Tillich summarizes the impact of these general characteristics of our times, so far as existential anxiety is concerned:

The anxiety which, in its different forms, is potentially present in every individual, becomes general if the accustomed structures of meaning, power, belief and order disintegrate. These structures, as long as they are in force, keep anxiety bounded within a protective system of courage by participation. . . . In periods of great changes, these methods no longer work.21

The general factors described above obviously affect all of us, including the alcoholic and those who would help him. But the alcoholic appears to be particularly devastated by the impact of his existential anxiety and two factors seem to account for this. On the one hand, his existential terror of nonbeing is complicated by a heavy burden of neurotic fear of death resulting from psychological damage during the oral period. On the other hand, because of his exaggerated dependency-autonomy conflict, he is unable to avail himself of the experiences in adolescence and young adulthood which would help him handle his anxiety constructively. An examination of these two factors is in order at this point.

The psychoanalytic view of alcoholism points in the direction of a basic disturbance of the mother–infant relationship in the first year of life. Because of some inadequacy in the quality of this relationship, the prealcoholic did not develop what Erik Erikson has called "basic trust." He did not experience the world as trustworthy. Basic trust constitutes the foundation for all subsequent relationships of trust, including trust in God. The extreme narcissism of drinking alcoholics has been noted by many students of the subject. This is directly related to the lack of basic trust. The person who regresses to narcissism when his self-esteem is threatened, as the alcoholic does, is one who sustained a psychological injury during that period when narcissism was normal, the first year. Because of this injury, the person continues into adulthood yearning for the "undifferentiated pleasure of body and mind" which were in short supply during the nursing period.22 From the threat of his very existence which is present in the deprivation of adequate love–sucking–security–warmth, the individual develops terrible fears of dying mixed with intense rage feelings toward the object perceived as depriving. It is noteworthy that many adult alcoholics respond as though the entire world of relationships were a bad breast, a depriving mother.23 Such alcoholics form impossibly demanding dependencies and then feel angry and rejected when their grandiose demands are not met.

23 Melanie Klein's work on the concept of the good and bad breasts is relevant at this point (Envy and Gratitude; A Study of Unconscious Sources [New York: Basic Books, 1957]).