



Our Primary Purpose Forum

The Voice of the Alcoholics Anonymous Minority Opinion

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“In granting this traditional “Right of Appeal,” we recognize that minorities frequently can be right; that even when they are partly or wholly in error they still perform a most valuable service when, by asserting their “Right of Appeal,” they compel a thorough-going debate on important issues. The well-heard minority, therefore, is our chief protection against an uninformed, misinformed, hasty or angry majority.” (From Bill’s comments on Concept V “The Right of Appeal.”)

Editorial Statement

Welcome to Our Primary Purpose Forum. The aim of the OPPF newsletter is to provide communication and information by and for the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous and provide a voice for the Minority Opinion to be heard. We are members of Alcoholics Anonymous that are concerned with the direction our fellowship is headed. It is our hope that together we can work to restore the fellowship and its simple program of recovery to its spiritual effectiveness in helping alcoholics to recover and also return to the principle of AA as a fellowship of men and women working together in autonomous groups, one drunk to another.

Dennis M. Co-editor

Editorial Introduction

AA should never grow so big that it out grows its spiritual principles. There is a paradox there for without our spiritual principles we will cease growing altogether. It isn’t the size that gives us our spiritual healing power for the suffering alcoholic

but rather our spiritual principles that maintains our one ultimate authority; a loving God. If one would read and reflect on the long form of our Traditions I think they would find that they are not laws by which to govern our society of ex-drunks but rather principles to keep laws and influences out so God may remain our director.

Many members seem to miss simple points in the Traditions like this part of Tradition Six: “We think, therefore, that any considerable property of genuine use to A.A. should be separately incorporated and managed, thus dividing the material from the spiritual.” This includes intellectual property which seems to be at the root of our problems because the money generated from this is used for a vast number of things that are not related to AA’s spiritual principles or our primary spiritual aim.

To continue with Tradition Six: “An A.A. group, as such, should never go into business. Secondary aids to A.A., such as clubs or hospitals which require much property or administration, ought to be incorporated and so set apart that, if necessary, they can be freely discarded by the groups. Hence such facilities ought not to use the A.A. name.”

Two interesting questions arise from this statement: The first is what does ‘as such’ mean? Does this mean we have part of AA that is not

considered an AA group? If that is the case we need to say in all honesty that part of AA is a fellowship of men and women and then we need to clearly define the 'other part' that is not. If there is much "property or administration" the Traditions suggest it should be "incorporated and so set apart." So the second question is where is the demarcation line between the apartness the Tradition suggests? With the incorporated entities as 'aids' to AA having so many seats at 'our' Conference and with many Areas, Intergroups, Districts, and even some large groups now incorporated the demarcation between the "spiritual" and "material" becomes very illusive.

Many problems not in the spirit of our principles have risen throughout AA's history but this last couple of decades we have had an epidemic of these problems. The following article is an example of one of these problems that has not been discussed or corrected within our service structure. The piece was written for OPPF by a past delegate that will remain anonymous as well as the other people involved. He served as delegate some years ago and it is my guess that the problem he informs us about has gotten worse and not better. Things like Gay's Minority Report (Past Trustee, June issue of OPPF) and the litigations (Two articles by past Delegates, April issue OPPF) demonstrate the problems related to the lessening separation between the spiritual and the material. I can vouch for the credibility of this Trusted Servant who has and continues to provide needed service to AA and Alcoholics. We discussed this and both decided it is the 'policy' that should be the focus and not those involved who for the most part have rotated out of their service positions. But I do feel that our current trusted servants should be accountable for all actions they take and especially those actions taken that can and do affect AA as a whole with decisions made without informing or discussion from the fellowship. The policy of silence and/or lack of documentation with their statements have got to cease. Only the fellowship can demand truth and accountability from their trusted servants.

Dennis M. OPPF Co-Editor

An Awakening of the Educational Variety

This is a story about an awakening, although of the 'rude' variety rather than a spiritual one. The focal points of this journey are the process by which Alcoholics Anonymous, or should I say the members of the A.A.W.S. Board, determine where the International Convention takes place. I have been involved in that process, which means I have served as a delegate to the AA General Service Conference. However, that is as specific as this will get. All other information regarding this writing will indicate practices and policies, but not in such a way as to indicate the 'when & where' of my experience.

I have been involved in doing the work of putting a bid together on several occasions. On each of these I was impressed with the dedication of my fellow AA's in attempting to provide the very best for the biggest AA event of all. While there were always personality clashes and some power-driving involved, for the most part the AA's involved were extremely careful to adhere to the Twelve Traditions.

However, on one particular occasion this experience became a grand tour of the sickness that can creep into AA when much money & prestige is involved. It had been determined that it would be helpful to research the bids of previous bidding cities to see what had been done, if anything, by the cities that had been selected as the site for the International Convention.

Unfortunately what was discovered was very disturbing. As some may know, in order to even be considered as a 'bidder', the respective city must meet some basic criteria which include number of hotel rooms, meeting facilities, weather conditions, etc. Our research uncovered that at least one city had greatly falsified their response to these criteria. Just to put the icing on the cake, a professional who had provided some consulting to this city – and was doing some work in our area – let us know that this was not an error, but something done purposely.

This person had absolutely no reason for telling us this, other than their own moral code. They gained absolutely nothing from disclosing it.

At this point I drafted a letter to the Chairperson of the General Service Board detailing what we had found. Prior to sending this I discussed it with the top person in our Convention Bureau. I was told that if I sent the letter our chances of ever hosting the International would be non-existent. However, I was also told that if I still felt that it was something I should do – then this person would back me completely.

I opted not to send this letter. The facts of the situation, however, were borne out in the experience of many International going AA members. In light of what has transpired, with things such as ‘incentives’, I often wonder what might have happened had I sent the letter. Using other like situations as an example, I doubt there would have been any change in the operation of the International planning at all.

In the process of preparing a bid, and presenting it at the General Service Conference, I made some amazing discoveries – some coming to light only years later. For example, a delegate from another bidding city told me (and I am quite certain this person would not have misspoken or lied) that the Convention Bureau president in their city had said to the delegate that “The people coming out of New York that this person had met were the most unprincipled people this person had ever met in the convention business.” That really took me aback! Our, society who claimed its whole basis to be a spiritual one, being called ‘unprincipled’ was almost more than I could absorb.

At another point I learned that the Delegate from cities that were selected for a visit was not allowed into the actual negotiation meetings. This also took me aback. I “chewed” on this for awhile, wondering if I should launch an effort to get the Conference to change this policy (at least I understood it to be a policy). I decided against the challenge because I assumed that there were Class B Trustees, a number of whom I trusted greatly, that were included in the

negotiations. Years latter I learned from a Trustee that they are not allowed into the negotiations either. It seems incredulous to me that there would not be several AA members – either Delegates or Trustees or both – involved in the meetings ensuring that AA’s principles are closely followed.

However, learning that this is not the case – it only seems natural that the Internationals should get bogged down in money, property & prestige. After all, isn’t that the natural course of business?

Another little “wrinkle” gave me pause as well. I was told that it was policy that the bidding cities could not lobby all the Conference delegates. We were told to simply make our presentation and let the spiritual process of the Conference work. There was one city, however, that lobbied each delegate (I’ll refrain from naming the details or the city). One might think that this would disqualify that city – it did not. Where were the spiritual principles?

I want to be clear that there are many well meaning and dedicated AA members who are involved in bidding for these conventions. However, when an event of this nature means between 40 – 60 MILLION dollars to a city – there are strong forces at work.

I believe that our International Conventions served a critical purpose early in AA’s history. They were gatherings that engaged in vital communication, and they had the hallmark (as described by Bill) of being gatherings at which the AA’s “thankfully contemplated what God had so freely given them.”

Recent conventions, however, have become little more than grand parties. At AA’s 25th Convention Dr Jellnick (famous for his chart on alcoholism) offered an interesting warning to us all. He said; “As each alcoholic gets sober, he or she unloads their ego on this wonderful Fellowship. I see a danger in that building up in this great society” (paraphrased). I believe this has been clearly exhibited at the conventions in the last few decades.

While I am sure many will say that they truly had a spiritual experience at the International; my

experience quite clearly points to times when what I thought to be a spiritual experience was simply a fast growing ego.

I think the usefulness of the International Convention has come and gone. For Alcoholics Anonymous to continue with it is simply a self-aggrandizing activity, an activity quite in opposition to our core spiritual principles.

Anonymous Past Delegate

One of the main important issues with the first OPPF committee was AA's Singleness of Purpose. We here of the new OPPF still believe in the importance of our singleness of purpose as expressed in the Third and Fifth Traditions. This issue has gotten worse since these were written although we are hearing from many members of groups that still hold to this principle as more and more groups are returning to a basic AA approach that proves still effective for the real alcoholic. Below are a few things from the OPPF archives.

From The OPPF Archives

From OPPF September, 1994

ALCOHOLICS IN THE MINORITY?!?

To Anyone Who's Listening!

Clarence Snyder ("The Home Brewmeister", page 297) said in 1977 at the opening of the Palm Springs Central Office that we had better remember who we are and what we are. That this is Alcoholics Anonymous, not dopes anonymous, fatsos anonymous, gamblers anonymous, or nose-pickers anonymous. Clarence Snyder, who began the meetings in Cleveland, Ohio, actually known as A.A. meetings and not the Oxford Group, and who, upon his death, was the longest living sober member of AA, WAS RIGHT! He was right in 1977 and his talk from that day is just as real and true today.

The acting Executive Secretary of the L.A. Central Office, A. W., told me that as a "Real Alcoholic" I spoke for a "very vocal minority." B. K., the interim Office Trustee, told me that my views on AA's Singleness of Purpose were "antiquated and shortsighted."

Well, while the non-profit, corporate bureaucracy of L.A.C.O. sits [idly by], "Real Alcoholics" view with alarm what's going on within alleged A.A. meetings, the price of literature goes up, meeting directories, which should be free, are now over \$1.00. Well, I could just go on and on.

It is not just a matter of semantics. Words mean things. The A.A. Big Book was written by drunks, about drunks and for drunks. Page 92 tells me that I am to be satisfied that the person I am carrying the message to is a "Real Alcoholic."

Since I am considered part of the "Minority Voice" by the trusted servants at L.A.C.O., there must be a duality of purpose and allegiance there as well.

As an experienced member of Alcoholics Anonymous with 15 years and four month of sobriety, I will certainly remain vigilant and willing to stand up for Alcoholics Anonymous and the alcoholic who still suffers. Are you?

Angel S.

Sober Date: 3/28/79

Editors Note: A few years later this lady was scheduled to speak at the Friday Night Malibu AA Meeting. Someone from a service position at that meeting called her a few days before the meeting and told her that they took a group conscience and didn't want her to come speak because she believes in AA being just for alcoholics and many of their members there are "dually addicted." She replied; "Let me get this straight. You don't want an alcoholic to come speak at an AA meeting?"

People often say, "It just isn't the way it was in the old days." We are interested in the ways in which long-term members see the differences from years back. One of our readers tells it like it was:

THE WAY IT WAS

In the early 50's, we were fortunate to have two newspaper editors in Chicago who were active members of AA! They usually ran a five day full page series on alcoholism and AA once every year. The articles carried stories and "before" and "after" pictures. It was through these articles that I first approached AA.

When I called the Central Office, the lady spent perhaps a half hour giving me a run-down on the organization. She then offered to send someone to my home that evening. I accepted.

All 12th step work then was done by two people. Men would call on men; women (whenever possible) would call on women. This was the day of the low-bottom drunks, so no chances were taken.

Two men came to see me that night and talked for about three hours. They each told of their problems with the bottle. The similarities to my behavior were quite convincing. One of the men became my sponsor, and I eventually became an unsuccessful sponsor of the second. The following night they took me to their "closed" meeting.

There were a great many small, neighborhood groups, situated for the sake of maximum convenience. We held meetings in our homes on a rotating basis. These were "closed" meetings, open only to alcoholics. Anonymity was not practiced in these groups. I left my first closed meeting with a list of members' names, addresses, and phone numbers.

We started each meeting with a "quiet time" a time for a short silent prayer. The chairman (selected at the previous meeting) then began his/her talk. Everyone participated, cross talk was permitted, even encouraged. There was no reading from the Big Book nor any formal rites observed. The talk was usually about one of the steps, or even a part of a step. I still remember a talk once on "Came to believe...." No subject was taboo. We discussed some highly personal beliefs and feelings and problems with complete candor. The meeting

ended with the Lord's Prayer and then we were served coffee and cake. We rehashed the meeting, and sometimes, the after meeting meeting took as long as the first.

We also had open meetings once a month, usually in a local hotel ballroom or other public place. Anonymity was strictly observed here at all times. The meeting opened with "AA is a fellowship...." The speaker for the evening was introduced by first name and initial and he was on his own. There was no reading or rituals, just someone trying to help someone. These meetings were well attended and we did a lot of "fishing" each time.

Sponsorship, in Southern California, seems to have acquired a mystique, requiring a special quality that only a chosen few have and can be considered worthy. Thus we have "sponsors" who act like drill sergeants or parole officers. Some also brag about the number of people they are "sponsoring".

There is nothing mystical about sponsoring a newcomer. They should be treated with kindness and respect. One only needs to know something of the program and be willing to share it, along with devoting many hours on the telephone, attending meetings with the new person. The old saying about learning by teaching is true.

Many of these new-comers are entering a new, foreign and intimidating society. Their "friends" are usually people who drink and whose social life is centered around taverns. To break the chain of habit they have acquired over the years, they need to see that there is another world out there waiting. The term "baby" is a very appropriate description.

... AA has changed. It has become much more aloof and impersonal. There does not seem to be the commitment "to the alcoholic who is still suffering" that once existed. Perhaps this is the result of having large meetings with more ritual than substance.

AA is at its best in small groups. The members come to know and trust each other. Each has something to offer. In a group of six or eight people, an absence becomes a matter of importance. A missing person in a group of a hundred or so is seldom noted.

The essence of AA was the caring and concern for each other. Each of us felt some responsibility for the other group members. We were in contact daily with one or more members. We became a close-knit family.

I hope we can again become a group of friends and not a lot of strangers at whom we smile -- and pass by.

G. C.

While our Eleventh Tradition of anonymity seems not to have been so rigorously maintained in those days, the spirit of caring, one drunk for another was clear! Without strong home groups, our Fellowship runs the risk of fostering non-commitment at meetings which require only casual commitments (I call it "CC" instead of "AA")

[Comment by the late Jim H. first OPPF Editor]

One of our readers, sober for over 20 years, (1994) wants to share his concerns, too.

Some of the non-A.A. stuff heard from A.A. podiums these days is absurd. For example, a recent meeting's speaker said he wasn't even an alcoholic, but that A.A. is his favorite "co-dependency program." My protest afterwards to the secretary met with indifference.

It disturbs me so to see and hear people coming into A.A. without any consideration for our primary purpose (or sole purpose), carrying A.A.'s message to alcoholics.

Being an alcoholic, a drunk, if you will, is the one and only requirement for membership in this outfit!

Of course some alcoholics are addicted to other things. So what? So, A.A. is where they come to deal with their drinking problem. Period. Getting sober and staying sober is what A.A.'s all about. Anything else is a bonus.

For a long time, alcohol was my elixir, but in time I couldn't function with it or without it. The solution for me was major doses of A.A. honesty and love and direction, as described and exhibited by others in the program.

The oldtimers I've [known] over the years wouldn't stand for the con games being played now. Where are they? I know some of them are still

around -- why are they so silent about what's going on in A.A. today?

Maybe it's up to not-so-oldtimers to step up and try to keep the focus on our primary/sole purpose. That is, if we really care. I do; how about you?

Alfred M.

In November and December of 1994 Jim H. wrote two articles of another aspect of AA's singleness of purpose. Besides being the first editor of OPPF and spending years in service to AA including General Service and sobering up dozens of drunks in his home for several years he was my sponsor. Every year when I come up on another sober birthday I can not think about this God given gift of sobriety without thinking about a man that gave me so much patience, love and a lot of his personal time. So in his memory I want to share some of his words on this important topic.

Dennis M.



I hear the phrase "an addiction is an addiction" and wonder where in the Big Book it came from. Those who say it often seem more convinced of the truth of it than those of us who say, "If you are satisfied that he is a real alcoholic," which is on page 92 of my book.

"An addiction is an addiction." Except for the phrase "alcoholic and drug addiction" I fail to find anywhere in the first 164 pages of the Big Book where the alcoholic condition is referred to as an addiction. But then, my book is over ten years old and probably seriously outdated, right? The term addict, the participle addicted, or the noun addiction is nowhere else to be found.

The phrases "dual addiction" and "dually addicted" which I hear often, and often from people with long-term sobriety and impressive service qualifications, make the hair stand up on the back of my neck! These phrases serve to reinforce the misinformation contained in the phrase "an addiction is an addiction."

Even if we grant the premise -- let's suppose an addiction to, say, caffeine is the same as an addiction to heroine -- we haven't addressed the

central issue that ALCOHOLISM IS NOT AN ADDICTION. I know that to some this may seem terribly academic and pointless (making such statements is one of those character defects of which God has not yet seen fit to relieve me even though I have assured Him that I am entirely ready), but there are people who claim to be real alcoholics of the hopeless variety who seem to miss this, to me, significant point. And so do those who use the phrase "dually addicted."

The language we use does affect the way we view situations, problems, and puzzles and, hence, does affect the way we seek solutions for them. Please, let's try to achieve precision in our use of language and avoid using sloppy phrases that open the door to the further dilution and misunderstanding of our message!

Jim H.

I can't quite figure out why, when singleness of purpose is mentioned, the subject of drug addiction seems to be the main topic of discussion. There are other issues to examine in our focus on alcohol and alcoholism, but drug addiction seems to be the one issue that people can't quite understand.

Most people have little trouble understanding that overeaters aren't alcoholics just because they want to stop drinking because of calories. The Third Tradition, "The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking," is seldom confusing in such cases. Why the problem with drug addiction?

One problem is the term "addiction" itself. On the one hand, it may mean any dependency that causes withdrawal symptoms when the user stops using the "substance" to which he/she is addicted. In this sense, many, but not necessarily all, alcoholics may be addicted to alcohol. The case of "periodic alcoholics" defies description as an addiction, even here.

But the more significant problem is that not all who are "addicted" to alcohol in this sense are necessarily alcoholics. The Big Book is clear that many who may need medical assistance to stop drinking may not be alcoholics:

"Then we have a certain type of hard drinker. He may have the habit badly enough to gradually impair him physically and mentally. It may cause him to die a few years before his time. If a sufficiently strong reason ill health, falling in love, change of environment, or the warning of a doctor becomes operative, this man can also stop or moderate, although he may find it difficult and troublesome and may even need medical attention.

But what about the real alcoholic? He may start off as a moderate drinker; he may or may not become a continuous hard drinker; but at some stage of his drinking career he begins to lose all control of his liquor consumption, once he starts to drink." [Pages 20-21]

No matter how I read this passage I keep getting the same message: Continuous hard drinkers may not be alcoholic and an alcoholic need not be a continuous hard drinker. The defining characteristic of the alcoholic is that he loses control of his consumption once he starts to drink.

This is the difference between the alcoholic and the addict: one who is merely addicted to alcohol will be able to control his/her consumption without the help of a spiritual experience. If one goes out to get drunk, to get "wasted," every time he/she drinks, one IS controlling his/her drinking. If that same person can drink without losing control of the amount he/she drinks whenever he/she chooses not to drink to excess, then that person is not an alcoholic.

Physical dependence upon alcohol (addiction in the narrowest sense of the word) is not a sufficient determinant of alcoholism. Nor is hospitalization for alcohol dependence a sufficient determinant. The test for alcoholism on pages 31 and 32 of the Big Book takes these facts fully into account:

"We do not like to pronounce any individual as alcoholic, but you can quickly diagnose yourself. Step over to the nearest barroom and try some controlled drinking. Try to drink and stop abruptly. Try it more than once. It will not take long for you to decide, if you are honest with yourself about it. It may be worth a bad case of jitters if you get a full knowledge of your condition."

On the other hand, the term addiction may mean any kind of compulsive behavior, including working to excess, as in "work-aholic." Obviously,

if one takes this broad a view of addiction, the term means absolutely nothing useful and cannot be used seriously to justify "sameness" between things or behaviors so designated.

If a drug addict stops using drugs, he is technically no longer addicted. People who are "addicts" are displaying something different from mere physical addiction in the narrowest sense of the term. These are people with a compulsion to become physically addicted over and over again. Such a state is something beyond what I understand as addiction in the narrow sense.

Years ago I worked with "addicts" in an institutional setting. They referred to themselves as "dope fiends" rather than as "addicts." The difference in terms struck me as capricious and demeaning at the time, but now I wonder if they hadn't struck on a truth that is deeper than my understanding at that time. Perhaps we are contributing only to confusion by arguing about "addicts" or "addictions."

One of the principle differences between what I think of as "addicts" and alcoholics is the desire to drop out rather than fit in. Typically, alcoholics seem to me to be people who wanted to fit in, whereas "addicts" seem to me people who wanted to drop out, to escape from society and life.

For me the difference is ultimately a spiritual one, and the need for a spiritual experience to overcome the illness is the ultimate test between mere addiction and alcoholism. These, however, are differences which are not likely to be objectively quantified in the near future, so we seem too stuck with our imperfect terminology for a while.

Jim H.



Other Minority Opinion sites:

<http://aamo.info/>

<http://gsowatch.aamo.info/>

Past issues of OPPF:

<http://www.aamo.info/oppf/>

AA Big Book Study Group:

<http://aabbsg.de/>

AA History:

http://aabbsg.de/chs/history_links.htm

http://silkworth.net/mitchellk/mitchellk_library.html

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--Thank You,

--Dennis M. -- OPPF Co-Editor

Common folks don't be shy send in you views, comments, and letters.

Contact us at: oppf@aamo.info

