

A Proposal To Eliminate The Lord's Prayer From AA Meetings



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This article was originally written on an Olympia manual typewriter and circulated in New York City in 1976.

Sadly, forty-five years later, there is nothing at all in this article that has changed.

By John Lauritsen

All too many AA meetings end with a group recitation of the “Lord’s Prayer” (also known as the “Our Father”), a prayer peculiar to the Christian religion. This practice is wrong — contrary to the spirit of AA unity, and in obvious violation of the Third Tradition and the AA Preamble.

AA members can believe in anything they wish, including the fables of the Christian religion, but they have no right to exclude freethinkers from full membership in the AA fellowship. And we atheists and agnostics are not the only ones involved. There are also Jews, Moslems, Buddhists, Hindus, and many others who are recovering alcoholics.

The AA Preamble

The AA Preamble states: ***“AA is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution.”*** This is clear enough. If anyone claims that the habitual recitation of the so-called Lord’s Prayer does not violate the AA Preamble, then he has the obligation to explain what the Preamble ***secretly*** means, as opposed to what it so clearly says.

The Third Tradition

The Third Tradition says: “The only requirement for AA membership is a desire to stop drinking.” It does not say, “first-class membership for Christians, second-class membership for everyone else.” It is true that no one is “forced” to say the “Lord’s Prayer”. The fact remains that someone who is not a Christian is forced into either dishonestly saying something he doesn’t believe, or feeling left out as everyone else in the room participates in a Christian prayer ritual. This is unfair and unnecessary.

The Honesty Part of the Program

Many AA members are not Christians, and their sobriety compares favorably with that of the Christian religionists. Nevertheless, the pressure towards conformity is sufficiently great that most of these non-Christian members stand up during the “Lord’s Prayer” (though many of them don’t say anything, or just mumble, or keep their eyes open). They are afraid of “standing out,” and probably — with reason — of being ostracized.

No one’s sobriety is helped if he is forced to pretend to be something he’s not, forced to say something he doesn’t believe, and forced to do something he believes is wrong. AA should encourage honesty, not hypocrisy.

But Isn’t It Traditional?

Reciting the “Lord’s Prayer” after meetings is indeed a ***habit***, and if it is a bad habit, then it ought to be broken. Every sober AA member has broken a dangerous and insidious habit, and it should not be too hard to stay away from the “Lord’s Prayer,” one meeting at a time.

What Makes AA Work?

Probably all sober alcoholics would agree that a requirement for sobriety is not picking up the first drink. Aside from that, alcoholics would give a variety of answers, for AA is an individual program.

I would say that for me, AA consists of the realization that I am powerless over alcohol; that total abstinence is required on a 24-hour basis; that alcoholics can provide practical help and moral support for each other; that life is worth living and things can get better; that honesty is the basis for lasting sobriety; and so on.

There is no evidence that religious belief is necessary for good sobriety. Thousands of alcoholics have stayed sober and helped others to sobriety without having the slightest belief in the supernatural, let alone the Christian version. In the Scandinavian countries, the steps have been reduced to seven, eliminating all references to "God", and AA seems to work just fine without "Him."

What Harm Does It Do?

The "Lord's Prayer" recitation is offensive to non-Christians. It makes it harder for us to feel comfortable in the AA fellowship and it undoubtedly prevents many non-Christian alcoholics from coming to AA in the first place. Who knows how many thousands of alcoholics never made AA because they were afraid it was a religious organization. And their fears will hardly be dispelled when they hear a Christian Prayer at their first meeting.

What If The Group Conscience Wants The Lord's Prayer?

If so, then the group should officially designate itself a Christian group, whose meetings would be terminated with a Christian prayer. It would be a special purpose group, and should be so listed in the meeting book. Just as there are special purpose groups for young people, or men, or women, or gay people, this would be a special group for Christians.

If a group is open to all who have a desire to stop drinking, then its meetings should not feature a sectarian religious practice that excludes those who are not Christian religionists.

Conclusion

The "Lord's Prayer" should no longer be recited at the end of AA meetings.

John Lauritsen was born and raised in Nebraska. He attended Harvard College (AB 1963), majoring in Social Relations (Sociology, Anthropology, and Psychology). In New York City he worked as a market research executive, while engaged in activism and writing on the side. He was in the antiwar movement since 1965 and the gay liberation movement since July 1969. He founded Pagan Press in 1982. For a decade, beginning in 1985, Lauritsen was a leading writer for the *New York Native*, which was then the world's foremost gay newspaper.

He has fifteen books to his credit, including [A Freethinker in Alcoholics Anonymous](#). The six most recent are about the great English poet, Percy Bysshe Shelley – his life, his works, and the circle of men around him. Lauritsen dates his alcoholism from his first bender in 1958 to his last drink in 1968. He considers himself a loyal, but by no means uncritical, member of AA. He now lives in Dorchester, Massachusetts.

Lauritsen has a section, [Alcoholism: Recovery Without Religiosity](#), on his personal website and he has written many a fine piece on AA Agnostica. Here they are:

- [My AA, Right or Wrong](#) (September 13, 2015)
- [Group Conscience Follies](#) (May 31, 2015)
- [Sober & Out](#) (October 8, 2014). A review of a book by the AA Grapevine for gays, lesbians and the trans gendered in AA.
- [Sophrosune: A Higher Power for Freethinkers](#) (August 10, 2014).
- [Perry Street Workshop](#) (February 16, 2014). This is where John attended his first AA meeting in 1968 and he still considers it his “home base”.
- [Physical Recovery](#) (February 17, 2013).
- [Washington Forebears of Alcoholics Anonymous](#) (July 15, 2012).
- [The Program](#) (February 28, 2012). John writes about the importance in his recovery of the 24 Hour Plan.
- [A Proposal to Eliminate the Lord's Prayer from AA Meetings](#) (November 17, 2011).

