

Alcoholics Anonymous

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Every thoughtful AA realizes that the divine grace which has always flowed through the Church is the ultimate foundation on which AA rests. Our spiritual origins are Christian.

Therefore, the transforming grace that expels our alcohol obsession has come down across the centuries through you. In this connection I'd like to tell you the story of my long association with Father Edward Dowling, whose funeral I have just attended.

Never shall I have a finer friend, a wiser advisor, nor in all probability such a channel of grace as he personally afforded me over the years.

Father Ed, as we affectionately call him, was the first clergyman of the Catholic faith ever to take notice of us AAs. It happened in this way. Our textbook, Alcoholics Anonymous, was published in the spring of 1939. A few months later Father Ed read the book and very evidently liked what he saw there.

In *The Queen's Work*, the magazine of the Sodality, he wrote a piece about us which in effect said to all people of the Catholic faith, "Folks, AA is good; come and get it." Because we could have had no idea how the AA book would be received by the clergy, this forthright recommendation brought us great excitement, rejoicing, and gratitude.

Shortly thereafter my wife Lois and I had moved to AA's first clubhouse on 24th Street here in New York. Our own house had been lost and the future for our society was uncertain indeed. Though a formula for recovery from alcoholism was evidently in sight, we were just beginning the great test to see whether we rather erratic people could live and work together. The problems of that club and its people were terrific; only God knew if we could survive.

Enter Father Ed

My first unforgettable contact with Father Ed came about in this way.

It was early in 1940, though late in the winter. Save for old Tom, the fireman we had lately rescued from Rockland asylum, the club was empty. My wife Lois was out somewhere. It had been a hectic day, full of disappointments. I lay upstairs in our room, consumed with self-pity. This had brought on one of my characteristic imaginary ulcer attacks. It was a bitter night, frightfully windy. Hail and sleet beat on the tin roof over my head.

Thinking him to be just another drunk, I didn't even get off the bed. Then he unbuttoned his coat and I saw that he was a clergyman.

Then the front doorbell rang and I heard old Tom toddle to answer it. A minute later he looked into the door of my room, obviously much annoyed. Then he said, "Bill, there is some damn bum down there from St. Louis, and he wants to see you." Great heavens, I thought, this can't be still another one! Wearily, and even resentfully, I said to Tom, "Oh well, bring him up, bring him up." Then a strange figure appeared in my bedroom door. He wore a shapeless black hat that somehow reminded me of a cabbage leaf. His coat collar was drawn around his neck, and he leaned heavily on a cane. He was plastered with sleet. Thinking him to be just another drunk, I didn't even get off the bed. Then he unbuttoned his coat and I saw that he was a clergyman.

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able to share openly and honestly about who she is and soon finds excuses for not going to meetings and can easily start drinking again.

It would then seem very important for the recovering sister to have a supportive environment in order to get fully well. This support should come from the community with whom she lives, but often this community is closed to her needs. The sisters are very frequently unaware of the nature of her disease and cannot honestly be the support she needs, some believing that it is better to say nothing to the recovering sister in an effort to respect her privacy or on the other hand, getting angry and upset because the sister is “taking the car so often” or “is not at home enough, going to those AA meetings,” believing that by now she should be well. After all, she has spent time and money in a program dealing with her problem. This kind of treatment of the recovering alcoholic is not unusual, but if the community isn't getting some kind of education and help for themselves through Al-Anon or a family support program, they will all remain sick and the alcoholic will usually relapse or leave the community.

While the recovering religious is trying to become comfortable in AA and still not feel guilty at home because she is not able to be part of the community at times, she also has to deal with the many issues around recovery that still need to be worked through.

As I mentioned before, getting sober is the easiest part — staying sober is difficult and requires lots of hard work on the part of the recovering sister and the people with whom she lives. The sister needs an environment to grow in; one that is loving, caring, understanding, trusting, and confrontive. She has lost much of her self-respect, she has still to struggle with her guilt and low self-esteem and these don't come back all at once. Living sober is hard work.

Some things the recovering person must deal with after treatment are:

1. Denial of her powerlessness and her need to be in control. I believe the religious has even more need to control than the lay person, for religious are expected to be “perfect.”

2. Shame and guilt because she is not the perfect person she is supposed to be. She feels “less than” her peers and is constantly thinking she is being put down, spied upon, or looked at with disdain.

3. Using the disease as an excuse for not taking responsibilities. Women religious are no different than any recovering alcoholic who seems to enjoy “ill health.” The alcoholic needs to be reminded that alcoholism doesn't stem from an inability to cope with life's problems, it just makes the problems bigger.

4. Fear of failure — women who were afraid of nothing during their drinking suddenly become very unsure of themselves. They are very afraid of taking a risk. They need to be encouraged to reach out; not to risk means not to really live.

5. Resentments — by the time alcoholics get to the point of treatment, they have accumulated a great number of resentments. These resentments don't go away immediately and some take much more time than others. The healing process for hurts, both real and imagined is slow and painful. This may be hard for the community with whom the sister is living to understand.

6. Feeling different, thinking everyone is watching them and fearfully waiting for them to start drinking again. It is hard to build up trust once it has been destroyed and this is something that must be worked through with the community. It takes time and patience on the part of all. It is important that all be convinced that alcoholism is a disease, not a moral issue or merely a lack of self-control.

I have listed only a few of the important issues for the alcoholic to work on. You could name many others I am sure. The important thing is to allow the alcoholic sister to grow and become happy in her new-found life of sobriety. She needs to be accepted, not merely tolerated. She should be encouraged to continue to take part in AA, to start getting involved in the therapy of helping other recovering alcoholics, and to do everything necessary to grow healthy once again.

With a continuous program of involvement with others, a constant reminder of her previous lifestyle, and a daily striving for spiritual growth, the recovering sister can and often does live her life of sobriety in peace and a degree of harmony not often found in many of the lives of her non-alcoholic counterparts. In this type of recovery program, life can get better and better. I know because I've been there.

are bound to be speculative. At any rate, here they are.

Though AA roots are in the centuries-old Christian community, there seems little doubt that in an immediate sense our fellowship began in the office of the much respected Dr. Carl Jung of Zurich.

Your bare chance is that somehow, somewhere you will find a transforming spiritual experience that will expel your obsession.

As you know, Dr. Jung is one of the pioneers of the psychiatric art who believes that man has a conscience and a soul. In 1930 he had under treatment a prominent American business man; an alcoholic who had exhausted all other resources of recovery. He remained with Carl Jung a whole year. And when he left that great doctor he felt very confident that he had made a complete comeback. He felt that the inner springs of his motivations to drink had been revealed; that through this immensely improved understanding he could now manage his own life. Yet, quite unaccountably, he was soon seized with the old malignant compulsion; he was drunk again. In utter despair, he returned to Dr. Jung. In effect, this was what he had to say, "Doctor, you have been my court of last resort. Tell me frankly, is this the end of the line? You know how badly I want to stop. Is there no hope?"

To this plea, Dr. Jung made a rejoinder of great candor, humility and perception, a statement that laid the foundation for Step One of the AA program.

Said he to the patient, "I thought that you would be one of the few who might be re-educated. But I'm obliged to conclude that you are like nearly all the rest of the alcoholics I've treated. There is nothing whatever in my art that can do anything for you." "But," persisted the patient, "is there no other way, is there no other chance?"

"Yes," said Dr. Jung, "there is a chance — a very small one. Your bare chance is that somehow, somewhere you will find a transforming spiritual experience that will expel your obsession."

"But," remonstrated his client, "I'm a man of faith. In fact, I used to be an Episcopal vestryman. I still have a faith of sorts. But perhaps God hasn't much faith in me." Then Dr. Jung further explained as follows:

"Faith is indispensable, but in cases such as yours, it isn't enough. I am talking of a transforming experience, a conversion, if you like. I'm talking about conversion at depth, something that will expel your obsession, render you sane, remotivate you. All through the centuries this sort of thing has happened, but only occasionally; sometimes under religious auspices, sometimes quite spontaneously, and always inexplicably. I can only suggest that you expose yourself to some sort of religious influence and hope for the best, admitting that you can do nothing of your own resources."

The Oxford Groups

Shortly thereafter Dr. Jung's patient — one I shall call Roland — joined up with the Oxford Groups, a society which in more recent years has been called Moral Re-Armament. As we shall see, AA owes this fellowship a great deal on two counts. From them we learned what, and what not to do. At any rate, our friend Roland did find there a truly transforming experience, an experience that kept him in sobriety for a number of years.

As one of those unusual Oxford Groupers interested in alcoholism, Roland went out of his way to help a former schoolmate of mine. A serious alcoholic, my old school chum "Ebby" was about to be committed for alcoholic insanity just as Roland reached him.

Now when Roland contacted my friend "Ebby," another element was cast into the synthesis that was to become AA. Here was one alcoholic talking to another. Roland could not only identify with "Ebby" as an alcoholic, he could also bring "Ebby" Dr. Jung's verdict of the medical hopelessness of the malady. Just as importantly, he could bring "Ebby" hope of release through a spiritual experience. He could also tell "Ebby" what conditions needed to be met in order to become worthy of such a gift of grace — namely, self-survey, an

examination of conscience (as you would call it), restitution for harms done, helpfulness to others without demands of prestige or money rewards, prayer to God as we understand Him. These were the essential attitudes and principles that Roland transmitted to "Ebby," who was to become my own sponsor.

The moment "Ebby" accepted these principles and conditions, he was released from his desire to drink, and this release lasted for a couple of years, during which he contacted me.

Bill Meets John Barleycorn

Perhaps at this point I should acquaint you with my own experience as an alcoholic. There have been, of course, childhood maladjustments. As a kid, I was over-sized, but not strong. I couldn't win in fights and contests. My mother and father were divorced. This resulted in great inferiority and much depression. To compensate for this condition, I developed a fierce desire to excel — the well-known power-drive. By the time I reached boarding school, I was possessed by a consuming desire to be first in everything. This was more than legitimate ambition — this was a veritable obsession.

My first drink came during World War I, just before going to service abroad. It was a tremendous experience. Under alcohol all my remaining inferiorities disappeared. I could draw near to people and they seemed to draw near to me. I was part of life at last. And alcohol was my elixir. Alcohol could not only banish shyness and inferiority, it could kill depression. Even better, it could elate me beyond description. I could dream vast dreams of power and accomplishment. Therefore, alcohol meant far more to me than to an average person — I had begun to use it as a cure for my neurotic difficulties.

Following the World War, this habit of finding surcease in the bottle became truly obsessive and uncontrollable. But it was a long time before my wife and I realized how grim that alcohol obsession could be. I entered Wall Street and became successful for a time, making more money than was good for one so young. In this period there were no depressions, only the mad and elated pursuit of fame and money. By 1929 the hangovers were terrific. But I had a good constitution, and I always dreamed of better controlling my drinking the next time I tried it.

Then came the 1929 crash. I was wiped out and plunged into debt. Times were very bad and my drinking was well known. Therefore, there was no financial comeback. Again I began to drink to cover up frustration and depression. Presently I began the weary round of hospitals.

Finally, Dr. William D. Silkworth of Towns Hospital at New York, a medical saint if ever there was one, took an interest in my case. Knowing my desperate desire to stop, he thought I might be one of the rare ones who could recover. But in the end he had to give up. Gently, but very definitely, he had to tell my wife: "Your husband has an obsession that condemns him to drink. Nothing that I know, no treatment at all can put an end to it. He also has some sort of physical defect — maybe an allergy — that guarantees he will damage his brain if he keeps on. Indeed, there is a little damage already." Such was the verdict of a doctor in whom Lois and I had every confidence. Strangely this verdict of medical hopelessness, this exact and awful statement of the nature of the alcohol malady, was to become a vital part of the AA program a little later on. By then it was the summer of 1934. It looked as though I would have to be locked up for good, or else soon go mad and die.

Nevertheless, I left the hospital, still in freedom, and by dint of great vigilance and discipline, I kept away from liquor until Armistice Day of 1934. Then the strange obsession was upon me, and I was drunk again.

Ebby Visits Bill

One day, while on that bout, the telephone rang as I sat drinking alone — my wife was working in a department store, supporting me — and here was my old friend Ebby. I had heard that he was about to be committed for alcoholic insanity; indeed, I had never seen him sober in New York before. I could instantly sense something about him — something different. It was a sort of a psychic hunch. He sat down at my kitchen

table. I pushed a crock of gin toward him. But he said, "No thanks." So I inquired, "Well, Ebby, are you on the water wagon?" "No," he replied, "I wouldn't say I'm on the water wagon. I'm just not drinking now."

Of course I was mystified. What was all this about? I had looked forward to a drinking bout with my friend. We would talk about the good old days. That would be a relief because the present was intolerable, and I knew there was to be no future for either of us. But he would have none of my gin. What on earth had got into him? When I put this question, he replied, simply and smilingly, "I've got religion."

So you've got religion, Ebby? Well, tell me what brand it is.

This was a poser, indeed it was a shocker. At college I had had a scientific training from which I'd inferred that man was the spearhead of evolution, was just about all the God there was. However, I felt I ought to be polite. So I said, "So you've got religion, Ebby? Well, tell me what brand it is." He replied that it wasn't exactly a brand — he wouldn't exactly call it a religion. Then he explained how he had run into those Oxford Groups. He also added that they were pretty evangelical for him. Nevertheless, he had met a drunk or two there, notably one Roland, who had been a patient of Dr. Jung's. And then he outlined the simple program that I have just described. He told me just how it worked for him, how quite unaccountably he had been released the moment that he became willing to accept it; indeed he had been released before he had done much about applying those principles and attitudes. He emphasized the fact that he had been "released." I could deeply sense that this was true. Ebby's sobriety was certainly something much more than the "water-wagon" variety.

Ebby then dwelt on Roland's experience with Dr. Jung, how hopeless this man of science said alcoholism was. Of course this corresponded exactly with what Dr. Silkworth had already told Lois and me. Though his new belief in God jarred me not a little, I nevertheless listened with rapt attention. In a way he was telling me nothing new at all, yet what he had to say carried an immense impact. Here was one alcoholic talking to another — at very great depth, no question.

My deflation which had begun with Dr. Silkworth's grim verdict was nearing completion. I was powerless on my own resources. Yet, here was hope. In Ebby's person, in his very evident state of release, Ebby carried immense conviction. Though I went on drinking for a while longer, in no waking moment could I forget his face and words as he sat and talked to me across that kitchen table. He had bound me to him with cords of verity and understanding — and a common suffering. From those benign ties I was not to escape.

But it must be confessed that I still gaged on a belief in God. I could and would try anything else — but not this. But I always had to come back to the thought that Ebby was released. He was sober, and I was hopelessly drunk. Who was I to say there is no God? Maybe I had better go to the hospital and get Dr. Silkworth to sober me up. Of course, there mustn't be any emotional conversion — that wouldn't do for a Vermont Yankee! Anyway, I'd have a good, clear look.

So I started for the hospital, very drunk. Dr. Silkworth shook his head. I brandished a bottle and shouted, "I've got something new, Doc." He could only reply, "Maybe you had better go to bed." And this I did. But I wasn't in too awful shape. In three days' time, I was perfectly sober. One morning my friend Ebby appeared in the doorway and he found me in a terrible depression. I was still in rebellion — against God.

But my old friend didn't try to evangelize me. Instead he put me in the position of asking, "Ebby, what is that neat little formula of yours for getting sober?" He quickly repeated it. I reflected, too, that he was definitely practicing what he preached. Why was he at my hospital so early in the morning, when he himself should have been looking for a job? He had simply retold his own story. There was no evangelizing. Presently he was gone and I was left to think.

Then I fell into a prodigious depression, one of the most frightful experiences I have ever known. Momentarily, I suppose, this completely deflated me; at great depth the conviction was carried to me that by myself I was actually nothing, nothing at all. I was helpless, and hopeless. Since this inner collapse was so sweeping, so

complete, I suppose this may explain the tremendous experience that immediately followed.

Bill's Spiritual Experience

Out of my black depression I found myself crying, just like a child in the dark, "If there is a God, will He show Himself? Now I am ready, ready to do anything, even to believe." Then came the great experience.

The room filled with a blinding white light. I was caught into an ecstasy for which there is no description. In my mind's eye I seemed to be on a mountain top; a great wind was blowing. Then I thought, "This is not air, this is spirit. This is the God of the preachers." How long this state lasted I have no idea. But at length I found myself still, of course, on the bed. Now, however, I seemed to be in a new dimension. All around and through me I felt a sense of Presence.

This is not air, this is spirit. This is the God of the preachers.

A great peace settled over me. With this came the mighty assurance that no matter how wrong things were with the world, all things were right with God. I had a tremendous sense of belonging. Here was purpose and destiny. Here was God. Such, in substance, was my transforming experience. I later found that my obsession to drink was snapped off instantly — never to return again in any dangerous form. Almost immediately a vision of a chain reaction among alcoholics, one carrying the good news to the other, began to possess me.

It might be well to here observe that every AA does have a transforming spiritual experience, though it seldom has the suddenness or dramatic content that mine did. What happened to me in perhaps six minutes, may in most cases require six months or even a year or more. But the fruits are the same. There must always be that same ego collapse at depth, at least, so far as alcohol is concerned. There must also be a turning to a higher Power for God's gift of grace, without which the obsession can practically never be expelled.

Though my sudden experience did give me a wonderful rebirth and an enormous stimulation to work with alcoholics, it did nevertheless have its liabilities. For a time I really thought I had been appointed by God to fix up all the drunks in the world! Along with the positive experience, some of my old paranoia had returned. Anyhow, the main outlines of today's AA program were already in sight, save only a lacking element or so.

Sickness Concept Versus Responsibility

Early in AA's history, very natural questions arose among theologians. There was a Mr. Link who had written a popular treatise called "The Return to Religion." One day I received a call from him. He strongly objected to the AA position that alcoholism was an illness. This concept, he felt, removed moral responsibility from alcoholics. He had been voicing this same complaint about psychiatrists in the American Mercury. And now, he said, he was going to lambast AA too.

Of course I made haste to point out that we AAs did not use the concept of sickness to absolve our members from moral responsibility.

Of course I made haste to point out that we AAs did not use the concept of sickness to absolve our members from moral responsibility. On the contrary, we used the fact of fatal illness to clamp the heaviest kind of moral responsibility on to the sufferer. The further point was made that in his early days of drinking the alcoholic often was no doubt guilty of irresponsibility and gluttony. But once the time of compulsive drinking, veritable lunacy, had arrived, he couldn't very well be held accountable for his conduct. He then had a lunacy that condemned him to drink in spite of all he could do; he had developed a bodily sensitivity to alcohol that guaranteed his final madness and death. When this state of affairs was pointed out to him, he was placed immediately under the heaviest kind of pressure to accept AA's moral and spiritual program of regeneration — namely, our Twelve Steps. Fortunately, Mr. Link was satisfied with this view of the use

that we were making of the alcoholic's illness. I am glad to report that nearly all theologians who have since thought about this matter have also agreed with that early position.

While it is most obvious that free choice in the matter of alcohol has virtually disappeared in most cases, we AAs do point out that plenty of free will is left in other areas. It certainly takes a large amount of willingness, and a great exertion of the will to accept and practice the AA program. It is by this very exertion of the will that the alcoholic corresponds with the grace by which his drinking obsession can be expelled.

Now what about the alcoholic who says that he cannot possibly believe in God? A great many of these come to AA and they complain that they are trapped. By this they mean that we have convinced them they are fatally ill, yet they cannot accept a belief in God and His grace as a means of recovery. Happily this does not prove to be an impossible dilemma at all. We simply suggest that the newcomer take an easy stance and an open mind; that he proceed to practice those parts of the Twelve Steps which anyone's common sense would readily recommend. He can certainly admit that he is an alcoholic; that he ought to make a moral inventory; that he ought to discuss his defects with another person; that he should make restitution for harms done; and that he can try to be helpful to other alcoholics. We emphasize the "open mind," that at least he should admit there might be a "Higher Power." He can certainly admit that he is not God, nor is mankind in general. If he wishes, he can for a time place his dependence upon his own AA group. That group is certainly a "higher power," so far as recovery from alcoholism is concerned. If these reasonable conditions are met, he then finds himself released from the compulsion to drink; he discovers that his motivations have been changed far out of proportion to anything that could have been achieved by a simple association with us or by the practice of a little more honesty, humility, tolerance, and helpfulness. Little by little he becomes aware that a higher Power is indeed at work. In a matter of months, or at least in a year or two, he is talking freely about God as he understands Him. He has received the gift of God's grace — and he knows it.

The Lunacy of Alcoholism

Perhaps a little more should be said about the obsessional character of alcoholism. When our fellowship was about three years old some of us called on Dr. Lawrence Kolb, then assistant Surgeon General of the United States. He said that our report of progress had given him his first hope for alcoholics in general. Not long before, the U.S. Public Health Department had thought of trying to do something about the alcoholic situation. But after a careful survey of the obsessional character of our malady, this had been given up. Indeed, Dr. Kolb felt that dope addicts had a better chance. Accordingly, the government had built a hospital for their treatment at Lexington, Kentucky. But for alcoholics — well, there simply wasn't any use at all, so he thought.

Nevertheless, many people still go on insisting that the alcoholic is not a sick man — he is simply weak or willful, and sinful. Even today we often hear the remark, "That drunk could get well if he wanted to."

There is no doubt, too, that the deeply obsessional character of the alcoholic's drinking is obscured by the fact that drinking is a socially acceptable custom. By contrast, stealing, or let us say shoplifting, is not. Practically everybody has heard of that form of lunacy known as kleptomania. Oftentimes kleptomaniacs are splendid people in all other respects. Yet they are under an absolute compulsion to steal — just for the kick. A kleptomaniac enters a store and pockets a piece of merchandise. He is arrested and lands in the police station. The judge gives him a jail term. He is stigmatized and humiliated. Just like the alcoholic, he swears that never, never will he do this again.

But on his release from the jail, he wanders down the street past a department store. Unaccountably he is drawn inside. He sees, for example, a red tin fire engine, a child's toy. He instantly forgets all about his misery in the jail. He begins to rationalize. He says, "Well, this little tin fire engine is of no real value. The store wouldn't miss it." So he pockets the toy, the store detective collars him, and he is right back in the clink. Everybody recognizes this type of stealing as sheer lunacy.

Now let's compare this behavior with that of an alcoholic. He, too, has landed in jail. He has already lost family

and friends. He suffers heavy stigma and guilt. He has been physically tortured by his hangover. Like the kleptomaniac, he swears that he will never get into this fix again. Perhaps he actually knows that he is an alcoholic. He may understand just what that means. He may be fully aware of what the fearful risk of that first drink is.

But on his release the alcoholic behaves just like the kleptomaniac. He passes a bar. At the first temptation he may say, "No, I mustn't go in there; liquor is not for me." But when he arrives at the next drinking place, he is gripped by a rationalization. Perhaps he says, "Well, one beer won't hurt me. After all, beer isn't liquor." Completely unmindful of his recent miseries, he steps inside. He takes that fatal first drink. The following day, the police have him again. Yet still his fellow citizens continue to say he is only weak or willful. Actually, he is just as crazy as the kleptomaniac ever was. At this stage, his free will in regard to alcoholism has evaporated. He cannot very well be help accountable for his behavior.

Now a final thought. Many a non-alcoholic clergyman asks these questions about Alcoholics Anonymous: "Why do clergymen so often fail with alcoholics, when AA so often succeeds? Is it possible that the grace of AA is superior to that of the Church? Is Alcoholics Anonymous a new religion, a competitor of the Church?"

Nor should any clergyman, because he does not happen to be a channel of grace to alcoholics, feel that he or his Church is lacking in grace.

If these misgivings had real substance, they would be serious indeed. But, as I have already indicated, Alcoholics Anonymous cannot in the least be regarded as a new religion. Our Twelve Steps have no theological content, except that which speaks of "God as we understand Him." This means that each individual AA member may define God according to whatever faith or creed he may have. Therefore, there isn't the slightest interference with the religious views of any of our membership. The rest of the Twelve Steps define moral attitudes and helpful practices, all of them precisely Christian in character. Therefore, as far as they go, the Steps are good Christianity, indeed they are good Catholicism, something which Catholic writers have affirmed more than once.

Neither does AA exert the slightest religious authority over its members: no one is compelled to believe anything. No one is compelled to meet membership conditions. No one is obliged to pay anything. Therefore, we have no system of authority, spiritual or temporal, that is comparable to or in the least competitive with the Church. At the center of our society we have a Board of Trustees. This body is accountable yearly to a Conference of elected Delegates. These Delegates represent the conscience and desire of AA as regards functional or service matters. Our Tradition contains an emphatic injunction that these Trustees may never constitute themselves into a government — they are to merely provide certain services that enable AA as a whole to function. The same principles apply at our group and area level.

Dr. Bob, my co-partner, had his own religious views. For whatever they may be worth, I have my own. But both of us have gone heavily on record to the effect that these personal views and preferences can never under any conditions be injected into the AA program as a working part of it. AA is a sort of spiritual kindergarten, but that is all. Never could it be called a religion.

Nor should any clergyman, because he does not happen to be a channel of grace to alcoholics, feel that he or his Church is lacking in grace. No real question of grace is involved at all — it is just a question of who can best transmit God's abundance. It so happens that we who have suffered alcoholism, we who can identify so deeply with other sufferers, are the ones usually best suited for this particular work. Certainly no clergyman ought to feel any inferiority just because he himself is not an alcoholic! Then, as I have already emphasized, AA has actually derived all of its principles, directly or indirectly, from the Church.

Ours, gentlemen, is a debt of gratitude far beyond any ability of mine to express. On behalf of AA members everywhere, I give you our deepest thanks for the warm understanding and the wonderful co-operation that you have everywhere afforded us.

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