



Volume 21

Number 006

Alcoholics Anonymous – II

Lead: Established as a part of the Christian religious tradition, Alcoholics Anonymous soon evolved into a multi-sectarian group with traditions and precepts all its own.

Intro: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts

Content: Delivered of his dependence on alcohol in 1934, William Griffiths Wilson became an enthusiastic convert and soon with his own first convert, Dr. Bob, were

finding success with other alcoholics and they established Alcoholics Anonymous stressing small group meetings, admission of a permanent addiction to alcohol, conversion to some concept of the divine, and willingness to share their struggle and success with others so afflicted.

Wilson, soon to be known only as Bill W., and his associates formed the Alcoholics Foundation to aid in fund-raising and began sketching out what would become AA's seminal text, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, better known today as the Big Book, in which the early members told their stories and described their program. Found in Chapter Five, "How it Works," is the primary directive of AA, the 12 Steps, numbered after the 12 apostles. Borrowing heavily from the insights of William James in his classic volume, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, Wilson shaped the steps to

induce a kind of religious mania, an intense obligation just as addictive as booze itself.

Members were to admit their helplessness over alcoholic addiction. They were to seek after help from a higher power, as each person saw that power. Members were expected to share their failures and successes with others in their meeting group, make restitution with those they have harmed and make prayer and meditation a part of their lives. Finally, members are to carry the message of their transformation to other alcoholics and to practice AA's principles for the rest of their lives. Since alcohol looms as a constant and permanent danger, a member is never free of the threat and never really outgrows their need for the program. It is a commitment for a lifetime of sobriety. The final and overarching rule governing AA is anonymity. Members only use their first names, thus protecting themselves from the

stigma of alcoholism and insuring that any failure or lapsing of a single member back into drinking, the organization would be protected from scorn.

By the early 1940s AA was beginning to enjoy widespread success thanks in part to a highly complementary story in *Saturday Evening Post* and the confirming testimony of celebrities whose lives had been changed by their involvement in the organization. To bring some level of standardization to AA, Wilson developed its governing principles known as the 12 Traditions. Instead of hierarchy he opted for anarchy. Each group was a law unto itself. Each group as well as the national organization was self-supporting. No fees were permitted other than those related to rent and light entertainment. Such an arrangement allowed AA to grow exponentially. By the 21st Century, literally millions have been

touched by Bill W.'s 12 step program in alcohol and other addictive substances and a significant percentage of those have experienced life transformation. Next time: AA and its critics.

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