What is your reaction to the term "God as we understood Him" in the Twelve Steps?
8. How would you respond if a lay person made the statement, "God is in everything."
9. A discussion was held concerning fellowship within the church.

#### ENDNOTES

1. [William G. Wilson] Alcoholics Anonymous, ref. 2d ed., (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous Publishing Co., 1955), 59, 60.
2. Ibid., 44.
3. In an interview with John O'Hara, St. Louis, February, 1992.
4. Steve Apthorp, Alcohol and Substance Abuse-A Handbook, (Wilston, Connecticut: Morehouse-Barlow, 1985), 7.
5. Third special report to the U.S. Congress on Alcohol and Health (Rockville, Maryland: U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 1978), xi.
6. [William G. Wilson], Alcoholics Anonymous, 564.
7. Francis Schaeffer, The God Who Is There, (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1968), 13-14.
8. This phrase is used by this researcher and he has heard it used by other people in the field. The exact origins, if any, are unknown.
9. [William G. Wilson], Alcoholics Anonymous, 62.
10. The St. Louis Post Dispatch, November 9, 1991.
11. [William G. Wilson], Alcoholics Anonymous, xxii.
12. Thomas Plaut, Alcohol Problems: A Report to the Nation, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 27.
13. Ronald Schlegal, "Facing Alcoholism and Other Chemical Dependencies," (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1987), 22. The original quote is from "A Deadly Epidemic Threatens: An Alcohol/Drug Abuse Resource for Pastors and Church Leaders." Prepared by the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Task Force of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod.
14. Anne Wilson Schaefer, Co-Dependence, Misunderstood-Mistreated, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 21-40.

15. Ibid., 24.
16. Ibid., 42-43.
17. Ibid., 21-26.
18. [William G. Wilson], Alcoholics Anonymous, 62.
19. Moses states in Genesis 19:30 ff.: "Lot and his two daughters left Zoar...One day the older daughter said to the younger, 'Our father is old, and there is no man around here to lie with us, as is the custom all over the earth. Let's get our father to drink wine and then lie with him and preserve our family line through our father.'...So both of Lot's daughters became pregnant by their father."
20. L. Ann Mueller and Katherine Ketcham, Recovering, (New York: Bantam, 1987), 11-21.
21. John Keller, Ministering to Alcoholics, (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1966), 33-34.
22. [William G. Wilson], Alcoholics Anonymous, 32-33.
23. Ronald Schlegel, Facing Alcoholism and Other Chemical Dependencies: A Study Guide for Adults, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1987), 24-25.
24. Anne Wilson Schaef, Co-Dependence, 24-26.
25. Betty Carter and Monica McGoldrick, editors, The Changing Family Life Cycle, Second Edition, (New York: Gardner Press, 1988), 508.
26. Barry Stimmel, edit. Alcohol and Drug Abuse in the Affluent, (New York: Haworth Press, 1984), 2.
27. [William G. Wilson], Alcoholics Anonymous, xxv-xxx.
28. Father Martin, "Chalk Talk" film series.
29. [William G. Wilson], Alcoholics Anonymous, xxiii-xxx.
30. [William G. Wilson], Twelve Steps And Twelve Traditions, (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1953), 48.
31. Ibid., 48.
32. Ibid., 49-52.

33. Ibid., 52.
34. Paul Meier, Frank Minirth, and Frank Wichern, Introduction to Psychology and Counseling, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 15-34.
35. [William G. Wilson], Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, 28.
36. Ibid., 30.
37. Ibid., 31-32.
38. Lutheran theology would identify this as mixing faith and works.
39. Betty Carter and Monica McGoldrick, editors, The Changing Family Life Cycle, Second Edition. It is stated on page 485, "Treatment in conjunction with referral to the programs of AA is optimal since family therapy alone is not sufficient to address the complex issues represented by alcohol addiction. Thus AA currently provides the most effective context available for addressing the compulsive, self-correcting nature of drinking behavior. With its focus on peer support, mutuality, "correct" thinking, behavioral change, and spiritual surrender, AA fosters change in the drinker's experience of himself of herself that cannot typically be achieved within the context of therapy."
40. Ernest Kurtz, Not-God, A History of Alcoholics Anonymous, (Center City, Minnesota: Hazelden, 1979), 10-36.
41. Dennis Morreim, "A Theological/Biblical Perspective Of The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous For Implementation in Ministry," (D.Min. Thesis, Luther-Northwestern Seminary, 1984), 18-19.
42. Ibid., 19-21.
43. Ernest Kurtz, Not-God, 46-47.
44. --, First Annual Meeting of the Fellowship of Recovering Lutheran Clergy, (August 8, 1992). These steps were on a photocopied handout which had the note: "(from the Oxford Group Movement...The above steps were practiced by the Oxford Group in the 1930-1940 period.)" A search in numerous references failed to turn up such a listing. The closest was a descriptive study by a sociologist, Allan Eister, Drawing-Room Conversion, A Sociological Account of the Oxford Group Movement, (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University, 1950). Eister suggests the Oxford Group was a cult.

A second source states, "Prior to the formulation of these steps, those who were members of what is now A.A. were sharing with other alcoholics the six suggestions that Ebby gave to Bill. This group had rejected other ideas and attitudes of the Oxford Group from which these six steps came.", from John Keller, Ministering to Alcoholics, 39. No identity is given to these six steps, nor is there a reference.

45. Erwin Kurtz, Not-God, 69.
46. Ibid., 69-72.
47. Sydney Ahlstrom, A Religious History of the American People, (New Haven: Yale University, 1972), 925-927.
48. Ibid., 34.
49. Ibid., 269.
50. Ibid., 302.
51. Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion In America," (Daedalus, Winter, 1967), 3-4.
52. Charles T. Knippel, "Samuel M. Shoemaker's Theological Influence," 269-274.
53. Ernest Kurtz, Not-God, 161-198.
54. John M. "The Kingdom Within," AA Grapevine 45 (May, 1989), 21-23.
55. Charles T. Knippel, "Samuel M. Shoemaker's Theological Influence," 299.
56. [William G. Wilson], Alcoholics Anonymous, 12, 45-46.
57. Ernest Kurtz, Not-God, 23-24.
58. [William G. Wilson], Alcoholics Anonymous, 57.
59. Ibid. 569, 570.
60. Ibid., xxv-xxx.
61. Betty Carter and Monica McGoldrick, editors, The Changing Family Life Cycle, Second Edition, 485.
62. Ibid. 54.



63. "44 Questions?" (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1952.) 15.
64. [William G. Wilson], Alcoholics Anonymous, 87.
65. Ibid., 63-76.
66. This is part of an introductory reading read at each A.A. meeting. This reading is published on individual fliers, plus often printed on the inside cover of A.A. tracts.
67. [William G. Wilson], Alcoholics Anonymous, 563-568.
68. [William G. Wilson], Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, 138.
69. Ibid., 164.
70. "The Twelve Concepts for World Service," (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1986).
71. Ibid.
72. Rudi, "I Am An Alcoholic," (St. Louis: International Lutheran Laymen's League, 1986), 23. This survey was taken by A.A.'s General Service Board.
73. [William G. Wilson], Alcoholics Anonymous, 60.
74. Doug B. in comments at an A.A. meeting on April 20, 1992.
75. Charles T. Knippel, "Samuel M. Shoemaker's Theological Influence," 299.
76. Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1991), 101.
77. Rudi, "I Am An Alcoholic," 22-29.
78. S. Van Cleave and Walter Byrd, Counseling for Substance Abuse and Addiction, (Waco: Word Books, 1987), 104.
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80. John Keller, Ministering to Alcoholics, 35-66.

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83. Ibid., 280-312.

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125. Stephen Apthorp, A Clergy Handbook of Alcohol and Substance Abuse, xiii, 7.
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127. Ibid., 191-192.
128. Walter Koehler, Counseling and Confession, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1982), 45.
129. Armin W. Schuetze, The Counseling Shepherd, (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1988). xii.
130. DSM III-R is the designation for the official diagnostic manual of the American Psychiatric Association, called The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, Number III, Revised. This indicates this is the Third Major edition and that this edition has been revised. All insurance benefits are paid according to a diagnosis based on DSM III-R.

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133. Wagner, Peter, Your Church Can Grow, (Glendale: Regal, 1977), 97.

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136. "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common...They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people" (Acts 2:42-47).

137. John Keller, "Alcoholics Are People", a tract produced by Concordia Tract Mission.

138. From the newsletter of Redeemer Lutheran Church, Stuart, Florida, February, 1992. The DCE of Redeemer was trained as a core group leader for CAP.

139. Ronald Schlegel, Facing Alcoholism and Other Chemical Dependencies, 36.

140. Pastor Carl Aufdemberge, in a sermon entitled "We Can't Do Without You," based on 1 Corinthians 12:12-21, 26-27, preached in January of 1991 at Trinity Lutheran Church, Edwardsville, Illinois.

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