

people, especially those who seem to come in wanting to be told what to do, and who are of a religious frame of mind.

It works poorly for many who come in in a rebellious frame of mind, but even many of those will eventually adopt the steps.

But having a mind of your own is not a character defect to be belittled as Bill Wilson did it in the Big Book. Especially when it comes to the religious aspect of the program.

We have to say to Bill's credit that as his sobriety matured he did a lot to moderate his earlier stance. Here are a couple of things he said later on:

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.

The Dilemma of No Faith AA Grapevine , April 1961

Agnostics, atheists and freethinkers can in most cases no more be convinced to change their ways than anyone else that the fundamentalists pass judgment on and try to make them change. We seem to have been born that way, with a sceptical mind. "Once you see it, you can't unsee it".

And while most of us are rather average human beings just like most of the religious crowd, it is among the sceptics that we find those who will step forward and change the world for the better. Nothing in this world ever changed for the better by people placidly going along. Throughout history there are many examples of how going along made the world change for the worse. Let us encourage diversity! Encourage dissent! And always encourage respect and love for one another.

Even though Dr. Bob said he felt sorry for me, I still like at least one thing he said:

Let's keep it simple.

(1) These facts are from the following sources:

(I have not been able to verify them further, but Jim Burwell was a member almost from the very beginning)

Talk by Jim Burwell 1957:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZzZYvaLy52o>

Most of his talk is about putting the Big Book together.

Silkworth.net:

http://silkworth.net/timelines/timelines_public/appendix1.html

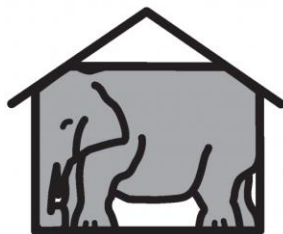
For further reading on being a non-believer in AA, have a look at the following websites:

aaagnostica.org
aabeyondbelief.org
secularaa.org

You can also find schedules of secular meetings worldwide for agnostics, atheists, freethinkers, and other non-believers at those sites.

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**ELEPHANT
IN THE ROOM**
WHAT WE'RE NOT
TALKING ABOUT

AA and the Art of Automobile Maintenance



It has probably happened to most of us during the times when we hadn't put our lives back together yet, or back in our drinking days, that we'd be nursing an old vehicle along and there would be days we'd say "Dear god, please let it start". And that's about as religious as most of us got about automobile maintenance. I had this old van and I did a lot of work on it during the 20 years I had it. But I never once saw in the manuals "You can't fix your truck without god's help, so before adjusting the valves pray to god for guidance, and after you have completed the task give thanks for god's help fixing your truck."

I imagine even the most devout Christian would think that an automobile manual which includes prayer should hardly be relied on. We want plain common sense instructions.

So why do we have to get a god involved in our recovery?

Don't get me wrong: Anyone who is of a religious mindset, if they feel a need or an inclination for a god in their life, and thus also in their recovery, that's fine by me, it's not my business to tell them what to do or not do, or what to believe. Let them do with their program what they want. I'm only talking about my program and about *our program – the one we work together*. The stuff we read, and how we talk to each other.

I can not see why the rest of us should be admonished to get a god involved.

Bill Wilson and his early recovery comrades attended the Oxford group, a decidedly evangelical Christian group which wasn't even so much focused on reforming drunks as on general salvation. Surely that influenced Bill's thinking a great deal.

Then, when he wrote the big book, he and Bob were 3 years sober. Jim Burwell tells that there were altogether only 8 people with more than 6 months sobriety when they published it. Of those first 100 people the book talks about, the majority only had a couple of months, and many relapsed. One of the 20 people whose story appeared in the back relapsed before the book came out. Six of them at some point later committed suicide ⁽¹⁾. I'd say they didn't have a lot to show when they wrote the big book. But Bill was a salesman and had great plans for his fellowship, he was going to make a movement, and he needed to have a book to do that, and he needed it right away. So he wrote it at 3 years sober when he really didn't know much about

alcoholism yet, and didn't have much in the way of facts to back up his claims.

I wish he could at least have kept it simple, instead of making this big, complicated god focused program.

Bill Wilson and Hank Parkhurst were salesmen. I imagine these guys as telling half-truths, exaggerations, embellishments and the occasional outright lie to their clients, and then having to go drink to forget about it. Salesmanship is about making a sale. And while there are many honest salesmen who want their clients to be happy, it would be odd if these guys belonged to that category, when you consider how much they talked about making amends. And all their salesmanship and half-truths carried over into the big book.

I can see why Bill invoked a god – it lent some weight and authority to his book. I do believe that Bill really had those religious visions (by which I'm not saying that he indeed did make contact with a god - or that he didn't) only that I do concede he was probably honest about that part.

I of course also concede that he did have some great ideas. Whether they were indeed his own, or whether he just managed to pull some of the right things together from various other sources, I don't think we need to be overly concerned about. Obviously he had discovered some principles which worked. I just wish he could have kept it simple:

- An alcoholic will trust another alcoholic more than they will trust just about anyone else, and so as alcoholics we're in a unique position to help each other in recovery.
- Helping other alcoholics is one of the best ways to increase our own chances of staying sober ourselves.

- Most of us need a tribe to belong to, and we greatly increase our chance of staying sober by going to meetings and by associating with other recovering alcoholics.
- If the tribe is defined in such a manner that we are made to feel that we belong, then most of us will indeed feel that we belong, and we are more likely to stay.
- Don't take that first drink, that's the one that leads to a drunk.
- For most of us it is not enough to merely stop drinking. We need to make some real changes in our lives. It also helps our recovery if we can contribute to making this a better world, especially for alcoholics and their kin. Having a plan or a program of some sort can make it much easier to do. But however we do it, our recovery will most likely include working with such general principles as honesty openmindedness, willingness, humility, service, living by the golden rule, acceptance, and living one day at a time.
- Take it one day at a time, one hour at a time, even 5 minutes at a time if that's all you can do. You can postpone that drink 5 minutes, or the argument, or whatever other stupid shit you're thinking about getting yourself into.
- Doing the right thing helps keep you sober, because you will have no reason to feel bad about yourself. At least you won't be adding to the reasons for feeling bad that you showed up here with, and even those will slowly fade away if you keep working on really changing your life.

Our program really did not need to be much more complicated than that.

Of course it helps many of us to have a program with specific instructions on what to do. The steps work quite well for many