

## As Bill ALSO Sees It

*A few of Bill's thoughts on inclusiveness and widening the gateway*

Our membership ought to include all who suffer from alcoholism. Hence we may refuse none who wish to recover. Nor ought A.A. membership ever depend upon money or conformity. Any two or three alcoholics gathered together for sobriety may call themselves an A.A. group, provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation.

*Tradition 3, long form*

Nor ought AA membership *ever depend on money or conformity. Any two or three alcoholics gathered together for sobriety may call themselves an AA Group*". This clearly implies that an alcoholic is a member if he says so; that we can't deny him his membership; that we can't demand from him a cent; that we can't force our beliefs or practices upon him; that he may flout everything we stand for and still be a member. In fact, our Tradition carries the principle of independence for the individual to such an apparently fantastic length that, so long as there is the slightest interest in sobriety, the most unmoral, the most anti-social, the most critical alcoholic may gather about him a few kindred spirits and announce to us that a new Alcoholics Anonymous Group has been formed. Anti-God, anti-medicine, anti-our Recovery Program, even anti-each other—these rampant individuals are still an AA Group if they think so!

*Anarchy Melts, July 1946, Grapevine*

As time passes, our book literature has a tendency to get more and more frozen, a tendency for conversion into something like Dogma, a human trait I am afraid we can do little about. We may as well face the fact that A.A. will always have its fundamentalists, its absolutists and its relativists.

*February 6, 1961 letter*

To some of us, the idea of substituting "good" for "God" in the Twelve Steps will seem like a watering down of A.A.'s message. But here we must remember that A.A.'s Steps are suggestions only. A belief in them, as they stand, is not at all a requirement for membership among us. This liberty has made A.A. available to thousands who never would have tried at all, had we insisted on the Twelve Steps just as written.

*Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age, p. 81*

Moreover, all people should have the right to voice their convictions. This is good principle and good dogma. But dogma also has its liabilities. Simply because we have convictions that work well for us, it becomes very easy to assume that we have all the truth. Whenever this brand of arrogance develops, we are certain to become aggressive; we *demand* agreement with us; we play God. This isn't good dogma; it's very bad dogma. It could be especially destructive for us of AA to indulge in this sort of thing.

Newcomers are approaching AA at the rate of tens of thousands yearly. They represent almost every belief and attitude imaginable. We have atheists and agnostics. We have people of nearly every race, culture and religion. In AA we are supposed to be bound together in the kinship of a common suffering. Consequently, the full individual liberty to practice any creed or principle or therapy whatever should be a first consideration for us all. Let us not, therefore, pressure anyone with our individual or even our collective views. Let us instead accord each other the respect and love that is due to every human being as he tries to make his way toward the light. Let us always try to be inclusive rather than exclusive; let us remember that each alcoholic among us is a member of AA, so long as he or she so declares.

*AA Grapevine, July 1965, Responsibility Is Our Theme*

Others refuse to accept all the Twelve Steps of the recovery program. Some go still further, saying that the "God business" is bunk and quite unnecessary. Under these conditions our conservative program- abiding members get scared. These appalling conditions must be controlled, they think, else A.A. will surely go to rack and ruin. They view with alarm for the good of the movement!

At this point the group enters the rule and regulation phase. Charters, bylaws and membership rules are excitedly passed and authority is granted committees to filter out undesirables and discipline the evildoers. Then the Group Elders, now clothed with Who Is a Member of Alcoholics Anonymous? authority, commence to get busy. Recalcitrants

are cast into the outer darkness; respectable busybodies throw stones at the sinners. As for the so-called sinners, they either insist on staying around, or else they form a new group of their own. Or maybe they join a more congenial and less intolerant crowd in their neighborhood. The elders soon discover that the rules and regulations aren't working very well. Most attempts at enforcement generate such waves of dissension and intolerance in the group that this condition is presently recognized to be worse for the group life than the very worst that the worst ever did.

Those who slip, those who panhandle, those who scandalize, those with mental twists, those who rebel at the program, those who trade on the A.A. reputation—all such persons seldom harm an A.A. group for long. Some of these have become our most respected and best loved. Some have remained to try our patience, sober nevertheless. Others have drifted away. We have begun to regard these not as menaces, but rather as our teachers. They oblige us to cultivate patience, tolerance, and humility. We finally see that they are only people sicker than the rest of us, that we who condemn them are the Pharisees whose false righteousness does our group the deeper spiritual damage.

*Who is a member of Alcoholics Anonymous? August 1947, Grapevine*

Though three hundred thousand did recover in the last twenty-five years, maybe half a million more have walked into our midst, and then out again. No doubt some were too sick to make even a start. Others couldn't or wouldn't admit their alcoholism. Still others couldn't face up to their underlying personality defects. Numbers departed for still other reasons.

Yet we can't well content ourselves with the view that all these recovery failures were entirely the fault of the newcomers themselves. Perhaps a great many didn't receive the kind and amount of sponsorship they so sorely needed. We didn't communicate when we might have done so. So we AAs failed them. Perhaps more often than we think, we still make no contact at depth with those suffering the dilemma of no faith.

Certainly none are more sensitive to spiritual cocksureness, pride and aggression than they are. I'm sure this is something we too often forget. In AA's first years I all but ruined the whole undertaking with this sort of unconscious arrogance. God as I understood Him had to be for everybody. Sometimes my aggression was subtle and sometimes it was crude. But either way it was damaging - perhaps fatally so - to numbers of non-believers. ... Then, for the first time, it burst in upon me how very dead faith can be - when minus responsibility. The doctor had an unwavering belief in his ideals. But he also practiced humility, wisdom and responsibility. Hence his superb demonstration.

My own spiritual awakening had given me a built-in faith in God - a gift indeed. But I had been neither humble nor wise. Boasting of my faith, I had forgotten my ideals. Pride and irresponsibility had taken their place. By so cutting off my own light, I had little to offer my fellow alcoholics. At last I saw why many had gone away - some of them forever.

*The Dilemma of No Faith, AA Grapevine, April 1961*

With respect to its own affairs, the group may make any decisions, adopt any attitudes that it likes. No overall or intergroup authority should challenge this primary privilege.

*Tradition Four, Grapevine, March 1948*

*It would seem that it is a basic principle – that when a person expresses their thoughts, and then later expresses other thoughts that to some degree contradict the earlier thoughts – that the later, contradicting thoughts bear witness that the person expressing them has evolved in some manner, and has modified his or her point of view, and that the latter expressions therefore carry more weight than their previous, earlier thoughts, in some cases considerably more. Bill Wilson wrote the Big Book with what, four years of sobriety? When therefore he kept writing all through his later years we ought to pay special attention to that.*

*From: life-j: Yet Another Intergroup Fight, March 2, 2014, AA Agnostica*