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## A Bormannean Fantasy Theme Analysis of "The Big Book" of Alcoholics Anonymous

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**A BORMANNEAN FANTASY THEME ANALYSIS  
OF "THE BIG BOOK"  
OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS**

**by**

**Leigh Arden Ford**

**A Thesis  
Submitted to the  
Faculty of The Graduate College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Arts  
Department of Communication Arts and Sciences**

**Western Michigan University  
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A BORMANNEAN FANTASY THEME ANALYSIS  
OF "THE BIG BOOK"  
OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

Leigh Arden Ford, M.A.

Western Michigan University, 1985

Utilizing Bormannean fantasy theme analysis, this study examined the rhetoric of "The Big Book," the basic text of Alcoholics Anonymous. Three dominant rhetorical visions were found corresponding to Cragan and Shields' conception of rhetorical visions as social, pragmatic and righteous at the metalevel. These rhetorical visions were labeled The Rich Man, Poor Man Vision (social), The Greater Power Vision (righteous), and The Solution Vision (pragmatic). The accompanying fantasy themes of dramatis personae, setting, plotline and sanctioning agent were delineated. The implications of this study for substance abuse therapists and AA members were examined and further research was suggested.

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Leigh Arden Ford

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## CHAPTER I

### THE STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

From 1935 to 1985 membership in Alcoholics Anonymous has increased from two people to an estimated one million members worldwide, evidence of the appeal of the Alcoholics Anonymous program. Furthermore, the AA program, particularly the use of Twelve steps, has served as a model for other self-help groups such as Overeaters Anonymous, Gamblers Anonymous, and Parents Anonymous. Clearly, the utility of Alcoholics Anonymous as direct treatment and as paradigm can be seen.

The treatment within Alcoholics Anonymous occurs in a small group setting as the members share life stories, problems, successes, hopes and the beliefs and philosophy of AA. This oral communication has therapeutic value and as such is important to recovery. For the communication scholar the dimensions of group interaction in AA could offer a rich field of study.

Research on AA groups is hampered to a degree by a central concept of the AA program -- the anonymity of the membership. Because of its important role in recovery, anonymity must be strictly protected. One maintains anonymity while providing understanding of

of the communication in AA groups involves examining sources other than the oral interaction. Therefore, one of these other sources, Alcoholics Anonymous, text of the Alcoholics Anonymous (1976), organization, was examined in this study.

Essential to the Alcoholics Anonymous program is its basic text, Alcoholics Anonymous (1976), or "The Big Book". "The Big Book" was nicknamed such after its publication because, printed on thick paper it did, indeed, make it a big book. The nickname is used by AA members, substance abuse counselors and others familiar with the work of Alcoholics Anonymous. Within this study "The Big Book" will be used when referring to the basic text, Alcoholics Anonymous (1976).

Written and first published in 1939, "The Big Book" was the sole work of Bill Wilson, co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous. However, in the tradition of anonymity the Alcoholics Anonymous, "The Big Book" is referenced with anonymous authorship. The text was written for a twofold purpose: first, to outline for alcoholics and nonalcoholics alike the philosophy and treatment to be found in AA and, second, to provide a means to recovery for individuals who are not near an AA group. This second purpose was especially salient in 1939 when AA membership numbered approximately one hundred persons in three cities, Akron, Cleveland, and

and New York. The members of AA felt a need to pass the program on to others and "The Big Book" offered a way to reach many people. Virtually unchanged in today's third edition, "The Big Book" still presents the basic messages which are communicated in AA groups. Thus, a detailed study of "The Big Book" should reveal the symbols, images and meanings which are communicated in an AA meeting.

This research proposes to analyze "The Big Book" of Alcoholics Anonymous using the method of Bormannean fantasy theme analysis. Fantasy theme analysis has as its two basic assumptions that first, the meanings, motives and emotions of people can be discovered in their rhetoric and that, second, a group of people create a social reality through communication. As a group of people come together for a common purpose, they begin to create a shared symbolic reality, a fantasy, which serves to develop and maintain a common culture. With fantasy theme analysis the researcher studies the communication looking for dramas being played out in the rhetoric. The researcher looks for such dramatic elements as plot, setting and characters. By drawing together these elements or themes, the researcher can then define the rhetorical vision or social reality that exists for the group.

A fantasy theme analysis of "The Big Book" should

increase understanding of the images, symbols, and messages contained in that text. Definition of the social reality conveyed by the Alcoholics Anonymous text should provide a new perspective on the messages used by AA in giving direct help to alcoholics. Since this study may provide additional, the findings of this study could benefit and interest both AA members and those persons concerned with alcohol and substance abuse.

In summary, the communication which occurs in an Alcoholics Anonymous group contributes to its therapeutic value. Presented to members are specific messages which contain symbols, images and meaning for those members. Those same messages appear in "The Big Book," the official text of Alcoholics Anonymous, and are the focus of this study. These messages are to be analyzed by utilizing the technique of Bormanean fantasy theme analysis.

\*

## CHAPTER II

### THE REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

In this chapter a review of the related AA literature and a review of the literature concerned with the Bormannean symbolic convergence theory will be presented. The research from the Alcoholic Anonymous literature examined first in this review will focus on studies which have attempted to explain how AA functions. The second body of literature that literature related to Bormann's fantasy theme analysis, will trace briefly the development of the symbolic convergence theory and will explain and illustrate concepts of that theory. Finally, the applicability of Bormannean fantasy theme analysis to "The Big Book" of Alcoholics Anonymous will be explored.

#### Alcoholics Anonymous Literature

Most of the research that has been done on Alcoholics Anonymous can be categorized in one of two broad areas. First, a large body of research focuses on defining the characteristics of problem drinkers who achieve sobriety through the program of AA, and, second, considerable effort has been expended in

attempts to explain how the AA program works, whether the perspective of the researcher be from an historical, sociological, philosophical, psychological, critical, anthropological or other discipline. It is this literature which focuses upon how AA functions which has significance for the present research project.

From an anthropological stance Madsen described Alcoholics Anonymous as a "crisis cult" (1979, p. 382). Such cults arise when minority members of a society feel powerless and alienated. Frequently these groups turn to the spiritual beings or supernatural elements in an attempt to gain control in a situation that seems otherwise uncontrollable. Typically, these religiously inspired minority movements are characterized by the emergence of a leader who rises above his own helplessness having experienced a vision (Madsen, 1979, pp. 382-383). Madsen argues that these very elements are present in AA. He described AA as a folk psychotherapy which depends on very unscientific data, the members' shared experiences. It is these shared experiences which are significant. In the AA group the "idiosyncratic misfit" becomes accepted as "normal." States Madsen (1979) "The very alcoholism that had alienated him from society becomes the bond linking him to this loving primary group. Thus, his alcoholism is meta-



morphosed from a destructive force to perhaps the most positive identity he has ever had" (1979, p. 385).

Within this milieu, the new AA finds the support and acceptance needed to remodel his value system. By reliance on his/her sponsor, meeting attendance, socializing with other AA's, study of the AA literature, and working the AA program, the alcoholic's thinking and alcoholic behaviors are restructured.

Sadler (1979, p. 388) disagrees with Madsen's "crisis cult" terminology and preferred to focus on the interaction of an AA meeting. In her article Sadler describes a typical AA meeting and its verbal interaction. She states that self labeling one's self as an alcoholic emphasizes the fundamental similarity of all persons in the group. The conversation of the meeting actually should be described as monologues, which, according to Sadler, have a specific structure. "What I was like, what happened, and what I am like now" is the standard framework (1979, p. 393). Sadler argued that the interaction is crucial. For both Sadler and Madsen the importance of the group interaction in the communication of new behaviors, values and the

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Many of the quotations used in this research are sexist in language. "The Big Book" and some of the research quoted here were written before consciousness of sexist language had been raised. In this study in the interest of accuracy all quotations will appear as they appear in their original sources.

accepted framework is evident. The language utilized to communicate those ideas, values and behaviors is of importance to this study.

Alcoholics Anonymous as a social organization was studied by Bales in 1944. From a sociologist's perspective he outlined the principal structural features which define AA as a social organization. Those features are: (1) a founder treated with reverence whose "magic" has been transferred to a set of ideas ("The Big Book"); (2) minimal degree of overhead structure, but an intimate network of friendships and obligations; (3) solidarity based on past common experiences; (4) concentration on the present and avoidance of future planning; and (5) a central focus--keeping sober and helping others to do the same (Bales, 1944 pp. 268-272). Bales argued that AA has an advantage over other treatment programs in that it can break through the alcoholic's psychosocial isolation. Bales (1944) stated that within the group an alcoholic's "guilty secrets" are transformed into "trade secrets" and the alcoholic recognizes his part in the "common alcoholic culture" (p. 275). The alcoholic isolation is replaced by feelings of belongingness, affiliation and allegiance. Becoming part of the group implies the acceptance of the ideas and meanings of the culture and can be seen as central

to the work of this study.

In a later sociological study Bales (1945) points to the effectiveness of the group context in the presentation of new ideas and behavior patterns to the individual. He described this process as reeducation in its broadest sense (1945, p. 15). He argued that the compulsion to drink is a learned process and thus, to be rid of the compulsion to drink, a new set of behaviors must be learned. The optimal condition for this learning to occur appears to be "within a group which understands him thoroughly and sympathetically, which will agree with him and support him and yet begin to correct his perspective and give him an acceptable view of himself from the outside" (Bales, 1945, p. 17). The group communicates common ideas, values and accepted behaviors which the new AA adopts and incorporates as his or her own.

An organizational analysis of AA was conducted by Gellman in his 1964 book The Sober Alcoholic. Gellman described the national structure and governance of AA as well as a general structural outline which is utilized by most local chapters of Alcoholics Anonymous and which describes the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. Formal and informal group structures, group membership, group activities and the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous were also explained. Gellman

(1964) suggests that the organization is the therapy, i.e., the socialization process which occurs leads to acceptance of AA as a "way of life" (p. 142). The ideas, symbols and messages which define the AA "way of life" for its members that are the interest of this study.

Critiques of an organization and its methods frequently provide greater understanding of the workings of such an organization. In her critical research Bean (1975) presents her view of several negative aspects of Alcoholics Anonymous. She criticizes the organization in these terms: (a) rigidity and authoritarianism; (b) regressive aspects; (c) superficiality; (d) dealing only with alcohol; (e) emphasis on inspiration; and (f) fanaticism (Bean, 1975 pp. 15-19). She describes the AA program as offering "a means of organizing the psychological field in order to help the person stop drinking" (p. 8). In her conception experiences are restructured within a simplified cognitive framework. In spite of her negative evaluation of this simplified cognitive framework restructuring, Bean's conclusion that the process of cognitive restructuring does occur within an Alcoholics Anonymous group seems to indicate that specific messages containing particular meanings are being conveyed by the group.

Beckman (1980) analyzed the AA program by utilizing the social-psychological theory of attribution. Attribution theory concerns itself with cause and effect as individuals perceive it and how those individuals assign meaning and order to their worlds. It is Beckman's contention that a change in attribution will result in a change in attitude and ultimately, in behavior change. Beckman stated that AA facilitates cognitive changes, e.g., the cause of drinking problem from personal characteristics (internal) to the disease of alcoholism (external), responsibility for recovery lies with the individual, attribution for change to external force - the Higher Power. Eventually these cognitive changes result in new attributions regarding alcoholism. Stated Beckman, "These attributions facilitate and support nondrinking behavior and may serve as important cognitive precursors of behavioral change" (1980, p. 717).

In a similar vein, Thune (1977) suggested that "the nature and meaning and experience of the constructions of self and the world by an alcoholic are subject to an ongoing process of reconstitution and redefinition, both in the process of becoming an alcoholic and in the course of any successful treatment and recovery" (p. 76). His phenomenological approach examines the role of the life histories as given in AA

meetings and in work with other alcoholics not yet members of AA. Life stories also play an important role in the AA literature although Thune does not specifically address these. "The Big Book" contains forty-four stories including those of Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob Smith, co-founders of AA. Thune argues that these personal histories are the means by which an individual gains control over drinking. These stories with their basic themes as a model transmit values, present the character of alcoholism and provide a world view. Thune (1977) said "what is altered are not isolated meanings, patterns or implications, but a total body of structurally integrated definitions and understandings of experienced reality" (p. 78).

The literature reviewed previously has focused on a variety of attempts to describe how Alcoholics Anonymous groups function. The use of language or specific messages which cause the alcoholic to change his or her world view in some manner appear to be a common element in all the studies examined. It is the message or the rhetoric upon which the Bormannean symbolic convergence theory focuses. The following literature will present the origins and development of Bormann's theory and will define the nomenclature and technique of fantasy theme analysis.

### The Bormannean Symbolic Convergence Theory

In 1942 Bales initiated his group interaction studies by observing the meetings of a local Alcoholics Anonymous chapter. Bales (1970) stated that his desire was "to get some inkling of the astonishing motivational changes they (AA) seemed to bring about" (p. ix). Eventually, Bales' work required a more controlled laboratory setting and it was this research which led to his Interactional Analysis categories. His studies developed a set of twelve general interaction categories. The second category, "dramatizes", became a key concept of the symbolic convergence theory.

Bales (1970) stated that dramatization, the portrayal of fantasy in the form of action, occurs when the speaker "presents images or potential emotional symbols" to the group members (p. 105). These symbols (words, images and metaphors) which may stimulate fantasies are presented via communication, and only those symbols which carry unconscious meaning for most of the active participants will become a group fantasy (Bales, 1970, p. 138). As the fantasy "chains out" among the members, the group fantasy becomes the basis of a group culture. Bales (1970) stated:

As the individual person creates and maintains a system of symbols with other persons in the group, he enters a realm of reality

which he knows does or can surpass which may inspire or organize him and which may threaten to dominate him as well. He "comes alive" in the specifically human sense as a person in communication with others, in the symbolic reality which they create together, in the drama of their action. It is presumably this feeling that is referred to when people talk about "becoming a group" or "the time we became a group." A group in this sense is not the only kind of group dealt with by a sociologist--it is an interacting group in the midst of a group fantasy chain reaction. It is a group in which the individuals have become emotionally involved and have begun to develop a culture of their own. (pp. 151-152)

The process of group fantasizing as outlined by Bales became a central concept to the work of Ernest Bormann in his studies of small group communication. Bormann's seminar in small group communication at the University of Minnesota in the late 1960s had been attempting to apply the principles of rhetorical criticism to the communication in groups with somewhat unsatisfactory to the seminar's participants. Publication of Bales' Personality and Interpersonal Behavior (1970) provided the communication structure for the development of fantasy theme analysis and, ultimately, of the symbolic convergence theory.

The basic assumption of the symbolic convergence theory of human communication is that meaning, emotion and motive are in the messages (rhetoric) of individuals. Thus, groups create and share specific messages which construct reality, a reality that



differs from the mere existence of phenomena. Further, this rhetorical reality is created through the interchange of public symbols (Shields, 1980, p. 6). The total, dramatistic explanation of reality Bormann calls a rhetorical vision. The basic units of such a rhetorical vision are the fantasy themes which have chained out in a group as explanations or interpretations of reality (Shields, 1980, p. 3).

A fantasy, according to Bormann (1985), is the "creative and imaginative interpretation of events that fulfills a psychological or rhetorical need" (p. 5). The fantasy is composed of one or more fantasy themes. It is the content of the dramatizing messages which make up the fantasy theme and which initiate the fantasy chain process within the group (Bormann, 1985, p. 5). Thus, the basic unit of fantasy theme analysis is the dramatizing message.

Bormann (1985) stated that the dramatizing message of a particular fantasy theme will appear as one of the following language structures: a pun or other word-play, a double entendre, a figure of speech, an analogy, an anecdote, allegory, fable and/or narrative (p. 4). Each dramatizing message may represent a new fantasy theme or may repeat a theme. These fantasy themes are the major concepts of rhetorical drama: the *dramatis personae*, scene, plotline, and sanctioning

agent (Shields, 1981, p. 6).

The nomenclature and concepts of fantasy theme analysis can best be examined by citing examples from previous work which illustrate the definitions of the central concepts. In Shield's work (1981) a quotation from an editorial which appeared in The Cheyenne Daily Leader during the Westward migration in this country was used as the source examples to illustrate the major concepts of Bormannean fantasy theme analysis. This same quotation and its examples of fantasy themes will be utilized in this explanation of fantasy theme analysis.

The rich and beautiful valleys of Wyoming are destined for the occupancy and sustenance of the Anglo-Saxon race. The wealth that for untold ages has lain hidden beneath the snow-capped summits of our mountains has been placed there by Providence to reward the brave spirits whose lot it is to compose the advance-guard of civilization. The Indians must stand aside or be overwhelmed by the ever advancing and ever increasing tide of emigration. The destiny of the aborigines is written in characters not to be mistaken. The same inscrutable Arbiter that decreed the downfall of Rome has pronounced the doom of extinction on the red men of America. [The Cheyenne Daily Leader, March 3, 1870 (as cited in Bury My Heart At Wounded Knee, by Dee Brown) and cited in Shields, 1981, p. 5]

The dramatis personae are the characters, real or fictitious, who populate the fantasy as heroes, villains, and/or supporting players. These characters can be found in the above quotation from The Cheyenne

Daily Leader. The identifiable heroes are named as the brave spirits, the Anglo-Saxon race and the tide of emigration. In the racist language of the time, the villains are referred to as aborigines, red men of America and the Indians (Shields, 1980, p. 6).

The fantasy theme of scene or setting is defined as the place where the action occurs, where the characters play out their roles. In the quoted example the scenic element is easily identified as the rich and beautiful valleys of Wyoming with its hidden wealth beneath snowcapped mountains. (Shields, 1980. pp. 6-7)

As in a play, the plotline or scenario is the action of the drama, the who is doing what to whom and how. These themes identify the rhetorical vision as a comedy, a tragedy, a quest, etc. The plotline also places the rhetorical vision in time (past, present or future) and identifies the metalevel of the rhetorical vision as righteous, social, or pragmatic. In The Cheyenne Daily Leader quotation the plotlines of the Manifest Destiny vision are easily seen: the occupation of the valleys, wealth as reward, the doom of extinction. This scenario at the metalevel is righteous in nature (Shields, 1980, p. 6).

The source which justifies the acceptance of a rhetorical vision and within which motives for action can be found is called the sanctioning agent. Such

themes can portray the sanctioning agent as a higher power, e.g., God, justice, brotherhood/sisterhood, or as a relevant here-and-now phenomenon, e.g., the threat of nuclear destruction, an actual armed conflict, perceived religious persecution. In the vision presented in the quoted paragraph from The Cheyenne Daily Leader the sanctioning agent is described as destiny, Providence and the inscrutable Arbiter's decree of the downfall of Rome (Shields, 1980, p. 7).

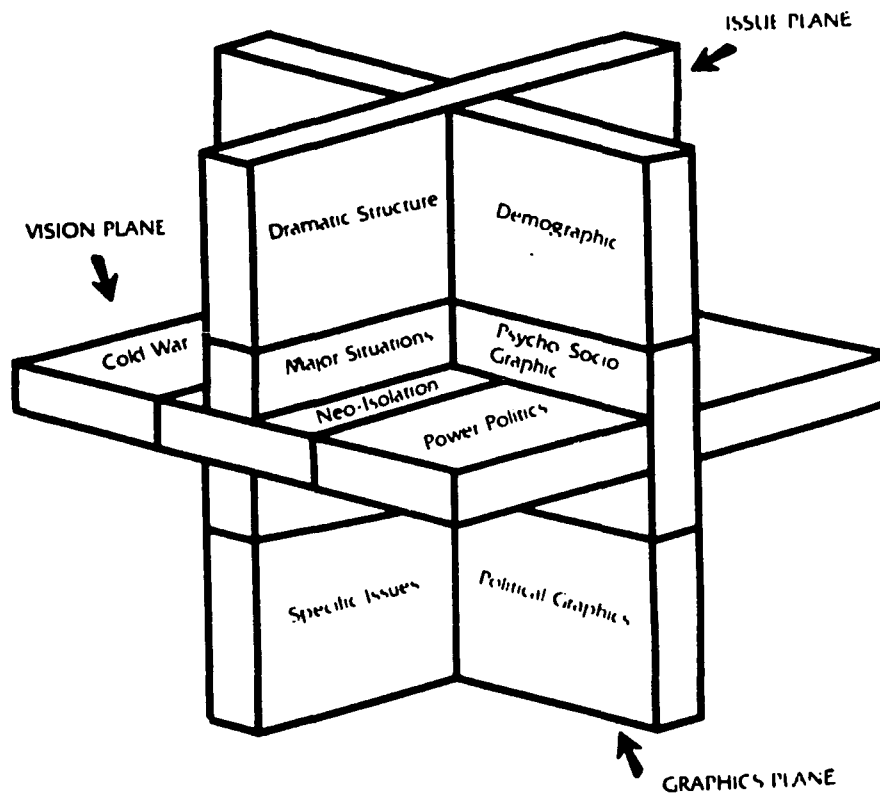
Frequently a fantasy type emerges. This rhetorical construct consists of a stock scenario repeated again and again by similar characters. These fantasy types become archetypal and may be an indication that a rhetorical vision has emerged (Bormann, 1985, p. 7). Rhetorical visions, as defined by Shields (1980), are the composite dramas which "catch up" with members of a group into a common symbolic reality (p. 6). Bormann says such visions may provide a master analogy which is a key word or slogan, e.g., Black Power, The Moral Majority, Manifest Destiny. Implied in this key word or slogan is a "total, coherent view of an aspect of social reality" (Bormann, 1985, p. 8). Thus, it is possible for an individual to participate in as many rhetorical visions as that person has group memberships. It is also possible that the rhetorical vision of a particular

group may be so powerful that one vision may become a person's total social reality, a lifestyle rhetorical vision (Bormann, 1985, p. 8).

It was Cragan and Shields (1977) who suggested that Bormann's theory not be considered as a method for doing fantasy theme analysis but rather that Bormann's work be viewed as a metatheory for constructing rhetorical visions. They demonstrated the application of Bormann's theory by using William Stephenson's (1953) Q-sort methodology and developed the methodological activity of building a three dimensional matrix. Within this matrix, one axis represents visions, the second represents dramatistic structure, and the third represents demographic, sociographic and psychographic variables (Cragan and Shields, 1980, p. 33). Figure A presents the three dimensional matrix as used by Cragan and Shields (1980, pp. 33-34) in their study of the three competing visions of foreign policy that "Played in Peoria" during a political campaign.

In their discussion of means of uncovering the visions held by a group, Cragan and Shields (1980) stated that "three visions tend to exhaust most of the potential fantasizing on a subject" (p. 38).

Theoretically, the number of visions could be equal to the number of persons in a particular group. However, in practical terms, most persons appear to be



**Figure 1. Three Dimensional Matrix.**

**Source:** Cragan, J. & Shields, D. (1981). Uses of Bormann's rhetorical theory in applied communication research. *Research: A dramatisitic approach* (pp. 31-42). Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.

attached to one of three major dramas in regard to a given subject. The metalevel of Bormann's theory, that a vision may be pragmatic, social or righteous, seems to be displayed in the competing rhetorical visions (Cragan and Shields, 1980, p. 40). This finding has particular significance for this study of the rhetoric "The Big Book" of Alcoholics Anonymous.

#### Alcoholics Anonymous and Fantasy Theme Analysis

Having examined the background of the Bormannean symbolic convergence theory and the basic concepts of fantasy theme analysis, the applicability of fantasy theme analysis to "The Big Book" of Alcoholics Anonymous will be addressed.

The versatility of fantasy theme analysis can be seen in the topics which have been addressed by some researchers: political campaigns (Bormann, 1973; Bormann, Koester and Bennett, 1978; Rarick, Duncan, Lee and Porter, 1977); radical movements (Chesbro, Cragan, and McCullough, 1973); advice on interpersonal relationships as given in popular magazines (Kidd, 1975); the image of fore safety educators (Shields, 1974). In each case the rhetoric, whether garnered from previously captured statements or obtained through group interview and observation, was the basis of the construction of the rhetorical visions which exist for

group members.

The research on Alcoholics Anonymous previously reviewed seems to suggest the AA creates a new social reality for its members. That change in symbols and meaning has been described as cognitive restructuring, as socialization, as changed attribution, or redefinition of the self and world. What is common to each of these variously described changes is the method for bringing about change--the communication of new ideas, meanings and symbols. The meaning, purpose or world view of Alcoholics Anonymous is communicated to potential members and those who accept the world view and maintain the program are most successful in the recovery.

The message and meaning of Alcoholics Anonymous was formed in the oral communication of the early Akron AA group. These symbols and messages were then recorded in "The Big Book." Since 1939, these realities have been repeated countless times within AA chapters worldwide and throughout the extensive AA literature. Thus, an examination of the rhetoric of "The Big Book" using fantasy theme analysis should reveal the competing rhetorical visions which may exist for the members of Alcoholics Anonymous. Furthermore, those visions at the metalevel, as suggested by Cragan and Shields (1980, p. 40), should correspond to the



following classifications: pragmatic, social and righteous.

Based on the information gained in this chapter, it is possible to outline the four underlying assumptions of this study. First, the need to develop effective and appropriate treatment programs for problem drinkers exists and will continue to exist. Second, the underlying assumption of the Bormannean symbolic convergence theory is that meanings, emotions and motives of people are revealed in their rhetoric. Thus, the meanings, motives and emotions of a particular group can be learned through examination of their communication. The third assumption of this study states that through communication persons in a group create and maintain a shared view, a social reality. Therefore, if the messages of a particular group are analyzed, evidence of a particular world view shared by the group members should be gained. Finally, the fantasy themes which can be found in "The Big Book" reflect the meanings, emotions and motives of persons in Alcoholics Anonymous groups. These fantasy themes should reveal the social reality of Alcoholics Anonymous.

This study examined five hypotheses related to the fantasy theme analysis of "The Big Book". These hypotheses were as follows:

Hypothesis I. Distinct competing rhetorical visions can be found in the basic text of Alcoholics Anonymous, "The Big Book".

Hypothesis II. Setting, plotline, dramatic personae and/or sanctioning agent for each of the rhetorical visions can be identified.

Hypothesis III. A pragmatic rhetorical vision indicated by such language as task, function, utility, practicality and usefulness can be found in "The Big Book".

Hypothesis IV. A righteous rhetorical vision indicated by such language as spirituality, salvation, morality, redemption, atonement and faith can be found in "The Big Book".

Hypothesis V. A social rhetorical vision indicated by such language as fellowship, community, friendship, solidarity and society can be found in "The Big Book".

In this chapter the literature related to Alcoholics Anonymous and related to the Bormannean symbolic convergence theory has been examined. The basic concepts of fantasy theme analysis have been described and the applicability of this form of analysis to "The Big Book" has been explained. Finally, the assumptions of the study have been outlined and the hypotheses of this research have been presented.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The method of research utilized in this study was Bormannean fantasy theme analysis, a form of rhetorical criticism. The research procedure was applied to the previously captured rhetoric of Alcoholics Anonymous as found in the basic text, "The Big Book."

Written by Bill Wilson, co-founder of AA, "The Big Book" was first published in 1939 and is now in its third edition (1976). Persons involved in the Alcoholics Anonymous program are consistently referred to this volume to gain guidance and understanding. Aside from the addition and/or substitution of some life stories, the text remains virtually unchanged. The AA program is outlined in the book and its principles are illustrated with the life stories.

The focus of this study was upon the messages addressed to the members of AA in "The Big Book." Although messages conveyed in Chapter 8, "To Wives," and Chapter 10, "To Employers," are similar in some respects to the other chapters of "The Big Book," these two chapters are not addressed to the alcoholic directly. Therefore, Chapters 8 and 10 of "The Big Book"

were eliminated from the Bormannean fantasy theme analysis.

The initial stage of this research required the establishment of criteria for the assessment of each type of rhetorical vision, pragmatic, social or righteous, which was to be found in "The Big Book." The basic criterion arose from Bormann's statement regarding the dramatizing message which conveys a fantasy theme. He stated (1985, p. 4) that dramatizing messages consist of the following types of language structures: a pun or other wordplay, a double entendre, a figure of speech, an analogy, an anecdote, allegory, fable and/or narrative. Thus, the first criterion used in this study for identification of a fantasy theme was the form of the dramatizing message.

The study's second criterion for assessment and classification of the rhetorical visions contained in "The Big Book" was based on the recognition of the use of language as central to the focus of this study. Vocabulary communicated within "The Big Book" and related to each of the three vision areas was used as an indicator of the classification pragmatic, social or righteous, to which the dramatizing message belonged.

The criterion words selected as indicators for the pragmatic rhetorical visions were work, function,

behavior, action, utility, applicability, usefulness, serviceable, task, practicality, method, process, treatment.

For the righteous rhetorical vision the chosen criterion words were virtuousness, integrity, morality, ethics, spirituality, faith, salvation, humility, deity references, atonement, redemption, conciliation.

The social rhetorical vision was indicated by the criterion words of fellowship, community, friendship, communion, sorority/fraternity, association, companionship, hospitality, society, comraderie.

Having established a set of criteria, "The Big Book" was read three times, once for each classification, by the researcher, looking for the dramatizing messages as indicated by the language. The messages were recorded on note cards of three colors to facilitate the sorting process.

At this point in the research procedure it became evident to the researcher that the life stories which make up over half of "The Big Book" are dramatizing messages in themselves. These narratives written by AA members with a diversity of backgrounds, experiences, and levels of participation in AA, illustrate the principles explained within the text and are models of the life histories as told within an AA meeting. Using the same procedure as outlined for the text of "The Big

Book," the personal stories were examined for fantasy themes.

The note cards of each rhetorical vision type taken from the text were then identified and sorted according to fantasy themes depicting plotline, scene, dramatis personae and sanctioning agent. Repetition of image and metaphor was noted and repetition of particular themes was noted. These repetitions were indicative of the strength of a particular fantasy theme. In addition, the use of a variety of metaphors to illustrate a common theme was noted.

This same research process was applied to the notes taken from the life histories which appear in "The Big Book." Of particular significance was not only the repetition of fantasy themes from story to story, but also the repetition of themes contained within the text itself.

Finally from the fantasy themes discovered in the text and the personal histories, each rhetorical vision, pragmatic, social, and righteous, was identified.

In summary, the research methodology of Bormanean fantasy theme analysis as applied to the "The Big Book" of Alcoholics Anonymous has been used in this study. Criteria for assessment, procedural steps and research method decisions have been presented to explain the

classification of the rhetorical visions as pragmatic,  
social or righteous.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE RESULTS

In this chapter the results of a Bormannean fantasy theme analysis of "The Big Book" of Alcoholics Anonymous will be given. The findings in regard to the five proposed hypotheses of this study will be presented. In addition, a detailed explanation of the rhetorical visions contained in "The Big Book" and supporting material from that text will be given. Because "The Big Book" (1976) is the main reference source used within this chapter, direct citations from that text will be noted by page number only.

The findings of this study indicated that three distinct competing rhetorical visions, as described in Bormannean fantasy theme analysis, are found in "The Big Book" of Alcoholics Anonymous. Within each of these rhetorical visions, the fantasy themes of *dramatis personae*, plotline, setting and sanctioning agent are present. Furthermore, these distinct rhetorical visions correspond to Cragan and Shields' (1980) conception of competing visions being social, pragmatic or righteous in nature (p. 33). A detailed description of the fantasy themes present in "The Big



Book" will be provided in this chapter. The social, pragmatic, and righteous visions will be addressed separately as they relate to the hypotheses of the study.

### The Social Rhetorical Vision

The social rhetorical vision as it appears in "The Big Book" of Alcoholics Anonymous could aptly be named the Rich Man, Poor Man Vision, after the children's counting rhyme. This vision characterizes Alcoholics Anonymous as a fellowship of persons for whom the usual social, economic, class and cultural distinctions are nonexistent. As "The Big Book" states, "The only requirement for membership is an honest desire to stop drinking" (p. xiv). Unlike most other organizations, the fellowship of AA becomes inclusive not exclusive and the level of tolerance of others' beliefs and behaviors is high.

Within the rhetorical drama of Rich Man, Poor Man, the traditional dramatis personae consisting of heroes and villains are unfulfilled roles. It is important to this fellowship drama that the roles of good or evil characters remain unassigned. Even those persons within AA who are already recovering are no more "good" than those still suffering. Persons attracted to the fellowship are bound by their alcoholism and its

solution in AA and that becomes the central and significant factor of their characterization. Thus, a description of AA members from "The Big Book" is also a description of the dramatis personae of the social rhetorical vision:

We are average Americans. All sections of this country and many of its occupations are represented as well as many political, economic, social, and religious backgrounds. We are people who normally would not mix. But there exists among us a fellowship, a friendliness, and an understanding which is indescribably wonderful. We are like the passengers of a great liner the moment after rescue from shipwreck when camaraderie, joyousness and democracy pervade the vessel from steerage to Captain's table. Unlike the feelings of the ship's passengers, however, our joy in escape from disaster does not subside as we go our individual ways. The feeling of having shared in a common peril is one element in the powerful cement which binds us. (p. 17)

The metaphor of a shipwreck is further utilized to emphasize the uselessness of the conceptions of heroes and villains to this Rich Man, Poor Man vision. The emphasis is always on equality--with alcohol being the great equalizer:

No one is too discredited or has sunk too low to be welcomed cordially--if he means business. Social distinctions, petty rivalries and jealousies--these are laughed out of countenance. Being wrecked in the same vessel, being restored and united under one God, with hearts and minds attuned to the welfare of others, the things which matter so much to some people no longer signify much to them. How could they? (p. 161)

The drama of disaster escaped and its equalizing effect is also present in the following passage from the text of "The Big Book" in its chapter on The Twelfth Step:

Near you, alcoholics are dying helplessly like people in a sinking ship. If you live in a large place, there are hundreds. High and low, rich and poor, these are future fellows of Alcoholics Anonymous. Among them you will make lifelong friends. You will be bound to them with new and wonderful ties, for you will escape disaster together and you will commence shoulder to shoulder your common journey. (pp. 152-153)

The fact that there are no distinctions in the inherent nature of the dramatis personae of the social rhetorical vision has import for the plotline fantasy theme of this vision. The action of the drama is simply this, "Each day, somewhere in the world, recovery begins when one alcoholic talks with another alcoholic, sharing experience, strength and hope" (p. xxii). From this it can be seen that the setting of the drama can be said to be anyplace, anytime. "The Big Book" advises recovering alcoholics in AA who are committed to helping other alcoholics, "Your job now is to be at the place where you may be of maximum helpfulness to others, so never hesitate to visit the most sordid spot on earth on such an errand." (p. 102) Evidence from the personal histories demonstrates that a person's first encounter with the fellowship of

AA, the action of one alcoholic talking to another alcoholic, may be played out in settings as diverse as a prison cell, a hospital room, a shabby rooming house, a church basement, or a kitchen. Whatever the setting, the action remains constant.

The simple image conjured of one person talking to another about his or her problems with alcohol belies the strength of the "rightness" of that behavior as presented in "The Big Book." The Rich Man, Poor Man Vision has as its sanctioning agent personal experience with alcoholism and with sobriety through AA. The roots of experience as sanctioning agent are deeply embedded in AA history as evidenced by Bill Wilson's talk with Dr. Bob Smith on June 10, 1935, the official beginning date of the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous (Alcohol Anonymous, 3rd ed., 1976, p. 171). Writing of that meeting in his personal history, Dr. Bob said:

But this was a man who had experienced many years of frightful drinking, who had had most all the drunkard's experiences known to man, but who had been cured by the very means I had been trying to employ, that is to say the spiritual approach. He gave me information about the subject of alcoholism which was undoubtedly helpful. Of far more importance was the fact that he was the first living human with whom I had ever talked, who knew what he was talking about in regard to alcoholism from actual experience. In other words, he talked my language. (p. 180)

From this encounter between Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob Smith grew the organization of Alcoholics Anonymous and with it the conviction that experience with the problem gives the recovering alcoholic the imperative to help when others may have failed. The recovering alcoholic's qualifications for this task are amply reinforced within the text. An example is given below:

But the ex-problem drinker who had found this solution, who is properly armed with facts about himself can generally win the entire confidence of another alcoholic in a few hours. Until such an understanding is reached, little or nothing can be accomplished.

That the man who is making the approach has had the same difficulty, that he obviously knows what he is talking about, that his whole deportment shouts at the new prospect that he is a man with a real answer, that he has no attitude of Holier Than Thou, nothing whatever except the sincere desire to be helpful; that there are no fees to pay, no axes to grind, no people to please, no lectures to be endured--these are the conditions we have found most effective. After such an approach many take up their beds and walk again. (pp. 18-19)

Again the sanctioning agent in the drama is reinforced--one's difficulty with alcohol allows one to speak and be heard where others' words have gone unheeded.

This experience with alcohol which ultimately develops kinship among those who suffer is central to a great many of the personal stories which appear in "The Big Book." On one level the stories can be

viewed as a written approach to other alcoholics. These stories state clearly how alcohol abuse has destroyed lives and how the AA program has restored those lives. As justification "The Big Book" states:

We hope no one will consider these self-revealing accounts in bad taste. Our hope is that many alcoholic men and women, desperately in need, will see these pages, and we believe that it is only by fully disclosing ourselves and our problems that they will be persuaded to say, 'Yes, I am one of them too; I must have this thing.' (p. 29)

On another level but of equal importance is the credence given the sanctioning agent of experience in the narratives. Again and again the feeling of being understood, accepted and belonging is expressed by the writers. Several examples of these feelings can be given. From "Alcoholics Anonymous Number Three," this statement:

Before very long we began to relate some incidents of our drinking, and, naturally, pretty soon, I realized both of them knew what they were talking about because you can see things and smell things when you're drunk, that you can't other times, and, if I had thought they didn't know what they were talking about, I wouldn't have been willing to talk to them at all. (p. 185)

In "He Sold Himself Short" a salesman speaks of his first visit from a member of AA:

He laid great stress on the progression of his attitude toward life and people, and most of his attitudes had been very similar to mine. I thought at times that he was telling my story! (p. 290)

This same feeling is echoed by a woman in "Keys to the Kingdom":

However, as he unfolded his story for me, I could not help but believe him. In describing his suffering, his fears, his many years of groping for some answer to that which always seemed to remain unanswerable, he could have been describing me, and nothing short of experience and knowledge could have afforded him that much insight! (p. 309)

Another woman in "Women Suffer, Too" expresses the peace she found in her acceptance by other AA members, a feeling often expressed in the other narratives:

I went trembling into a house in Brooklyn filled with strangers...and I found I had come home at last, to my own kind. There is another meaning for the Hebrew word that in the King James version of the Bible is translated 'salvation.' It is: 'to come home.' I had found my salvation. I wasn't alone any more. (p. 228)

She continues:

That was the beginning of a new life, a fuller life, a happier life than I had ever known or believed possible. I had found friends, understanding friends who often knew what I was thinking and feeling better than I knew myself, and didn't allow me to retreat into my prison of loneliness and fear over a fancied slight or hurt. Talking things over with them, great floods of enlightenment showed me myself as I really was and I was like them. We all had hundreds of character traits, of fears and phobias, likes and dislikes, in common. Suddenly I could accept myself, faults and all, as I was--for weren't we all like that? (pp. 228-229)

In The Rich Man, Poor Man Vision the sanctioning agent of experience dominates, the vision. "The Big

Book" narratives emphasize individually and as a whole the power of experience in work with other alcoholics. Past experience with alcohol no matter how tragic is considered an asset. "Cling to the thought that, in God's hands, the dark past is the greatest possession you have--the key to life and happiness for others. With it you can avert death and misery for them" (p. 124). More than just an asset, experience empowers. The recovering alcoholic has the power to act and that action is to carry the AA message to other alcoholics.

The Rich Man, Poor Man rhetorical vision contains all the dramatistic elements required. The dramatic personae are men and women from all backgrounds, cultures, religions and social levels who have been brought together by their common problem and "who have discovered a common solution" (p. 17). This solution is "a way out on which we can absolutely agree and upon which we can join in brotherly and harmonious actions." (p 17). Within this social rhetorical vision the action or plotline is simply one alcoholic talking to another alcoholic and this action is carried out in many different settings from sordid to splendid.

The strength of this vision lies in its sanctioning agent, experience. Past alcoholic experience contrasted with present sobriety in the



fellowship of AA provide powerful meaning, emotion and motive to the Rich Man, Poor Man vision. With the sharing of experience, despair, futility and fear are replaced by hope and love. In "Keys of the Kingdom" a woman AA member summarizes the essential elements the fantasy themes of the social rhetorical vision presented in "The Big Book" of Alcoholics Anonymous:

The last fifteen years of my life have been rich and meaningful. I have had my share of problems, heartaches and disappointments, because that is life, but also I have known a great deal of joy, and a peace that is the handmaiden of an inner freedom. I have a wealth of friends and, with my A.A. friends, an unusual quality of fellowship. For, to these people, I am truly related. First, through mutual pain and despair, and later through mutual objectives and newfound faith and hope. And, as the years go by, working together, sharing our experiences with one another and also sharing a mutual trust, understanding and love--without strings, without obligation--we acquire relationships that are unique and priceless.

There is no more "aloneness," with that awful ache, so deep in the heart of every alcoholic that nothing, before, could ever reach it. That ache is gone and never need return again.

Now there is a sense of belonging, of being wanted and needed and loved. In return for a bottle and a hangover, we have been given the Keys of the Kingdom. (p. 312)

#### The Righteous Rhetorical Vision

The righteous rhetorical vision presented in "The Big Book" of Alcoholics Anonymous is dominated by the

concept of a "Power greater than ourselves." The Greater Power Vision provides a spiritual answer to the pervasive problems generated by an addiction to alcohol.

In the Greater Power Vision the dramatis personae can be seen as heroes and villains although not in the traditional sense. Whereas heroes and villains are normally viewed as "good" and "bad", "The Big Book" avoids judging and evaluating persons in those terms. Because behaviors of alcoholics during drinking episodes and while in recovery are the focus of attention, the dramatis personae of the Greater Power Vision can be seen as simply opposing forces, much as an impartial observer might view opposing players in a tennis match. In the Greater Power Vision, then, this competition is carried out by the self-will of the alcoholic against the will of God.

The self-will personification becomes, in a sense, the villain of the action. "The Big Book" refers to this self-will as the basis of the alcoholic problem:

Selfishness-self-centeredness! That, we think, is the root of our troubles. Driven by a hundred forms of fear, self-delusion, self-seeking, and self-pity, we step on the toes of our fellows and they retaliate. Sometimes they hurt us, seemingly without provocation, but we invariably find that at some time in the past we have made decisions based on self which later placed us in a position to be hurt.

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. (p. 62)

This self-will is further emphasized in the extended metaphor of the alcoholic as an actor who attempts to direct all of the action of a play:

Most people try to live by self-propulsion. Each person is like an actor who wants to run the whole show; is forever trying to arrange the lights, the ballet, the scenery and the rest of the players in his own way. If his arrangements would only stay put, if only people would do as he wished, the show would be great. Everybody, including himself, would be pleased. Life would be wonderful. In trying to make these arrangements our actor may sometimes be quite virtuous. He may be kind, considerate, patient, generous; even modest and self-sacrificing. On the other hand, he may be mean, egotistical, selfish and dishonest. But, as with most humans, he is more likely to have varied traits. (pp. 60-61)

The result of all this self-will is a redoubling of the will, according to "The Big Book":

What usually happens? The show doesn't come off very well. He begins to think life doesn't treat him right. He decides to exert himself more. He becomes, on the next occasion, still more demanding or gracious, as the case may be. Still the play does not suit him. Admitting he may be somewhat at fault, he is sure that other people are more to blame. He becomes angry, indignant, self-pitying. What is his basic trouble? Is he not really a self-seeker even when trying to be kind? Is he not a victim of the delusion that he can wrest satisfaction and happiness out of this world if he only manages well? Is it not evident to all the rest of the players that these are the things he wants? And do not his actions make each of them wish to retaliate, snatching all they can get

out of the show? Is he not, even in his best moments, a producer of confusion rather than harmony? (p. 61)

Again, self-centeredness is personified as the villain while allowing the alcoholic person to not be judged as somehow evil.

The opposing force, God's will, then becomes the second dramatis personae in the Greater Power Vision. The self-will must abdicate the lead role, the alcoholic actor taking his or her proper place in the play and God's will must take center stage as shown in "The Big Book":

This is the how and why of it. First of all, we had to quit playing God. It didn't work. Next, we decided that hereafter in this drama of life, God was going to be our Director. He is the Principal; we are His agents. He is the Father, and we are His children. Most good ideas are simple, and this concept was the keystone of the new and triumphant arch through which we passed to freedom. (p. 62)

Another drama metaphor emphasizes God's will as the central character:

For we are now on a different basis; the basis of trusting and relying upon God. We trust infinite God rather than our finite selves. We are in the world to play the role He assigns. Just to the extent that we do as we think He would have us, and humbly rely on Him, does He enable us to match calamity with serenity. (p. 68)

The conceptualization of God and His will in the Greater Power Vision is an essential element in this drama. No attempt is ever made to describe theolo-

logically, mystically or by any other means, the nature of God. Instead the conceptualization is left to the individual and the reference point is a "power greater than ourselves" or simply a "Higher Power." This open interpretation is repeated frequently within the text of "The Big Book."

Much to our relief, we discovered we did not need to consider another's conception of God. Our own conception, however inadequate, was sufficient to make the approach and to effect a contact with Him. As soon as we admitted the possible existence of a Creative Intelligence, a Spirit of the Universe underlying the totality of things, we begin to be possessed of a new sense of power and direction, provided we took other simple steps. We found that God does not make too hard terms with those who seek Him. To us, the Realm of Spirit is broad, roomy, all inclusive; never exclusive or forbidding to those who earnestly seek. It is open, we believe, to all men. (p. 46)

When speaking to other alcoholics, the recovering alcoholic is urged to emphasize this open interpretation:

Tell him exactly what happened to you. Stress the spiritual feature freely. If the man be agnostic or atheist, make it emphatic that he does not have to agree with your conception of God. He can choose any conception he likes, provided it makes sense to him. The main thing is that he be willing to believe in a Power greater than himself and that he live by spiritual principles. (p. 93)

Furthermore, tolerance of all spiritual beliefs and religions is encouraged:

We have no desire to convince anyone that there is only one way by which faith can be

acquired. If what we have learned and felt and seen means anything at all, it means that all of us, whatever our race, creed, or color are the children of a living Creator with whom we may form a relationship upon simple and understandable terms as soon as we are willing and honest enough to try. Those having religious affiliations will find here nothing disturbing to their beliefs or ceremonies. There is no friction among us over such matters. (p. 28)

Throughout "The Big Book" this theme, "When, therefore, we speak to you of God, we mean your own conception of God," (p. 47), echoes through the text and narratives presented.

The use of a "power greater than ourselves" in the Greater Power vision presents interesting shadings of character to the dramatis personae of the self-will and God's will. "Self-will" brings to mind images of power and control. One may imagine a person whose strength and determination allow him or her to surmount any obstacle. The exertion of one's will should allow one to exert control over one's habits, i.e., compulsive drinking. Instead within "The Big Book" an alcoholic in the grip of his or her self-will is actually viewed as being powerless. "We could wish to be moral, we could wish to be philosophically comforted, in fact we could will these things with all our might, but the needed power wasn't there. Our human resources, as marshalled by the will, were not sufficient; they

failed utterly" (p. 45). The human will is not sufficient to overcome the problem. "Lack of power, that was our dilemma. We had to find a power by which we could live, and it had to be a Power greater than ourselves." (p. 45).

The lack of individual power is evident. Control and power are given to someone or something which each AA member defines for himself or herself as a Higher Power. "The Big Book" capsulizes this belief regarding a Higher Power and its effect on alcoholism in the explanation of the personal stories contained in the text:

Every one of them has gained access to, and believes in, a Power greater than himself. This Power has in each case accomplished the miraculous, the humanly impossible. (p. 50)

In one of these stories in particular, "Me An Alcoholic," the narrator stresses the implications of that power for the alcoholic:

Here I found an ingredient that had been lacking in any other effort I had made to save myself. Here was--power! Here was power to live to the end of any given day, power to have the courage to face the next day, power to have friends, power to help people, power to be sane, power to stay sober. That was seven years ago--and many A.A. meetings ago--and I haven't had a drink during those seven years. Moreover, I am deeply convinced that so long as I continue to strive, in my bumbling way, toward the principles I first encountered in the earlier chapters of this book, this remarkable power will continue to flow through me. What is

friends, all I can say is that it's a power greater than myself. If pressed further, all I can do is follow the psalmist who said it long, long before me: 'Be still, and know that I am God.' (pp. 436-437)

The dramatis personae of this Greater Power Vision reflect the concept of power. The self-will is personified as a position of virtual powerlessness, symbolized by a life out of control, particularly in regard to drinking. This is contrasted with the personae of God's will, whose pervasive power empowers the alcoholic to not only avoid that first drink but also to accept his or her life and deal with all its complexities.

In view of the characterizations of the dramatis personae, the plotline and setting of the righteous rhetorical vision seem to be self-evident. The action of this drama appears to be the struggle between the contolling self-will of the suffering alcoholic and the surrender of that alcoholic to God's will. This struggle plays itself out daily in the souls and minds of alcoholics, the setting of this Greater Power Vision.

In "Physician, Heal Thyself," one of the personal histories, this struggle is clearly illustrated:

We've got to turn the whole business over to some joker we can't even see! And this chokes the alcoholic. Here he is powerless, unmanageable, in the grip of something bigger than he is, and he's got to turn the whole



business over to someone else! It fills the alcoholic with rage. We are great people. We can handle anything. And so one gets to thinking to oneself, 'Who is this God? Who is this fellow we are supposed to turn everything over to? What can He do for us that we can't do for ourselves?' (p. 350)

The intellectual skepticism that may accompany this struggle are a part of "Bill's Story." Writes Bill Wilson:

I was not an atheist. Few people really are, for that means blind faith in the strange proposition that this universe originated in a cipher and aimlessly rushes nowhere. My intellectual heroes, the chemists, the astronomers, even the evolutionists, suggested vast laws and forces at work. Despite contrary indications, I had little doubt that a mighty purpose and rhythm underlay all. How could there be so much of precise and immutable law, and no intelligence? I simply had to believe in a Spirit of the Universe, who knew neither time nor limitation. But that was as far as I had gone. With ministers, and the world's religions, I parted right there. When they talked of a God personal to me, who was love, superhuman strength and direction, I became irritated and my mind snapped shut against such a theory.

To Christ I conceded the certainty of a great man, not too closely followed by those who claimed Him. His moral teaching--most excellent. For myself, I had adopted those parts which seemed convenient and not too difficult; the rest I disregarded.

The wars which had been fought, the burnings and chicanery that religious dispute had facilitated, made me sick. I honestly doubted whether, on balance, the religions of mankind had done any good. Judging from what I had seen in Europe and since, the power of God in human affairs was negligible,

the Brotherhood of Man a grim jest. If there was a Devil, he seemed the Boss Universal, and he certainly had me. (pp. 10-11)

From this struggle within the mind and soul of the alcoholic comes the climax of this drama, the surrender to a Higher Power. "Alcoholics Anonymous Number Three" writes of it this way:

I was willing to admit to myself that I had hit bottom, that I had gotten hold of something that I didn't know how to handle by myself. So, after reviewing these things and realizing what liquor had cost me, I went to this Higher Power which, to me, was God, without any reservation, and admitted that I was completely powerless over alcohol, and that I was willing to do anything in the world to get rid of the problem. In fact, I admitted that from now on I was willing to let God take over, instead of me. Each day I would try to find out what His will was, and try to follow that, rather than trying to get Him to always agree that the things I thought of myself were the things best for me. (p. 187)

The plotline of this vision, the struggle and surrender, is not a singular action. Rather this struggle repeats itself throughout the life of a recovering alcoholic with varying degrees of intensity. In "The Big Book" this belief is stressed to the recovering alcoholic:

We are not cured of alcoholism. What we really have is a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition. Every day is a day when we must carry the vision of God's will into all of our activities. 'How can I best serve Thee--Thy will (not mine) be done.' These are thoughts which must go with us constantly. We can

exercise our will power along this line all we wish. It is the proper use of will.  
(p. 85)

The sense of the struggle never completely being won is embodied in the AA slogan "One Day at a Time." Members of AA are focused on today and their sobriety rests on being able to stay away from alcohol "One drink at a time." "The European Drinker" expresses this daily commitment thusly:

That day I gave my will to God and asked to be directed. But I have never thought of that as something to do and then forget about. I very early came to see that there had to be a continual renewal of that simple deal with God; that I had perpetually to keep the bargain. (p. 237)

This daily rededication to one's surrender to God's will is a vital aspect of the plotline of the Greater Power Vision.

Two sanctioning agent fantasy themes of the Greater Power Vision seem to arise from the text and narratives of "The Big Book." The first sanctioning agent is logic. The second agent is similar to that of the sanctioning agent of the Rich Man, Poor Man Vision. Again the experience of recovering AA members appears to give credence to the drama of surrender to a Higher Power.

In reference to the sanctioning agent of logic, an entire chapter of "The Big Book" is devoted to the development of a logical argument for the acceptance of

what is essentially a matter of faith. In this chapter specifically addressed to agnostics and atheists, the reader with strong intellectual and anti-religious convictions is shown an intellectual argument for faith, thereby, reducing or eliminating defensiveness.

The logical discussion of faith begins with the examination of the present confusions in an alcoholic's mind. His or her disconcertion over the existence of a Higher Power in the face of the seeming inexplicable contrasts of this world are examined:

We have shared his honest doubt and prejudice. Some of us have been violently anti-religious. To others, the word 'God' brought up a particular idea of Him with which someone had tried to impress them during childhood. Perhaps we rejected this particular conception because it seemed inadequate. With that rejection we imagined we had abandoned the God idea entirely. We were bothered with the thought that faith and dependence upon a Power beyond ourselves was somewhat weak, even cowardly. We looked upon this world of warring individuals, warring theological systems, and inexplicable calamity, with deep skepticism. We looked askance at many individuals who claimed to be godly. How could a Supreme Being have anything to do with it all? And who could comprehend a Supreme Being anyhow? Yet, in other moments, we found ourselves thinking, when enchanted by a starlit night, 'Who, then, made all this?' There was a feeling of awe and wonder, but it was fleeting and soon lost. (pp. 45-46)

Skepticism over organized religion is examined as a prejudice which blinds the nonbeliever to reality:

We have learned that whatever the human frailties of various faiths may be, those

faiths have given purpose and direction to millions. People of faith have a logical idea of what life is all about. Actually, we used to have no reasonable conception whatever. We used to amuse ourselves by cynically dissecting spiritual beliefs and practices when we might have observed that many spiritually-minded persons of all races, colors, and creeds were demonstrating a degree of stability, happiness and usefulness which we should have sought ourselves.

Instead, we looked at the human defects of these people, and sometimes used their shortcomings as a basis of wholesale condemnation. We talked of intolerance, while we were intolerant ourselves. We missed the reality and the beauty of the forest because we were diverted by the ugliness of some of its trees. (pp. 49-50)

Then an example of practical facts which the modern person accepts is given:

Everybody nowadays, believes in scores of assumptions for which there is good evidence, but no perfect visualproof. And does not science demonstrate that visual proof is the weakest proof? It is being constantly revealed, as mankind studies the material world, that outward appearances are not inward reality at all. To illustate: The prosaic steel girder is a mass of electrons whirling around each other at incredible speed. These tiny bodies are governed by precise laws, and these laws hold true throughout the material world. Science tells us so. We have no reason to doubt it. When, however, the perfectly logical assumption is suggested that underneath the material world and life as we see it, there is an All Powerful, Guiding, Creative Intelligence, right there our perverse streak comes to the surface and we laboriously set out to convince ourselves it isn't so. We read wordy books and indulge in windy arguments, thinking we believe this universe needs no God to explain it. Were our contentions true, it would follow that life originated out of nothing, means nothing, and proceeds nowhere.

Instead of regarding ourselves as intelligent agents, spearheads of God's ever advancing Creation, we agnostics and atheists chose to believe that our human intelligence was the last word, the alpha and the omega, the beginning and end of all. Rather vain of us, wasn't it? (pp. 48-49)

Explaining the need for this logical argument, "The Big Book" states:

We agnostically inclined would not feel satisfied with a proposal which does not lend itself to reasonable approach and interpretation. Hence we are at pains to tell why we think our present faith is reasonable, why we think it more sane and logical to believe than not to believe, why we say our former thinking was soft and mushy when we threw up our hands in doubt and said, 'We don't know.' (p. 53)

To further explain this logic sanctioning agent, a metaphoric bridge is described, a bridge spanning from skepticism to faith:

Arrived at this point, we were squarely confronted with the question of faith. We couldn't duck the issue. Some of us had already walked far over the Bridge of Reason toward the desired shore of faith. The outlines and the promise of the New Land had brought lustre to tired eyes and fresh courage to flagging spirits. Friendly hands had stretched out in welcome. We were grateful that Reason had brought us so far. But somehow, we couldn't quite step ashore. Perhaps we had been leaning too heavily on Reason that last mile and we did not like to lose our support.

That was natural, but let us think a little more closely. Without knowing it, had we not been brought to where we stood by a certain kind of faith? For did we not believe in our own reasoning? Did we not have confidence in our ability to think?

What was that but a sort of faith? Yes, we had been faithful, abjectly faithful to the God of Reason. So, in one way or another, we discovered that faith had been involved all the time. (pp. 53-54)

Again in metaphor, the capacity for faith is logically argued by returning to the imagery of the electron mass:

Imagine life without faith! Were nothing left but pure reason, it wouldn't be life. But we believed in life--of course we did. We could not prove life in the sense that you can prove a straight line is the shortest distance between two points, yet, there it was. Could we still say the whole thing was nothing but a mass of electrons, created out of nothing, meaning nothing, whirling on to a destiny of nothingness? Of course we couldn't. The electrons themselves--seemed more intelligent than that. At least, so the chemist said. Hence, we saw that reason isn't everything. Neither is reason, as most of us use it, entirely dependable though it emanate from our best minds. (pp. 54-55)

Thus presented with the facts, the logical conclusion regarding belief in a "Power greater than ourselves" is drawn.

We finally saw that faith in some kind of God was a part of our make-up, just as much as the feeling we have for a friend. Sometimes we had to search fearlessly, but He was there. He was as much a fact as we were. We found the Great Reality deep down within us. In the last analysis it is only there that He may be found. (p. 55)

With the logic sanctioning agent firmly established within the text of "The Big Book", further sanction is given to the Greater Power Vision through the testimony provided in many of the personal his-

tories. These personal revelations are initially presented as an extension of the logical basis for faith argument:

Here are thousands of men and women, worldly indeed. They flatly declare that since they have come to believe in a Power greater than themselves, to take a certain attitude toward that Power, and to do certain simple things, there has been a revolutionary change in their way of living and thinking. In the face of collapse and despair, in the face of the total failure of their human resources, they found that a new power, peace, happiness, and sense of direction flowed into them.

When many hundreds of people are able to say that the consciousness of the Presence of God is today the most important fact of their lives, they present a powerful reason why one should have faith. (pp. 50-51)

The experience of a belief in a Higher Power and the change that acceptance has wrought are offered as a powerful sanctioning agent for the righteous rhetorical vision.

In "Bill's Story," Bill Wilson describes his somewhat dramatic conversion:

It was only a matter of being willing to believe in a Power greater than myself. Nothing more was required of me to make my beginning. I saw that growth could start from that point. Upon a foundation of complete willingness I might build what I saw in my friend. Would I have it? Of course I would! Thus was I convinced that God is concerned with us humans when we want Him enough. At long last I saw, I felt, I believed. Scales of pride and prejudice fell from my eyes. A new world came into view. (p. 12)



Bill continues his story with an explanation of his surrender while in the hospital seeking another cure for his alcoholism: There I humbly offered myself to God, as I then understood Him, to do with me as He would. I placed myself unreservedly under His care and direction. I admitted for the first time that of myself I was nothing; that without Him I was lost. I ruthlessly faced my sins and became willing to have my new-found Friend take them away, root and branch. I have not had a drink since. (p. 13)

This sudden reversal of a world view, the act of surrender is echoed in the story "The Man Who Mastered Fear":

Finally, and I shall never know how much later it was, one clear thought came to me: Try prayer. You can't lose, and maybe God will help you--just maybe, mind you. Having no one else to turn to, I was willing to give Him a chance, although with considerable doubt. I got down on my knees for the first time in thirty years. The prayer I said was simple. It went something like this: "God, for eighteen years I have been unable to handle this problem. Please let me turn it over to you."

Immediately a great feeling of peace descended upon me, intermingled with a feeling of being suffused with a quiet strength. I lay down on the bed and slept like a child. An hour later I awoke to a new world. Nothing had changed and yet everything had changed. The scales had dropped from my eyes and I could see life in its proper perspective. I had tried to be the center of my own little world, whereas God was the center of a vast universe of which I was perhaps an essential, but a very tiny, part. (p. 280)

These sudden conversion experiences are powerful images, but are not touted as necessary nor as usual.

The image of men and women growing in faith and that faith's life changing power are testified to more often. Says the alcoholic man in "Rum, Radio and Rebellion", "In meeting me casually I don't think my strong belief in 'The Man Upstairs' shows, but I have no other explanation for the many good things that have happened to me since I have been in AA - they came to me from a Greater Power" (p. 367).

This feeling is strongly repeated in "He Sold Himself Short":

I'm rated as a modestly successful man. My stock of material goods isn't great. But I have a fortune in friendships, courage, self assurance and honest appraisal of my own abilities. Above all, I have gained the greatest thing accorded to any man, the love and understanding of a gracious God, who has lifted me from the alcoholic scrap-heap to a position of trust where I have been able to reap the rich rewards that come from showing a little love for others and from serving them as I can. (p. 296)

The experience of the presence of a Higher Power in the lives of men and women who once felt defeated and lost, in the grip of something beyond their power to control, provides convincing evidence for persons still locked in the struggle with alcoholic self-will. The sanctioning agents of logic and experience give approval to the drama of this righteous rhetorical vision.

The Greater Power Vision as found in "The Big Book" of Alcoholics Anonymous creates a drama in which the plotline fantasy theme centers on the struggle between the dramatis personae of the self-will of the alcoholic and his or her surrender to the will of God. The action of this vision occurs in the hearts and minds of alcoholics who are led to the "rightness" of this vision by a logical argument for faith and/or by the experience of a Higher Power as presented by alcoholics recovering in AA. The essence of this Greater Power Vision has been expressed well in "Physician, Heal Thyself":

What is this power that A.A. possesses? This curative power? I don't know what it is. I suppose the doctor might say, "This is psychosomatic medicine." I suppose the psychiatrist might say, "This is benevolent interpersonal relations." I suppose others would say, "This is group psychotherapy." To me it is God. (p. 352)

#### The Pragmatic Rhetorical Vision

The emphasis of the pragmatic rhetorical vision of "The Big Book" of Alcoholics Anonymous is upon the conviction of the members of AA that they have found the solution, the answer to the alcohol problem. As stated in "The Big Book," "The tremendous fact for everyone of us is that we have discovered a common solution. We have a way out on which we can absolutely

agree" (p. 17). This Solution Vision, "a design for living that really works" (p. 28), is presented as a factual, straight-forward plan for dealing not only with the problem of compulsive drinking, but also the numerous difficulties that preceded or accompanied the alcoholism.

The Solution Vision of "The Big Book" does not divide its dramatis personae into heroes and villains. In this drama the actors are divided into alcoholics and nonalcoholics. Drinking behaviors and behaviors while drinking are clearly described to define the alcoholic:

But what about the real alcoholic? He may start off as a moderate drinker; he may or may not become a continuous hard drinker; but at some stage of his drinking career he begins to lose all control of his liquor consumption, once he starts to drink.

Here is the fellow who has been puzzling you, especially in his lack of control. He does absurd, incredible, tragic things while drinking. He is a real Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. He is seldom mildly intoxicated. He is always more or less insanelly drunk. His disposition while drinking resembles his normal nature but little. He may be one of the finest fellows in the world. Yet let him drink for a day, and he frequently becomes disgustingly, and even dangerously anti-social. He has a positive genius for getting tight at exactly the wrong moment, particularly when some important decision must be made or engagement kept. He is often perfectly sensible and well balanced concerning everything except liquor, but in respect he is incredibly dishonest and selfish. He often possesses special abilities, skills, and aptitudes, and has a

promising career ahead of him. He uses his gifts to build up a bright outlook for his family and himself, and then pulls the structure down on his head by a senseless series of sprees. He is the fellow who goes to bed so intoxicated he ought to sleep the clock around. Yet early morning he searches madly for the bottle he misplaced the night before. If he can afford it, he may have liquor concealed all over his house to be certain no one gets his entire supply away from him to throw down the wastepipe. As matters grow worse, he begins to use a combination of high-powered sedative and liquor to quiet his nerves so he can go to work. Then comes the day when he simply cannot make it and gets drunk all over again. Perhaps he goes to a doctor who gives him morphine or some sedative with which to taper off. Then he begins to appear at hospitals and sanitariums.

This is by no means a comprehensive picture of the true alcoholic, as our behavior patterns vary. But this description should identify him roughly. (pp. 21-22)

The alcoholic is identified as different from other drinkers in "The Big Book":

Most of us have been unwilling to admit we were real alcoholics. No person like to think he is bodily and mentally different from his fellows. Therefore, it is not surprising that our drinking careers have been characterized by countless vain attempts to prove we could drink like other people. The idea that somehow, someday he will control and enjoy his drinking is the great obsession of every abnormal drinker. The persistence of this illusion is astonishing. Many pursue it into the gates of insanity or death. (p. 30)

Alcoholics, therefore, are defined simply as "men and women who have lost the ability to control our drinking" (p. 30).

With this definition in mind, the person still in doubt as to his or her alcoholism is invited to "quickly diagnose yourself. Step over to the nearest barroom and try some controlled drinking. Try to drink and stop abruptly. Try it more than once" (pp. 31-32). Ultimately, each person must identify himself or herself as alcoholic. "We learned that we had to fully concede to our innermost selves that we are alcoholics. This is the first step in recovery. The delusion that we are like other people, or presently may be, has to be smashed" (p. 30).

In the Solution Vision there are no heroes and villains. The dramatis personae are those persons who are normal drinkers and those who are not, alcoholics. No conflict between these dramatis personae exists, only the recognition that drinking behavior alone casts an individual in one role or the other.

Because willingness to admit one's alcoholism is often difficult, the sanctioning agent in the Solution Vision must be one which allows this admission to come more easily. Alcoholism as illness of the body, mind and soul is that sanctioning agent. In this conception the stigma of moral laxity is removed from the alcoholic.

This illness sanctioning agent was lent authority by Dr. William Silkworth, a physician long involved in

the treatment of alcoholics and an early supporter of Alcoholics Anonymous. In an open letter which appears in "The Big Book" Silkworth stated:

We believe, and so suggested a few years ago, that the action of alcohol on these chronic alcoholics is a manifestation of an allergy; that the phenomenon of craving is limited to this class and never occurs in the average temperate drinker. These allergic types can never safely use alcohol in any form at all and once having formed the habit and found they cannot break it, once having lost their self-confidence, their reliance upon things human, their problems pile up on them and become astonishingly difficult to solve.  
(p. xxvi)

This statement from Silkworth gave medical authority to a belief held by the early AA members:

In this statement he confirms what we who have suffered alcoholic torture must believe--that the body of the alcoholic is quite as abnormal as his mind. It did not satisfy us to be told that we could not control our drinking just because we were maladjusted to life, that we were in full flight from reality, or were outright mental defectives. These things were true to some extent, in fact, to a considerable extent with some of us. But we are sure that our bodies were sickened as well. In our belief, any picture of the alcoholic which leaves out this physical factor is incomplete.

The doctor's theory that we have an allergy to alcohol interests us. As laymen, our opinion as to its soundness may, of course, mean little. But as ex-problem drinkers, we can say that his explanation makes good sense. It explains many things for which we cannot otherwise account.  
(p. xxiv)

In the previous statement from "The Big Book"

recognition of the mental aspect of the illness  
alcoholism is present as well as the physical aspect.  
In the "The Vicious Cycle" an early AA member describes  
the sickness of mind common to alcoholics:

The mental state of the sick alcoholic is beyond description. I had no resentments against individuals--the whole world was all wrong. My thoughts went round and round with "What's it all about anyhow? People have wars and kill each other; they struggle and cut each other's throats for success and what does anyone get out of it? Haven't I been successful, haven't I accomplished extraordinary things in business? What do I get out of it? Everything's all wrong and the hell with it." (pp. 244-245)

"The Big Book" describes this mental condition as a kind of insanity. "However intelligent we may have been in other respects, where alcohol has been involved, we have been strangely insane." (p. 38) And again it states, "Whatever the precise definition of the word may be, we call this plain insanity. How can such a lack of proportion, or the ability to think straight, be called anything else?" (p. 37). While conceding the physical factors, it is concluded that:

Therefore, the main problem of the alcoholic centers in his mind, rather than in his body. If you ask him why he started on that last bender, the chances are he will offer you any one of a hundred alibis. Sometimes these excuses have a certain plausibility, but none of them really makes sense in the light of the havoc an alcoholic's drinking bout creates. They sound like the philosophy of the man who, having a headache, beats himself on the head with a hammer so that he can't feel the ache. (p. 23)



These mental and physical sanctioning agents clearly receive support in several of the personal histories. In "It Might Have Been Worse," an alcoholic who began his drinking career later in life states:

The explanation that alcoholism was a disease of a two fold nature, an allergy of the body and an obsession of the mind, cleared up a number of puzzling questions for me. The allergy we could do nothing about. Somehow our bodies had reached the point where we could no longer absorb alcohol in our systems. The why is not important: the fact is that one drink will set up a reaction in our system which requires more; that one drink was too much and one hundred drinks were not enough.

The obsession of the mind was a little harder to understand and yet everyone has obsessions of various kinds. The alcoholic has them to an exaggerated degree. Over a period of time he has built up self pity, resentments toward anyone or anything that interferes with his drinking. Dishonest thinking, prejudice, ego, antagonism toward anyone and everyone who dares to cross him, vanity and a critical attitude are character defects that gradually creep in and become a part of his life. Living with fear and tension inevitably results in wanting to ease that tension, which alcohol seems to do temporarily. (p. 380)

Upon the occasion of her first exposure to "The Big Book", the relief felt by the woman in "Women Suffer, Too" can clearly be sensed:

The first chapters were a revelation to me. I wasn't the only person in the world who felt and behaved like this! I wasn't mad or vicious-I was a sick person. I was suffering from an actual disease that had a name and symptoms like diabetes or cancer or TB--and a disease was respectable, not a moral stigma! (p. 227)

This theme can be seen again in "Doctor, Alcoholic, Addict" when a multiply addicted physician writes:

It helped me a great deal to become convinced that alcoholism was a disease, not a moral issue; that I had been drinking as a result of a compulsion, even though I had not been aware of the compulsion at the time; and that sobriety was not a matter of willpower.  
(p. 448)

The testimony of these and other AA members combined with the conviction within the text of "The Big Book" that alcoholism is a disease provide meaning and motivation to the Solution Vision. Our modern society has accepted the idea that treatment exists for disease. All diseases may not be cured, but all can be given some form of treatment, if only to ease the pain and suffering of the afflicted. In the Solution Vision, the sanctioning agent of alcoholism as illness permits the belief that, therefore, treatment can be given. A cure for alcoholism does not result, but through this treatment plan, the design for living, the pain and suffering of alcoholics may be relieved.

This treatment plan itself is the plotline fantasy theme of Solution Vision of "The Big Book". This plan is seen as the answer to the problem of alcoholism and although not presented as a cure, its life altering properties are emphasized. This belief in the solution can be seen in this statement:

There is a solution. Almost none of us liked the self-searching, the leveling of our pride, the confession of shortcomings which the process requires for its successful consummation. But we saw that it really worked in others, and we had come to believe in the hopelessness and futility of life as we had been living it. When, therefore, we were approached by those in whom the problem had been solved, there was nothing left for us but to pick up the simple kit of spiritual tools laid at our feet. We have found much of heaven and we have been rocketed into a fourth dimension of existence of which we had not even dreamed. (p. 25)

The greater portion of the text of "The Big Book" is devoted to the careful examination of the principles of the AA treatment plan which have helped so many alcoholics achieve sobriety. After working through these principles in his own life and while working with others, Bill Wilson was able to refine and state these principles as a series of twelve progressive acts to be completed to achieve and maintain sobriety. The Twelve Steps, as they are now called, are the treatment plan of the Alcoholics Anonymous program. When alcoholics speak of "working the program", they are referring to an individual's progress through these steps. It is that action of working through the Twelve Steps which constitute the plotline fantasy theme. An examination of The Twelve Steps will more clearly delineate the action of this pragmatic rhetorical vision.

Steps One, Two, and Three of The Twelve Steps suggest strongly that for the alcoholic the estab-

lishment of a relationship with a Higher Power is the practical starting place for 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. (p. 59)

These three steps begin the presentation in the plotline of spiritual elements as practical solutions. As presented in "The Big Book," the alcoholic has been shown the path that has led to the belief in Steps One and Two:

Our description of the alcoholic, the chapter to the agnostic, and our personal adventures fore and after make clear three pertinent ideas:

- (a) That we were alcoholic and could not manage our own lives.
- (b) That probably no human power could have relieved our alcoholism.
- (c) That God could and would if He were sought. (p. 60)

Having been convinced of these ideas, the alcoholic at Step Three is given a suggested prayer:

Many of us said to our Maker, as we understood Him: "God, I offer myself to Thee--to build with me and to do with me as Thou wilt. Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do Thy will. Take away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of Thy Power, Thy Love, and Thy Way of life. May I do Thy will always!" (p. 63)

Alcoholics are encouraged to "abandon ourselves utterly to Him." (p. 63)

Having admitted his or her alcoholism and having turned its control over to a Higher Power, the alcoholic is ready for the next act in the drama of the Solution Vision. Steps Four through Seven focus the alcoholic's attention on his or her own character defects and their removal.

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. (p. 59)

This moral inventory of Step Four is likened in extended metaphor to the inventory a business takes:

Therefore, we started upon a personal inventory. This was Step Four. A business which takes no regular inventory usually goes broke. Taking a commercial inventory is a fact-finding and a fact-facing process. It is an effort to discover the truth about the stock-in-trade. One object is to disclose damaged or unsalable goods, to get rid of them promptly and without regret. If the owner of the business is to be successful, he cannot fool himself about values.

We did exactly the same thing with our lives. We took stock honestly. First, we searched out the flaws in our make-up which caused our failure. Being convinced that self, manifested in various ways, was what had defeated us, we considered its common manifestations. (p. 64)

A clear example of an inventory is given within the text and a discussion of problems common to alcoholics is presented. The feelings of resentment, anger, and fear are personified as a horribly destructive trio:

Resentment is the "number one" offender. It destroys more alcoholics than anything else. From it stem all forms of spiritual disease, for we have been not only mentally and physically ill, we have been spiritually sick. When the spiritual malady is overcome, we straighten out mentally and physically. In dealing with resentments, we set them on paper. We listed people, institutions or principles with whom we were angry. We asked ourselves why we were angry. In most cases it was found that our self-esteem, our pocketbooks, our ambitions, our personal relationships (including sex) were hurt or threatened. So we were sore. We were "burned up."

But the more we fought and tried to have our own way, the worse matters got. As in war, the victor only seemed to win. Our moments of triumph were short-lived. It is plain that a life which includes deep resentment leads only to futility and unhappiness. To the precise extent that we permit these, do we squander the hours that might have been worth while. But with alcoholic, whose hope is the maintenance and growth of a spiritual experience, this business of resentment is infinitely grave. We found that it is fatal. For when harboring such feelings we shut ourselves off from the sunlight of the Spirit. The insanity of alcohol returns and we drink again. And with us, to drink is to die.

If we were to live, we had to be free of anger. The grouch and the brainstorm were not for us. They may be the dubious luxury of normal men, but for alcoholics these things are poison....

Notice that the word "fear" is bracketed alongside the difficulties with Mr. Brown, Mrs. Jones, the employer, and the wife. This short word somehow touches about every aspect of our lives. It was an evil and corroding thread; the fabric of our existence was shot through with it. It set in motion trains of circumstances which brought us misfortune we felt we didn't deserve. But did not we, ourselves, set the ball rolling? (pp. 64-66)

Having conducted his or her inventory, it would be fairly easy for the alcoholic to place blame upon the persons listed there. However, the illness metaphor is utilized again in this different context to help the alcoholic avoid this blaming behavior:

This was our course: We realized that the people who wronged us were perhaps spiritually sick. Though we did not like their symptoms and the way these disturbed us, they, like ourselves, were sick too. We asked God to help us show them the same tolerance, pity, and patience that we would cheerfully grant a sick friend. When a person offended we said to ourselves, "This is a sick man. How can I be helpful to him? God save me from being angry. Thy will be done." (p. 67)

Furthermore, the alcoholic is reminded that the inventory is his or hers:

Putting out of our minds the wrongs others had done, we resolutely looked for our own mistakes. Where had we been selfish, dishonest, self-seeking and frightened? Though a situation had not been entirely our fault, we tried to disregard the other person involved entirely. Where were we to blame? The inventory was ours, not the other man's. When we saw our faults we listed them. We placed them before us in black and white. We admitted our wrongs honestly and were willing to set these matters straight. (p. 67)

Having conducted this inventory the alcoholic is now prepared for the confession of Step Five. The act of confession is absolutely necessary to the action of the drama. This conviction is emphasized in "The Big Book":

In actual practice, we usually find a solitary self-appraisal insufficient. Many of us thought it necessary to go much further. We will be more reconciled to discussing ourselves with another person when we see good reasons why we should do so. The best reason first: If we skip this vital step, we may not overcome drinking. Time after time newcomers have tried to keep to themselves certain facts about their lives. Trying to avoid this humbling experience, they have turned to easier methods. Almost invariably they got drunk. Having persevered with the rest of the program, they wondered why they fell. We think the reason is that they never completed their housecleaning. They took inventory all right, but hung on to some of the worst items in stock. They only thought they had lost their egoism and fear; they only thought they had humbled themselves. But they had not learned enough of humility, fearlessness and honesty, in the sense we find it necessary, until they told someone else all their life story. (pp. 72-73)

Although confession is a difficult task which requires the careful selection of a confessor who will be unharmed by the revelations, the result of this act is highly desired. The act and its result are vividly described in the text:

We pocket our pride and go to it, illuminating every twist of character, every dark cranny of the past. Once we have taken the step, withholding nothing, we are delighted



We can look the world in the eye. We can be alone at perfect peace and ease. Our fears fall from us. We begin to feel the nearness of our Creator. We may have had certain spiritual beliefs, but now we begin to have a spiritual experience. The feeling that the drink problem has disappeared will often come strongly. We feel we are on the Broad Highway, walking hand in hand with the Spirit of the Universe. (p. 75)

At the conclusion of this act the alcoholic is asked to examine the structure that he or she has been building as a foundation for a new life:

Returning home we find a place where we can be quiet for an hour, carefully reviewing what we have done. We thank God from the bottom of our heart that we know Him better. Taking this book down from our self we turn to the page which contains the twelve steps. Carefully reading the first five proposals we ask if we have omitted anything, for we are building an arch through which we shall walk a free man at last. Is our work solid so far? Are the stones properly in place? Have we skimped on the cement put into the foundation? Have we tried to make mortar without sand? (p. 75)

From this point the alcoholic expresses his or her willingness to let God remove his or her defects of character and then, to let God do it. Again a suggested prayer is given:

When ready, we say something like this: "My Creator, I am now willing that you should have all of me, good and bad. I pray that you now remove from me every single defect of character which stands in the way of my usefulness to you and my fellows. Grant me strength, as I go out from here, to do your bidding. Amen" (p.76)

Steps Eight and Nine make up the action of the next act of the Solution Vision rhetorical drama.

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. (p. 59)

It is within these steps that the alcoholic begins to work on repairing the damage his or her drinking has wrought.

The need for doing more than staying sober is portrayed in metaphor:

The alcoholic is like a tornado roaring his way through the lives of others. Hearts are broken. Sweet relationships are dead. Affections have been uprooted. Selfish and inconsiderate habits have kept the home in turmoil. We feel a man is unthinking when he says that sobriety is enough. He is like the farmer who came up out of his cyclone cellar to find his home ruined. To his wife, he remarked, "Don't see anything the matter here, Ma. Ain't it grand the wind stopped blowin'?" (p. 82)

The alcoholic must begin a reconstruction of broken relationships and lives. Thus, the list of offended persons is reviewed and the task of making amends is begun.

Practical approaches to enemies, creditors, family members, and others are given. "The Big Book" declares that though the risks may be great, the spiritual rewards may be greater:

Reminding ourselves that we have decided to go to any lengths to find a spiritual experience, we ask that we be given strength and direction to do the right thing, no matter what the personal consequences may be. We may lose our position or reputation or face jail, but we are willing. We have to be. We must not shrink at anything. (p. 79)

Only one qualifier exists:

Usually, however, other people are involved. Therefore, we are not to be the hasty and foolish martyr who would needlessly sacrifice others to save himself from the alcoholic pit. (p. 79)

The image presented is one of humility:

We should be sensible, tactful, considerate and humble without being servile or scraping. As God's people we stand on our feet; we don't crawl before anyone. (p. 83)

Steps Ten and Eleven begin to focus on the maintenance of sobriety.

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. (p. 59)

At this point in the plotline the alcoholic can not relax. "The Big Book" advises:

Continue to watch for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear. When these crop up, we ask God at once to remove them. We discuss them with someone immediately and make amends quickly if we have harmed anyone. Then we resolutely turn our thoughts to someone we can help. Love and tolerance of others is our code. (p. 84)

This need is seen in the narrative "He Sold Himself Short," when this alcoholic experienced a slip into drinking:

That was my lesson, that one could not take the moral inventory and then file it away; that the alcoholic has to continue to take inventory every day if he expects to get well and stay well. (pp. 293-294)

By taking inventory each day and by making amends for wrongs done to others, the alcoholic can stay sober.

Step Eleven is the action that directs the alcoholic's behavior. In this drama it also portrays the setting fantasy theme. The setting of this drama is the slogan "One Day At A Time." The alcoholic is taught to focus his or her prayers and attention on today only. He or she is encouraged to pray for God's guidance in daily living and to pray in gratitude for that guidance at the end of each day. "The Big Book" suggests:

When we retire at night, we constructively review our day. Were we resentful, selfish, dishonest or afraid? Do we owe an apology? Have we kept something to ourselves which should be discussed with another person at once? Were we kind and loving toward all? What could we have done better? Were we thinking of ourselves most of the time? Or were we thinking of what we could do for others, of what we could pack into the stream of life? But we must be careful not to drift into worry, remorse or morbid reflection, for that would diminish our usefulness to others. After making our review we ask God's forgiveness and inquire what corrective measures should be taken.

On awakening let us think about the twentyfour hours ahead. We consider our plans for the day. Before we begin, we ask God to direct our thinking, especially asking that it be divorced from self-pity, dishonest or self-seeking motives. Under these conditions we can employ our mental faculties with assurance, for after all God gave us brains to use. Our thought-life will be placed on a much higher plane when our thinking is cleared of wrong motives....

As we go through the day we pause, when agitated or doubtful, and ask for the right thought or action. We constantly remind ourselves we are no longer running the show, humbly saying to ourselves many times each day "Thy will be done."  
(pp. 86-88)

Taking inventory and seeking God's will for twenty-four hours only is stressed.

The utility of this twenty-four hour plan is expressed in the personal narratives. In "He Had To Be Shown", a longtime AA member writes.

The very simple program they advised me to follow was that I should ask to know God's will for me for that one day, and then, to the best of my ability, to follow that, and at night to express my gratefulness to God for the things that had happened to me during the day. When I left the hospital I tried this for a day and it worked, for a week and it worked, and for a month, and worked--and then for a year and it still worked. It has continued to work now for nearly eighteen years. (pp. 208-209)

A young AA member who began his drinking career at age 13 states in "Too Young":

Once I did have a slip--tried drinking again--but the A.A.'s tell me not to worry about yesterday, because nobody can change it, and

not to worry about tomorrow, because it hasn't come yet. Live twenty-four hours at a time, they say. And it works. I'm sober today. (p. 320)

Thus, Steps Ten and Eleven stress the ongoing action of the plotline fantasy theme of the Solution Vision and the setting fantasy theme of that vision.

Step Twelve of the Twelve Steps concludes the action of the pragmatic rhetorical vision.

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. (p. 59)

To AA members Step Twelve is critical to recovery.

Working with other alcoholics, or Twelfth Step work as it is commonly referred to, is necessary to continued sobriety. "The Big Book" states:

Practical experience shows that nothing will so much insure immunity from drinking as intensive work with other alcoholics. It works when other activities fail. (p. 89)

It further advises in making a Twelfth Step call:

It is important for him to realize that your attempt to pass this on to him plays a vital part in your own recovery. Actually, he may be helping you more than you are helping him. Make it plain he is under no obligation to you, that you hope only that he will try to help other alcoholics when he escapes his own difficulties. Suggest how important it is that he place the welfare of other people ahead of his own. Make it clear that he is not under pressure, that he needn't see you again if he doesn't want to. You should not be offended if he wants to call it off, for he has helped you more than you have helped him. (p. 94)

An extended description of the Good Samaritan role shows possibilities that can occur when helping other alcoholics:

Helping others is the foundation stone of your recovery. A kindly act once in a while isn't enough. You have to act the Good Samaritan every day, if need be. It may mean the loss of many nights' sleep, great interference with your pleasures, interruptions to your business. It may mean sharing your money and your home, counseling frantic wives and relatives, innumerable trips to police courts, sanitariums, hospitals, jails and asylums. Your telephone may jangle at any time of the day or night. Your wife may sometimes say she is neglected. A drunk may smash the furniture in your home, or burn a mattress. You may have to fight with him if he is violent. Sometimes you will have to call a doctor and administer sedatives under his direction. Another time you may have to send for the police or an ambulance. (p. 97)

In light of these possibilities, the benefits of this action seem few in number. However, the opposite is claimed to be true:

Life will take on new meaning. To watch people recover, to see them help others, to watch loneliness vanish, to see a fellowship grow up about you, to have a host of friends--this is an experience you must not miss. We know you will not want to miss it. Frequent contact with newcomers and with each other is the bright spot of our lives. (p. 89)

Twelfth Step work is seen as one of the cornerstones of recovery and as the climax of the action of this plotline fantasy theme.

The Twelve Steps, discussed briefly here, are the plotline fantasy theme of this pragmatic rhetorical

vision. "Working the program" becomes the key phrase to understanding the action of the drama while "One Day At A Time" becomes the key phrase to the setting. In the Solution Vision, alcoholics, the dramatis personae, work the program twenty-four hours a day. Relieved of characterization as a moral weakling, the alcoholic may accept his or her problem as an illness, the sanctioning agent of the drama, and, thus, can receive treatment through following the "AA way of life."

In "It Might Have Been Worse," a recovering alcoholic expresses the pragmatic rhetorical vision as found in "The Big Book."

There are many short phrases and expressions in A.A. which make sound sense. "First Things First": solving our immediate problems before we try to solve all the others and get muddled in our thinking and doing. "Easy Does It." Relax a little. Try for inner contentment. No one individual can carry all the burdens of the world. Everyone has problems. Getting drunk won't solve them. "Twenty-four hours a day." Today is the day. Doing our best, living each day to the fullest is the art of living. Yesterday is gone, and we don't know whether we will be here tomorrow. If we do a good job of living today, and if tomorrow comes for us, then the chances are we will do a good job when it arrives--so why worry about it?

The A.A. way of life is the way we always should have tried to live. 'Grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, courage to change the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference.' These thoughts become part of our daily lives. They are not ideas of resignation but of the recognition of certain basic facts of living. (p. 382)



In summary, this chapter has described the fantasy themes of *dramatis personae*, plotline, setting and sanctioning agent for each of the three hypothesized rhetorical visions to be found in "The Big Book" of Alcoholics Anonymous. These visions were identified as the Rich Man, Poor Man Vision, the Greater Power Vision, and the Solution Vision. At the metalevel, these three visions were shown to correspond to Cragan and Shields' (1981) conceptualization of social, righteous and pragmatic, respectively (p. 40).

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter, a discussion of the findings and limitations of this study will be provided and an analysis of possible further research studies will be presented. In addition, the implications of this Bormannean fantasy theme analysis of "The Big Book" of Alcoholics Anonymous for members and friends of AA, for substance abuse counselors, and for speech communication scholars will be examined.

#### Summary of the Findings

Using a Bormannean fantasy theme analysis of "The Big Book" of Alcoholics Anonymous, three distinct rhetorical visions were delineated. Further, this study indicated that within each vision all four of the fantasy themes, plotline, dramatis personae, setting and sanctioning agent, were present. As a result of an examination of these themes, this research suggests that the development within "The Big Book" three distinct rhetorical visions, named the Rich Man, Poor Man Vision, the Greater Power Vision, and the Solution Vision, correspond, at the metalevel, to the characterizations of social, righteous and pragmatic, respec-

ively (Cragan and Shields, 1980, p. 40). Therefore, the five hypotheses posed in this research appear to be confirmed. Although the confirmation of the three rhetorical visions as hypothesized was demonstrated in Chapter 4, the hypothesized distinctiveness of these visions was not as clear as had been expected, particularly for the righteous and pragmatic rhetorical visions. The spiritual aspects of the AA program are presented as practical steps and, thus, the distinctiveness of these two visions is not always as evident within "The Big Book."

Further, the text which outlines the actual Alcoholics Anonymous program is not as metaphorically rich as had been anticipated. Imagery, allegory, figures of speech and other dramatizing messages described by Bormann (1985, p. 4) are present, but not in as great a number as had been expected. Instead, much of the dramatizing material appears as the forty-four personal stories which comprise the final section of "The Big Book." These histories, many imagery laden, follow a basic format: a description of the alcoholic's drinking background and the difficulties such behavior caused, a recalling of his or her introduction to and acceptance of the Alcoholics Anonymous program and finally, a discussion of the alcoholic's life and behavior since becoming an AA

member. Humorous, tragic, ironic, desperate, joyous, these tales reflect the principles which appear in "The Big Book." Therefore, an accurate construction of each rhetorical visions and confirmation of the hypotheses required a careful examination of the text and the narratives.

Since the confirmation of hypotheses in this study differs from confirmation in the traditional quantitative study, that difference must be addressed. The five hypotheses of this study suggested that three distinct competing rhetorical visions, each with fantasy themes of plotline, setting, dramatis personae and sanctioning agent, exist in "The Big Book" of Alcoholics Anonymous and that these visions could be characterized as social, righteous and pragmatic in nature. These hypotheses were confirmed in the sense that examples of these fantasy themes could be identified in specific sections taken from "The Big Book." These direct quotations from "The Big Book" were presented in Chapter 4 to support the argument for validity.

#### Limitations

Limitations exist in this study and it is these limitations which demonstrate its differences from traditional quantitative studies. The major limitation

is that the investigator proposes hypotheses and then seeks evidence to support them. In a sense, the investigator finds what he or she hopes to find. Of course, similar strategy is used in experimental or empirical studies, but safeguards against investigator bias exist in the procedures, and replication of the study should be possible.

The research reported here is similar to certain studies of rhetoric and, thus, is qualitative in nature. The findings reported here were limited by the use of a single analyst of the available material in "The Big Book." No attempt has been made at independent or blind verification by other analysts. Such additional studies are needed. These studies may present replication of this research or may find different rhetorical visions within "The Big Book." In addition to studies of this purpose, an independent critique of the findings reported here would be useful.

#### Implications for Further Research and Applications

On the basis of the results of this study and with the caveats provided above, other research studies are indicated which may expand the usefulness of this fantasy theme analysis of "The Big Book." Such studies may have utility for persons concerned with substance

abuse and to scholars within the communication discipline.

A study of immediate importance as a result of this Bormannean fantasy theme analysis is an actual assessment of these visions by AA members. Persons within AA could be asked to examine these visions and their respective fantasy themes to confirm or disconfirm their existence. Furthermore, analysis of actual group interaction within meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous and focused group interviews of AA members are indicated. By these means, the salience of the rhetorical visions discovered in this study may be assessed and revisions and refinements may take place.

Once the rhetorical visions created within the Alcoholics Anonymous group have been accurately portrayed, individual response to those visions could be examined. The dominance of a particular rhetorical vision could be analyzed in relationship to numerous variables. For example, the researcher might simply compare demographic variables such as sex, age, social class, and education, and their relationship to a person's likely response to one of the rhetorical visions. Further research might explore personality variables and their relationship to the rhetorical vision which seems to have "caught up" certain members

of the group. In addition, variables of years of compulsive drinking behavior and years of AA attendance could be assessed as they relate to the dominance of one rhetorical vision over another for a particular person.

An examination of various AA group responses to these visions found in "The Big Book" may also prove of some value. Research comparing AA groups in various settings and their dominant vision might also provide insight not only into the fantasy themes but also into the group interaction.

Clearly, the results of this particular study only begin to explore the depth and breadth of research which could arise from an analysis such as this. Although only an initiating step of a more complex research process, a Bormannean fantasy theme analysis of "The Big Book" does have some implications for members and friends of AA, substance abuse therapists and communication scholars.

Previous to this study, the message of Alcoholics Anonymous may have been viewed as simply that, the message. However, this study suggests that this conception that AA presents a singular identifiable message, may not be an accurate description.

If a group conveys a single message, it is

reasonable to assume that persons responding to that message will be similar in many ways, i.e., value structure, social class, religious background. In AA the great similarity is, obviously, compulsive drinking, but in every other area of human existence, alcoholics cover the spectrum of human characteristics. Thus, the results of this research, that "The Big Book" presents three distinct rhetorical visions whose messages may capture and have meaning for a diversity of people, seem to make sense. Furthermore, the fact that these three visions have different motives for action may help to explain why such a variety of membership exists in Alcoholics Anonymous and why it is a successful treatment for these persons.

This recognition of three rhetorical visions within "The Big Book" also has some implications for AA members and their Twelfth Step work. Current practice dictates such factors as length of sobriety and availability as determinants of who makes Twelfth Step calls when needed. As such, within the framework of this study, an AA member for whom the Greater Power Vision is dominant might be sent on a call and would naturally use the language and messages of his or her dominant vision, the righteous rhetorical vision. If these spiritual themes were not salient to the prospective member, the Twelfth Step call might be



doomed to failure.

On the other hand, if research can tie particular variables to each vision, the potential success rate of Twelfth Step calls may be increased. Determination of likely response to the visions from prospective members would make the selection of the AA member to make the call less likely left to indiscriminate factors. An AA member could be chosen on the basis of vision matching and the likelihood that his or her language and messages would have meaning for the alcoholic in need of help should increase.

This concept of vision matching may also have significance for substance abuse therapists. As the therapist presents the AA program as a treatment strategy, one of the three visions could be emphasized according to the factors within the alcoholic which would have been identified as related to a particular vision. Thus, for AA members and others concerned with alcohol abuse the Bormannean fantasy theme analysis of "The Big Book" provides information regarding the messages conveyed by Alcoholics Anonymous which may be useful to successful changes in the world view of some alcoholics.

This study has demonstrated that a Bormannean fantasy theme analysis can be conducted on the literature of a group. From such information an

assessment of the salience of the visions for a particular organization can be completed. With such information, organizations as varied as support groups, volunteer organizations, and corporate management circles, can examine their messages and the effectiveness of these messages in portraying the vision they wish to create in the minds of their members or the public. Thus, the communication scholar may find a rich field of study within the messages themselves and within the interaction of these groups as the fantasy themes of the rhetorical vision chain out among the members.

## APPENDIX A

### THE TWELVE STEPS

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

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