

# *Spiritus contra spiritum*

## Spirituality and recovery from alcohol use disorder

The Lampeter Alister Hardy Lecture  
16<sup>th</sup> July 2017

---

Dr Wendy Dossett  
Department of Theology and Religious Studies  
Chester Studies of Addiction, Recovery and Spirituality Group  
PI of The Higher Power Project  
University of Chester  
[w.dossett@chester.ac.uk](mailto:w.dossett@chester.ac.uk)  
[www.csarsg.org.uk](http://www.csarsg.org.uk)  
@higherpowerproj  
@WEDossett

---

### **The AA Preamble (read at the beginning of every meeting)**

Reproduced with permission from the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous

Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for A.A. membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions. A.A. is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes. Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.

---

### **The Twelve Steps (as developed by AA, and adapted by other Twelve Step Fellowships).**

Reproduced with permission from the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol [drugs]—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs

**Full Text of Jung's Letter to Bill W.** (copied from photocopy of original sent to me by AA's General Service Office archive)

Jan 30<sup>th</sup> 1961

Dear Mr. Wilson,

Your letter has been very welcome indeed.

I had no news from Rowland H. anymore and often wondered what has been his fate. Our conversation which he has adequately reported to you had an aspect of which he did not know. The reason that I could not tell him everything was that those days I had to be exceedingly careful of what I said. I had found out that I was misunderstood in every possible way. Thus I was very careful when I talked to Rowland H. But what I really thought about was the result of many experiences with men of his kind.

His craving for alcohol was the equivalent, on a low level, of the spiritual thirst of our being for wholeness, expressed in medieval language: the union with God.\*

How could one formulate such an insight in a language that is not misunderstood in our days?

The only right and legitimate way to such an experience is that it happens to you in reality and it can only happen to you when you walk on a path which leads you to higher understanding. You might be led to that goal by an act of grace or through a personal and honest contact with friends, or through a higher education of the mind beyond the confines of mere rationalism. I see from your letter that Rowland H. has chosen the second way, which was, under the circumstances, obviously the best one.

I am strongly convinced that the evil principle prevailing in this world leads the unrecognized spiritual need into perdition, if it is not counteracted either by real religious insight or by the protective wall of human community. An ordinary man, not protected by an action from above and isolated in society, cannot resist the power of evil, which is called very aptly the Devil. But the use of such words arouses so many mistakes that one can only keep aloof from them as much as possible.

These are the reasons why I could not give a full and sufficient explanation to Rowland H., but I am risking it with you because I conclude from your very decent and honest letter that you have acquired a point of view above the misleading platitudes one usually hears about alcoholism.

You see, "alcohol" in Latin is "spiritus" and you use the same word for the highest religious experience as well as for the most depraving poison. The helpful formula therefore is: spiritus contra spiritum.

Thanking you again for your kind letter

I remain

Yours sincerely,

*C. G. Jung*

\*"As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God." (Psalms 42:1)

---

## Selected references

- Alcoholics Anonymous World Services. (1939, 2001). *Alcoholics Anonymous*. New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services. (The BIG BOOK)
- Alcoholics Anonymous. (1952, 1981). *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*. New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services.
- B, Dick. (1992). *The Oxford Group & Alcoholics Anonymous*. Maui, HI: Paradise Research Publications Inc.
- Broyles, L. M., et al. (2014). Confronting Inadvertent Stigma and Pejorative Language in Addiction Scholarship: A Recognition and Response. *Substance Abuse*, 35(3), 217–221.
- Carrette, J. R., & King, R. (2005). *Selling Spirituality: the Silent Takeover of Religion*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Carrette, J. R., & King, R. (2005). *Selling Spirituality: the silent takeover of religion*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Dossett, W. (2013). 'Addiction, spirituality and 12-step programmes.' *International Social Work*, 56(3), 369–383.
- Dossett, W. (2015). Reflections on the Language of Salvation in Twelve Step Recovery. In H. Bacon, W. Dossett, & S. Knowles (Eds.), *Alternative Salvations: Engaging the Sacred and the Secular*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Dossett, W. (2017). A daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition. *Addiction* 112 (6), 942-943
- Fuller, R. C. (2001). *Spiritual, But Not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America*. Oxford University Press.
- Galia, B., Kannai, R. & Ahmad, A. (2012) 'The Wounded Healer as Cultural Archetype': *Journal of Comparative Literature and Culture*. 14 (1).
- Hibbert, L. J., & Best, D. W. (2011). Assessing recovery and functioning in former problem drinkers at different stages of their recovery journeys. *Drug and Alcohol Review*, 30(1), 12–20.
- Kurtz, E. (1979). *Not-God: A History of Alcoholics Anonymous*. Center City, Minn.: Hazelden Educational Services.
- Llewellyn, D. (2015). *Reading, Feminism, and Spirituality: Troubling the Waves*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan
- Masters, R. A. (2010). *Spiritual Bypassing: When Spirituality Disconnects Us from What Really Matters*. North Atlantic Books.
- Masters, R. A. (2010). *Spiritual Bypassing: When Spirituality Disconnects Us from What Really Matters* Berkeley: North Atlantic Books.

- McAdams, D. P. (1993). *The Stories We Live by: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self*. Guilford Press.
- McCabe, I. (2015). *Carl Jung and Alcoholics Anonymous: The Twelve Steps as a Spiritual Journey of Individuation*. London: Karnac Books.
- Mercadante, L. A. (2014). *Belief Without Borders: Inside the Minds of the Spiritual But Not Religious*. Oxford University Press.
- Miller, J. A. (Ed.). (2014). *Sobering Wisdom: Philosophical Explorations of Twelve Step Spirituality*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press.
- Pittman, B. (1993). *The Roots of Alcoholics Anonymous*. Center City, MN: Hazelden.
- Project Match Research Group. (1997). Matching Alcoholism Treatments to Client Heterogeneity: Project MATCH. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, 58, 7–29.
- Rodriguez, L., & Smith, J. A. (2014). “Finding Your Own Place”: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Young Men’s Experience of Early Recovery from Addiction. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction* 12(4), 477–490.
- Schmidt, B. (Ed.). (2016). *The Study of Religious Experience: Approaches and Methodologies*. Sheffield: Equinox
- Streib, H., & Hood, R. (Eds.). (2016). *Semantics and Psychology of Spirituality: A Cross-Cultural Analysis*. Cham: Springer.
- Taves, A. (2016). *Revelatory Events. Three Case Studies of the Emergence of New Spiritual Paths*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Webster, D. (2012). *Dispirited: How Contemporary Spirituality Makes Us Stupid, Selfish and Unhappy*. Winchester: Zero Books.
- Žižek, S. (2001). *On Belief*. London; New York: Routledge.
- 

## **For further information and help with substance issues:**

**Alcoholics Anonymous:** National Helpline. 0845 769 7555. help@alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk . [www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk](http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk).

**Narcotics Anonymous:** Helpline: 10.00am – Midnight 0300 999 1212, <http://ukna.org>

**Al-Anon Family Groups** provide support to anyone whose life is, or has been, affected by someone else’s drinking or drug-using. Helpline 020 7403 0888, [www.al-anonuk.org.uk](http://www.al-anonuk.org.uk)

**SMART Recovery.** [www.smartrecovery.org.uk](http://www.smartrecovery.org.uk)