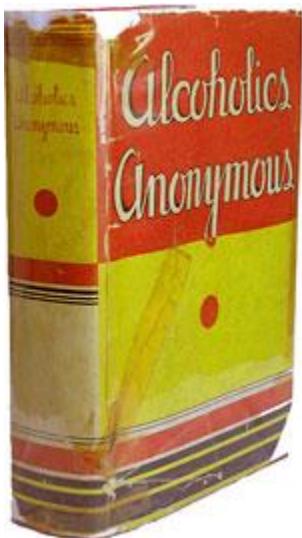




The Big Book: Sacred or out-dated?

*Rebellion Dogs Recovery Radio looks at
the two sided sword of stewardship:
Protection & Progress*



THE *BIG BOOK* of AA: Sacred or Outdated? The key author to Alcoholics Anonymous said of our Twelve Traditions that these principles serve two interdependent functions: protection and progress. In a healthy society, you can't have one without the other. Today we see what AA Stewards have to say, two former AAWS Directors, one living and one dead, and one very alive Delegate from Ontario, Canada. While some assume The *Big Book* and the Twelve Steps contained within are the centerpiece of any AA meeting, on today's show we see if this is truth or myth. Thanks for being part of Rebellion Dogs Radio, a Freethinkers' look at 12 Step Culture, now with less dogma and more bite. Visit RebellionDogsPublishing.com for a transcript of this show.

Let me tell you a story that was a wake-up call for me. I can't count the number of times so far this century that I have been involved in discussions about *Alcoholics Anonymous* the book and the role of this 1939 document in Alcoholics Anonymous the Fellowship. Because the book and the society share the same name, I am afraid that people easily see them as inseparable.

Today it seems AA is divided by those who, "in this corner," swear by the life-giving salvation that the words of the *Big Book* impart on members and, "in this corner," members say they feel stifled, persecuted or insulted by it. The big question is this: Who says the *Big Book* is so relevant? If you like it, read it, over and over again. If you don't, why do you care so much? Can your sobriety and your AA group get along without it? Who says The *Big Book* is the centerpiece to any AA meeting or discussion? The Preamble describes AA. The Twelve Traditions define and defend our Fellowship. Neither the Traditions nor the Preamble tout any book or any program as central to AA—the society or AA-membership status. To one member, AA membership and obedience to the 12 Step program might be indistinguishable. Another member dismisses the whole 12 Steps and enjoys a new-found freedom based on the group-therapy of meetings, the one-day-at-a-time program, the resignation, desire and determination suggested as our only requirement for membership.



In AA's newest pamphlet, *Many Paths to Spirituality*, Bill W. says "... the full individual liberty to practice any creed or principle or therapy whatever should be a first consideration for us all.

Let us not, therefore, pressure anyone with our individual or even our collective views. . . . Let us always try to be inclusive rather than exclusive.”

It wasn’t the book’s authors or the founders who demanded reverence or strict adherence to any dogma. It was my generation that canonized the pioneers and deemed AA’s early accounts as a sacred text.

This may shock any of you who started your recovery this century; I was two years sober or longer before I thumbed through *Alcoholics Anonymous* and about eight years sober before I read it—from Foreword to page 164. In the 1970s, where I came from, at least, working the Steps was done largely from the oral tradition on which AA was founded. One alcoholic talking to another, and sometimes, another alcoholic and another. We were more likely to read a story out of the *Grapevine* than we were to read “More About Alcoholism” or “Into Action.” In the 70s the Big Book was – no offense, but officially over 30 years old and we hippies didn’t trust anyone over 30. There was nothing sacred about the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*. It may have borrowed from the Abrahamic faiths but it was no *Koran, Bible* or *Torah*.

A Step Four might mimic the *Big Book* resentments, fears and sex-conduct columns but it might not. It might just be an autobiographic account of our faults, blunders, and negative, selfish and destructive tendencies. The important thing was to write down what we were most ashamed of and tell someone else. It was an ego-deflating, fault-reconciling exercise that taught me that I wasn’t as evil or as smart as I thought I was. I wasn’t a victim of circumstances to the extent that I had protested. In doing Step Five I felt more dignity and less shame than I could ever recall. That term ego-maniac with an inferiority complex didn’t apply anymore. Oh, these extremes would wreak havoc on me from time to time, but they were now visitors, not masters of my psyche.

If there was any Back-to-Basics movement in AA in that era, it wasn’t alive in Montreal, where I got sober. I am sure I read some of the stories out of the back of my Third Edition. When I couldn’t get to a meeting it was the next best thing—hard to remember but there were no internet meetings or chat-groups then. AA wasn’t yet one million members then and now we’re over two million.

So that was then and what about now? Maybe you’ve been in the middle of these discussions between “open to new experiences” liberals and “preserve the integrity of the message” conservatives. Should “To Wives” have been written by Lois instead of Bill? Should it be re-written as a gender and sexual orientation-neutral “To Loved Ones.” “We Agnostics” ought to be in support of secular AA instead of a veiled threat to unbelievers. Can we get a second opinion? It’s great that Dr. Silkworth offered some input to A.A. and what he says holds up today but who would treat an illness with 75-year-old modality? Appendix III offers more 20th century thumbs up from doctors but who could blame a skeptic for thinking our practices were based on mythology and folklore? Some might think that non-alcoholics have no place in the text, doctors or otherwise.

The male-gender language and sexist tone can’t be where the magic of recovery resides, can it? That is the reasoning of some who think the book needs an update. Surely we can make the

alcoholics throughout the first 164 pages and the Gods we pray to either/or male or female or genderless to respect our Muslim members (Allah is neither male nor female).

Where am I in this debate? I lean towards the idea that the *Big Book* is a text book for mutual-aid recovery from alcoholism. I liken it to a grade six math book. The principles of grade six math have not changed since 1939. But the way we talk to 11-year-olds has. What we've learned about teaching has improved. Every revised text book has new examples and speaks in a modern present-day vernacular. The wording of our 1939 grade six math book wasn't sacred; only the principles of mathematics are or were. Because it wasn't a sacred text, no one worries that the risk of changing the text was that some educational magic spell, hidden in a comma or phrase somewhere, would be broken if we were to inadvertently remove the phrase that magic was hiding in. No one believed the words on the page were sacred or magic so no one feared that carelessly changing one word or phrase for another could break any magic spell, casting future 11-year-olds into an abyss of ignorance and ruin and leaving the editors the blame.

What a good thing that we've updated the teaching of math. When AA started I believe 4% of Americans had a college or university degree. It's over 40% today. In part, the credit for this increase in educational acumen maybe attributed to the idea that, while we teach the same old numbers and equations to grade six, we're improving the means of imparting this age-old wisdom.

Today, bringing up this view of the *Big Book* as a text book that was intended to be tinkered with will create a reaction. Said reaction will range from bobble-headed agreement in one corner to conflict, verging on hostility, in another. One of the conclusions an online AA chat group came to was that a new book—another book—was more likely to see the light of day than an altered and improved *Big Book*. Let the literalists crowd around their sacred text with Amish-like quaintness as AA inches towards our 100th birthday. I am trying to be serious about this. The Amish, Mennonites and Hutterites have taken a pass on modern life in favor of the lifestyle of their ancestors. Who's to say they got it wrong and we live such a higher quality, gadget-dependent life?

Maybe everyone can have what they want. Instead of taking away, we could just add something. Let another book for Humanists, progressive and forward thinking members be written by and for the Fellowship today. Long after we're gone the next generation can take what they like and leave the rest. Neither book ought to belittle or be threatening to those who read the other. "But won't that be confusing for the newcomer?" is the battle-cry of the change-resistant. Maybe choice will cause confusion; maybe our inability to adapt will confuse them. If the newcomer needs clarification, I expect someone will help them along the way.

But again, the more pressing question that came to me in discussing the *Big Book* is still this: Why and when did the *Big Book* become so central or sacred in AA culture? If one thinks that only the Big Book, followed in 1940s Ohio style will yield a 75% success rate, no one is going to stop them from flocking to *Big Book* study retreats. And if you feel the religious, archaic or misogynist writing is cramping your style, ignore it. No more persecution, no more oppression. Go forth and be the only No-Big-Book-No-Problem that someone else may ever see. If others fear for your sobriety because you're not doing it the way the first 100 did, who cares what others say or think? Again, the author of that book reminds us that, "full individual liberty to

practice any creed or principle or therapy whatever should be a first consideration for us all. Let us not, therefore, pressure anyone with our individual or even our collective views.”

How did feelings about a book ever get so polarized? Our history holds some clues. Going back to my history, my experience, it was 1974 when I came to my first meeting and 1976 when I got sober. In Montreal Canada, I can’t recall a single *Big Book* study group that I or any of my running mates attended. *Living Sober* and *Came to Believe* were new books that people were excited about. The *Twelve & Twelve* was a more modern, relevant look at the Twelve Steps, written by a wiser, more experienced Bill Wilson. He didn’t write it alone. I just learned that Jack Alexander, author of the game-changing Saturday Night Post article about AA in the 1940s was, at the time of the 12 & 12, one of our non-alcoholic Class A Trustees and he helped edit *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*.

Have you ever heard, “There are no rules in AA and plenty of us to explain them to you”? What is AA orthodoxy if there is just one self-identifying membership requirement? An AA meeting is still an AA meeting without “How It Works” or some other tribute to our *Big Book* being read or quoted. We can be an AA meeting without praying, without reading or, if the group prefers, not going around the room saying, “My name is _____ and I’m an alcoholic.” There were meetings before there was a book, after all. AA is like the united nations of 115,000 countries, sovereign meetings that decide for themselves what the practices, rituals and doctrines of the meeting will be.

With all that autonomy there seems to be a certain degree of voluntary orthodoxy or a tendency to mimic what other groups have done. Is that rigid; is that reification at work? Or is that an innocent reflection of human nature? I have been to AA meetings and other Twelve Step mutual-aid groups in six countries with includes 14 different US states and Canadian provinces. Still, I have been to less than 1% of all AA meetings. I am hardly qualified to talk about AA as a whole. I turn instead to a couple of members who have heard from groups and members from around the world. They have read and heard outpourings of gratitude, criticisms, demands to have local disputes adjudicated and good ideas about how AA could be better. There are many who fit this profile but I am going to draw upon Bob P and John K. Let’s start with Bob.

I never met the late Bob P up close (1917 – 2008). I remember the one time I saw Bob P. from a distance. It was at the World Conference, in 1985, Bob P welcomed everyone from Montreal’s Olympic Stadium. AA was 50 years old and I was ½ that age. It was great to be back in Montreal for me. I had left Montreal for Calgary Alberta in 1979 and now I was living six hours away from home-town Montreal in Toronto, Ontario. I was excited about the Montreal conference as I would be seeing friends from my first home group, Western Canada and my new home, Toronto, all in the same place. So that was the only time I laid eyes on Bob P, as I watched the opening ceremonies from the Montreal stands along with tens of thousands of others.

Ten months later, Bob P would give the closing talk in April 1986 at the 36th General Service Conference, not that I was paying much attention to such things at the time. I was active in service, but much more focused on the Young People’s movement which was vibrant in Toronto as it had been in Calgary and Montreal before that. Toronto Young People’s had organized local dances, an annual Toronto Young People’s Conference which we facetiously called TYPC or

pronounced Tipsy and we were talking about bidding for the International Convention of Young People in AA (ICYPAA).

So it would be much later that I would get to know about Bob P as I developed a curiosity about the history of culture—which, like for many of us, coincided with a gnawing concern for our fellowship's health and future prospects. Now I can tell you this about the man Bob P. Bob came to AA in 1961 and three years into sobriety, drawing on a professional background of Public Relations, he found himself involved in AA public information and in short order, working with Bill W., himself. In a *Readers Digest* article about Bill W., Bob describes meeting him.

Bill was slouched in a chair, his feet up on a battered oak desk that was scarred with dozens of burn marks from cigarette stubs. When he stood he was about six feet, two inches-slender and loose-limbed. He had a long face and sparkling blue eyes. He acted as if meeting me was the nicest thing that had happened to him in years. "I'm Bill," he said, stretching out his hand. "I'm a drunk."

I started mumbling how I owed him my life, and Bill, embarrassed, looked at the floor and said, "Just pass it on."

Bob's whole AA story can be found in our *Big Book*, entitled, "AA Taught Him to Handle Sobriety." Bob served as director of Grapevine, director of A.A.W.S. and as General Service Trustee. Bob was General Manager of G.S.O. until 1984, then acted as a senior advisor until this last speech about AA's future. Hindsight suggests that he showed the quality of an Oracle as he addressed the 1986 General Service Conference. It was Bob's 18th General Service Conference. Imagine that; a delegate goes to two Conferences. Bob had been to 18 of the 36 Conferences AA every had—that's ½ of them. He talked first about the past:

I have lived through nearly half of our Fellowship's history. And with each passing year, I feel more and more blessed to have come in when many of the early giants of A.A. were still around. I knew Bill, of course, and literally sat at his feet as he spun his famous "bedtime story." I heard Bernard Smith deliver his last talk at the Miami International Convention. Brilliant and articulate, his contributions were tremendous. Marty M helped me in my early sobriety and I even lunched frequently at the ANSA Club with "Popsie" M who took Marty to her first meeting at 182 Clinton Street. Also with Bert T whose loan from his mortgaged shop enabled the *Big Book* to be published. It was Dr. Harry Tiebout who sent me to A.A.

They are all gone now and legions more like them. The memories bring tears to my eyes. But there is one remarkable A.A. pioneer still with us today – Dr. Jack Norris. He has been a tower of strength for over 36 years. He has lived more A.A. history than the rest of us put together; indeed he not only lived it, he helped make it. Cherish him. We will not see his like again.

The other person here I must thank by name is John B. He came on board at G.S.O. in May 1984 and in due course succeeded me. Thanks to his tolerance and understanding, the succession has been affected without a harsh word or an uncomfortable situation between us. John has a fine mind and a wealth of management know-how, and he is a

very active and faithful member of A.A. We are fortunate to have him in this period of some serious problems. G.S.O.'s affairs are in good hands.

Bob also paid tribute to then GSO Chair Gordon Patrick and so many valuable non-alcoholic Trustees "With a capital N in non-alcoholic" as Bob would say. He commented that he had worked with 1,700 delegates from North America reminding us all that "neither credit nor gratitude can be apportioned among the different kinds of service workers—so much to this group, so much to that. All are essential, regardless of title. In fact, the most important title in Alcoholics Anonymous—the only one that really counts—is "A.A. member." As they say, "The highest you can get in A.A. is sober."

Then, Bob P talked about the future:

I have no truck with those bleeding deacons who decry every change and view the state of the Fellowship with pessimism and alarm. On the contrary, from my nearly quarter century's perspective, I see Alcoholics Anonymous as larger, healthier, more dynamic, faster growing, more global, more service-minded, more back-to-basics, and more spiritual—by far—than when I came through the doors of my first meeting in Greenwich, Connecticut, just one year after the famous Long Beach Convention. A.A. has flourished beyond the wildest dreams of founding members—though perhaps not of Bill himself, for he was truly visionary.

I echo those who feel that if this Fellowship ever falters or fails, it will not be because of any outside cause. No, it will not be because of treatment centers or professionals in the field or non-Conference-approved literature, or young people or the dually-addicted or even the druggies trying to come to our closed meetings. If we stick close to our Traditions and our Concepts and our Warranties—and if we keep an open mind and an open heart—we can deal with these and any other problems that we have or ever will have. If we ever falter and fail, it will be simply because of us. It will be because we can't control our own egos, nor get along well enough with each other. It will be because we have too much fear and rigidity and not enough trust and common sense.

I mentioned rigidity. If you were to ask me what is the greatest danger facing Alcoholics Anonymous today, I would have to answer: the growing rigidity that is so apparent to me and many others. The increasing demand for absolute answers to nit-picking questions. Pressure for G.S.O. to "enforce" our Traditions. Screening alcoholics at closed meetings. Prohibiting non-Conference-approved literature, i. e., "banning books." Laying more and more rules on groups and members.

The decline of the church at the end of the Middle Ages was symbolized by their neglect of human suffering and the souls of sinners to argue in their conclaves over "how many angels can stand on the head of a pin." My friends, at our conclave this week, I heard some arguments over "how many angels can stand on the head of a pin."

And in this trend toward rigidity, we are drifting farther and farther away from our co-founders. Bill, in particular, must be spinning in his grave, for I remind you that he was perhaps the most permissive person I ever met. One of his favorite sayings was "Every

group has the right to be wrong”; he was maddeningly tolerant of his critics; and he had absolute faith that faults in A.A. were self-correcting.

Bob went on describe Bill W’s last public appearance, dying of emphysema and being wheeled up the microphone in Miami in 1970, before a crowd only 1/10th the size of the Montreal crowd Bob addressed only months before. The entire speech can be found in Box 4-5-9. I encourage anyone to read it.

I called Bob oracle-like. It was 1986 and AA was still growing and would continue to until it peaked out in the early 1990s at 2.2 million. Rigidity, which he warned of, causes stagnation. That stagnation, at least in the number of people who embrace AA as their home away from home, would come a ½ a decade later.

I will tell you what I do remember about the mid-1980s. It was a boom-era for alcohol and drug treatment. Any year-sober neophyte without a resume that warranted gainful employment in their career of choice could become a treatment professional. And some of AA did, balancing their very different roles as counselor at work and rank-and-file member in their home group. For Step Four which I talked about from my 1976 perspective, now there were books and manuals and systems and a new *latest, greatest thing* per month.

AA finally gave way to membership requests for a daily reflection book because so many other me-too organizations were filling the need which resulted in Hazelden and other 24 hour books being formally read or informally referred to in meetings. There was talk of GSO creating a how-to-Step-Four guide by AA for AA just to quell the flow of ACA, Hazelden, Betty Ford, NA, this-way, that-way guides that were, as we love to say, ‘confusing the newcomer.’

GSO decided that how-to literature was a bad idea. Our collective experience has been that when we codify an oral tradition it does tend to get rigid. Let’s bring John K into the discussion and look at his first hand experience looking up at AA from the bottom of the inverted service triangle. In a general sharing session in November of 2003, John K, General Service Trustee, mirrored in some ways what Bob said almost 20 years earlier.

John recalls, “Our co-founders were pragmatists—try something, test it, change it, review it, test it, then change, review, test it again. As a result, our knowledge as a Fellowship is based not on logic, or revelation, or authority—it is based on experience, on what works and as such, it is always subject to change.”

This isn’t what we hear from Today’s Big Book literalists. Their view of history was that conformity to a single process and uniformed interpretation was what worked then and what was “authoritatively” intended for all time. I don’t know if they are right or wrong but I know muckers and thumpers are encroaching on mainstream AA. I wonder sometimes if people think for themselves. Like zombies, some members repetitively drone the words of dead men, from one cliché to the next with the same inflection as they heard their sponsor’s sponsor use. This waking-dead brand of sobriety, while I am sure it is effective for a good number of members, misses the point that our founders emphasized.

John K spoke of the balancing act Bill W. wrote about in November 1960. "As we contemplate the Traditions we see that they have two main characteristics, and that each of these aspects reinforces the other. The first aspect of the Twelve Traditions is protection; the second aspect is progress." While literalists or bookers, or thumpers protect either a true or imagined historical process that saved a true or imagined 75% of all who passed through our gateway, why have they forsaken progress? Why sneer at newcomers speaking a language learned from cutting edge treatment centers and tell them, "We have to un-teach the psychobabble you learned in treatment"? Thumpers seem to be for protection at the expense of progress—or as John K put it, "test it, change it, review it." I do not think that the cutting edge treatment is either a threat to or a replacement for 12 Step Fellowship. But on the other side of the ledger, how are thumpers any threat to a more liberal, self-defined addiction, self-defined sobriety regimen? Thumping and praying and recitation of folklore is not contagious, nor does it impose any ritual or limits on your own group. Each group is autonomous.

John talks about the difference between, say, pamphlets that welcome subcultures inside AA to, say, a *how to* make amends or define a higher power or take a personal inventory pamphlet.

Every time we develop a new recovery pamphlet, I believe we say "welcome" to a whole new group of alcoholics who might otherwise feel our message was not intended for them, or worse, that they would not be welcome. Every time we develop a "how to" guideline or the like, I believe we run the risk of implying that "this is the only way to do things." In the process we may discourage innovation, or even scare our members off from service by creating the impression that they need vast training before even trying. I believe we need to produce more of the first type of literature, when appropriate, and less of the second."

In one regard, John K reiterates the message from Bob P, almost two decades earlier.

At every Regional Forum I attend, I notice how eager some of our members are to turn over power to GSO and the corporate boards. Some seem to want to reduce service, which should involve as much contact as possible with other recovering alcoholics, to as few computer keystrokes as possible. Some are eager to avoid inconvenience in service, even if it results in bypassing the service structure completely. Others want to install rituals and orthodoxy, which by their nature are always *authoritative*, even at the expense of setting our upside-down triangle seriously a-wobble. . . . I hope our vision for the future emphasizes the A.A. group as the fundamental unit of recovery. I hope our vision includes an A.A. where groups still have the right to be wrong. . . In short, I hope our vision for A.A.'s future includes a willingness to engage in a "continuous moral inventory of our collective behavior," and to include as many of our members as possible in every aspect of that exercise.

Some of our trusted servants encourage orthodoxy. A current Delegate writes in a Toronto Intergroup AA newsletter about singleness of power. While one member fears rigidity, we can always find those that warn us against the risks that lurk behind imagination and autonomy. Here's what the September *Better Times* has to say about things:

The last part of Tradition Four "except in matters affecting AA as a whole" tells us our fellowship has a singleness of purpose and that a group is subservient to the whole, not

above it. We can have groups with ‘personalities,’ groups that have variations in form, but not groups that have variations in substance. It is not up to the group to re-invent the model or re-write the cookbook, it is up to the group to undertake the application of these principles in all their affairs and pass on a clean, clear message that reflects the programme of Alcoholics Anonymous, as interpreted first by our founders and later by our Conference – and each and every day by us AAs.

Groups subservient to the whole, not above it? That’s another way of looking at it compared to what other stewards have said. Let’s install rituals and orthodoxy, which John was concerned with, as he stated, “by their nature are always *authoritative*, even at the expense of setting or upside-down triangle seriously a-wobble.” A subservient group and an AA that demanded it would be a service triangle a-wobble. We have one AA view that uniformity is the glue that ought to bind us. Not the unity of many chaotic voices, but uniformity of a single voice. John K concluded in 2003 with, “I hope our vision for the future emphasizes the A.A. group as the fundamental unit of recovery. I hope our vision includes an A.A. where groups still have the right to be wrong.”

Toronto’s *Better Times* suggests too much risk in so much latitude. The singleness of purpose article concludes:

We must always be vigilant in protecting our program’s magnificent concept of singleness of purpose. It is that singleness of purpose that will sustain us when forces—almost always from within—want to mold and morph our purpose to suit other goals or objectives. When the newcomer arrives in the room for the first time, it is our ability to share a consistent, clear and uncomplicated story of a recovery solution that is critical; one that does not confuse from meeting to meeting or Area to Area. Personal opinions have no place in our rooms nor do re-writes or self-styled “improvements” to the basic text. We have a spiritual solution to a deadly foe who wants nothing more than to kill us. We can never afford to look away from that, even for an instant.

What drama. What an alarming prospect; confused newcomer falling prey to a deadly foe because the spiritual solution was confused from meeting to meeting or Area to Area. Why risk progress, when protecting a sacred message ensures victory over a foe who wants nothing more than to kill us? Is adaptation, imagination and self-styled improvements the enemy of AA? I agree that this would represent comforting stewardship for some of our Fellowship—maybe even the majority of our membership. Bill saw ignoring progress as equally foolish as ignoring protection.

Why do people fear *change*—another word for the *progress* Bill spoke of? I speculate that if motivation boils down to one of two forces being A) desire for change or B) fear of loss, if we feel both, fear wins, desire is set aside; loss trumps gain.

I think of my own sobriety; it wasn’t desire for a good and meaningful sober life, it was fear of consequences - loss. The benefits of a good and sober life were always there for the taking but the desire for the good life didn’t motivate me to change; fear got me thinking straight.

I guess reification over adaptation-motivated members are no different than I am. They fear that

the magic spell that keeps us all sober is at risk with any changed word or ritual. Change is seen as risking it all. Any mis-step and all be banished to Hell.

What if extinction was what we feared? Every society that doesn't adapt goes by the wayside. It's like the frog in the slowly boiling water. We wouldn't voluntarily boil ourselves to death but the transition to death comes slowly enough that by the time we notice there is trouble, it's too late.

We can't *logically* separate those from a position they have come to *emotionally*. Otherwise I would have logically seen sobriety as wiser than continuing with my addiction and dying drunk.

In the July 1965 digital archives of *Grapevine*, I heard Bill W say, "Never fear needed change. Certainly we have to discriminate between changes for the worse and changes for the better." It isn't change for the better that *Better Times* is on a fear-mongering campaign about. It's change for the worse. How do we know if it's change for the better or change for the worse? John K described AA as try this and see how it works. Try that and see how it works. He described an AA that never rested on our laurels. He talked of an AA than never feared if a group got it wrong. Bill said in 1965 that if a group or AA as a whole identifies a need to change he doesn't say to ignore the need as an ego-feeding proposition or a risk to be discouraged and feared. He didn't talk about a group that was subordinate to the approval of others or some AA authority. Instead his 1965 *Grapevine* article (*As Bill Sees It*, p. 115 if you prefer) says, "We cannot stand still or look the other way. The essence of growth is a willingness to change for the better and then an unremitting willingness to shoulder whatever responsibility this entails."

We have to be unafraid of being wrong. We can't identify change for the better from change for the worse before hand. What about honesty, open-mindedness and willingness? Is this a temporary demand for the first months of sobriety or a way of life, forever? AA isn't growing. I don't know if that means we're failing. But if we could help more people I think we should. If that meant trying something new, we are encouraged to overcome our close-mindedness. And when we try something it might not work. We ought to be willing to say we were wrong and try something else with the same enthusiasm.

If we try something and we confuse a newcomer, can we cross that bridge when we get to it? Aren't we projecting our fear of change onto them? Is that stewardship or is that bureaucracy?

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