

An Historical & Prophetic Perspective on the Alcoholics Anonymous

I think Alcoholics Anonymous is a **prophetic challenge** from Lord of the Church to his church. **God** has a **message** for the **church** through AA. In the late 1940's and the 1950's the church in the United States was in the height of her institutionalized form. This was the era before Vatican II, when the world's largest denomination was still holding her services in a dead language. The Protestant mainline church in the U.S. was closely identified with the mainstream of the dominant American culture, typified, for example by General Motors. Executives in American corporations knew that it was helpful to be seen at church to demonstrate their loyalty, to the corporation and the country as much as to the church and her Lord. Wives in the Bible belt dragged their alcoholic husbands to church, where they got a good dressing down, but not much freedom from their disease. This is an overstatement, of course, but you're catching my drift. In other words the church was culturally successful, but the fire in her fireplace was low. So, out of his passionate love for alcoholics, God raised up Alcoholics Anonymous, and sent (or at least allowed) AA **outside the camp** of the church into the **wilderness** (where the drunks were) but also where prophets go.

Alcoholics Anonymous, becomes "the first **spiritual fellowship** organized around **pain**." (Phyllis Tickle) Not institutional loyalties, ethnicity, etc. This is a stripped down fellowship. Organized around pain. Like the fellowship of Jesus, when it all began "Blessed are the poor in spirit..." Need is way in.

AA was not going to fly unless it **worked**, unless it delivered the goods. So it was a grand experiment: **What works? What's necessary** to save an alcoholic from his disease? These 12 Steps are what works and what's necessary. This has been verified over & over. Those who work these steps only **half way** only get **half cured**.

So, in a sense, Alcoholics Anonymous is a challenge from God for the church to begin to apply the spiritual discipline of reality test to spirituality: what works? What can be verified as effective? This is the heart of the scientific method. Religion has always been subject to this test. But now it's framed more like an experiment, for all to

see. (By the way, this is obviously not the only test. There are others, such as “What’s beautiful?” but we’re getting distracted, aren’t we?)

What a challenge to the church, and I speak as a son of the church. Especially when AA made a strategic decision to low the profile of Jesus’ name in favor of “Higher Power”...but, and this is a huge BUT, they did the Jesus stuff, based on the wisdom rooted in the gospel.

Just like God isn’t it? A God who is “joyous, happy, and free,” speaking to his lukewarm church: “You’ve got the Jesus Name, but you’re not doing the Jesus stuff for alcoholics. AA is doing the stuff, but not using the Name. If it’s a choice these two options, which works to get more alcoholics saved from disease?” The answer, without doubt, the fact-based answer, is AA.

Now the response of the church to all this is not (our ought not to be) the dumping of the name in favor of the stuff. We have every reason to believe that a personal savior is attached to his name. After seeing this savior’s path verified so powerfully by Alcoholics Anonymous, we might feel more attached than ever to him, and by extension to his name. The response called for is to bear the name and do the stuff associated with the name. That may not be the task of Alcholics Anonymous, but it is certainly the task of the church.