

April 1963

*Bill's Views*

## Our Critics Can Be Our Benefactors

*A recent magazine article criticizing certain aspects of AA reminds us of the need to review our relationships to medicine, to religion and to the world at large. When the Grapevine editors consulted Bill W. on the matter, he suggested a rereading of relevant portions of "Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age" (published in 1957) and "Twelve Concepts for World Service" (published in 1962). Here, Bill suggested, members and friends may find helpful guidance. Bill has directed particular attention to the excerpts quoted below.—Ed.*

As A SOCIETY we must never become so vain as to suppose that we have been the authors and inventors of a new religion. We will humbly reflect that each of AA's principles, *every one of them*, has been borrowed from ancient sources. We shall remember that we are laymen, holding ourselves in readiness to cooperate with all men of good will, whatever creed or nationality.

Speaking for Dr. Bob and myself I would like to say that there has never been the slightest intent, on his part or mine, of trying to found a new religious denomination. Dr. Bob held certain religious convictions, and so do I. This is, of course, the personal privilege of every AA member.

Nothing, however, could be so unfortunate for AA's future as an attempt to incorporate any of our personal theological views into AA teaching, practice, or tradition. Were Dr. Bob still with us, I am positive he would agree that we could never be too emphatic about this matter.

Then, too, it would be a product of false pride to believe that Alcoholics Anonymous is a cure-all, even for alcoholism. Here we must remember our debt to the men of medicine. Here we must be friendly and, above all, open-minded toward every new development in the medical or psychiatric art that promises to be helpful to sick people. We should always be friendly to those in the fields of alcoholic research, rehabilitation,

and education. We should endorse none especially but hold ourselves in readiness to cooperate so far as we can with them all. Let us constantly remind ourselves that the experts in religion are the clergymen; that the practice of medicine is for physicians; and that we, the recovered alcoholics, are their assistants.

There are those who predict that Alcoholics Anonymous may well become a new spearhead for a spiritual awakening throughout the world. When our friends say these things they are both generous and sincere. But we of AA must reflect that such a tribute and such a prophecy could well prove to be a heady drink for most of us—that is, if we really came to believe this to be the real purpose of AA, and if we commenced to behave accordingly. Our Society, therefore, will prudently cleave to its single purpose; the carrying of the message to the alcoholic who still suffers. Let us resist the proud assumption that since God has enabled us to do well in one area we are destined to be a channel of saving grace for everybody.

On the other hand, let us never be a closed corporation; let us never deny our experience for whatever it may be worth to the world around us. Let our individual members heed the call to every field of human endeavor. Let them carry the experience and spirit of AA into all these affairs, for whatever good they may accomplish. For not only has God saved us from alcoholism; the world has received us back into its citizenship. Yet believing in paradoxes as we do, we must still realize that the more the Society of Alcoholics Anonymous as such tends to its own affairs and minds its own business, the greater will be our general influence, the less will be any opposition to us, and the wider will be the circle in which our Fellowship will be likely to enjoy the confidence and respect of men.

—*Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, pp. 231-3, by permission.

Now let us suppose that AA does fall under sharp public attack or heavy ridicule; and let us take the particular case where such pronouncements happen to have little or no justification in fact.



Almost without exception it can be confidently estimated that our best defense in these situations would be no defense whatever—namely, complete silence at the public level. Unreasonable people are stimulated all the more by opposition. If in good humor we leave them strictly alone, they are apt to subside the more quickly. If their attacks persist and it is plain that they are misinformed, it may be wise to communicate with them in a temperate and informative way; also in such a manner that they cannot use our communication as a springboard for fresh assault. Such communications need seldom be made by the Conference officially. Very often we can use the good offices of friends. Such messages from us should never question the motives of the attackers; they should be

purely informative. These communications should also be private. If made public, they will often be seized upon as a fresh excuse for controversy.

If, however, a given criticism of AA is partly or wholly justified, it may be well to acknowledge this to our critic, together with our thanks.

—*Twelve Concepts for World Service*,  
pp. 71-2, by permission.

In the years ahead we shall, of course, make mistakes. Experience has taught us that we need have no fear of doing this, providing that we always remain willing to confess our faults and to correct them promptly. Our growth as individuals has depended upon this healthy process of trial and error. So will our growth as a fellowship. Let us always remember that any society of men and women that cannot freely correct its own faults must surely fall into decay if not into collapse. Such is the universal penalty for the failure to go on growing. Just as each AA must continue to take his moral inventory and act upon it, so must our whole Society do if we are to survive and if we are to serve usefully and well.

—*Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*,  
p 231, by permission.