

This is not a formal statement and merely this writer's opinion based on years in the fellowship of AA.

I believe AA is unquestionably a quasi-religious cult despite its foundational claim of being "spiritual, not religious." An informal list of similarities would include: a core of adepts seeking indoctrination of neophytes; glorified founders; rites and rituals; dogma contained in the canonical *Big Book* (complete with highly edited personal stories of miraculous recovery, each ending with a canned testimonial for AA); salvation in *this* life; damnation for those who leave ("jails, institutions, and death"); strong in-group/out-group mentality; groupthink; pressure to attend meetings, every day if possible; and, indoctrination under the stern and watchful eye of an adept (one's sponsor). AA relies heavily on "denialism", where no matter what objections a newcomer may have, the objections automatically confirm he or she is "in denial" and therefore suffering from the "disease of alcoholism."

The founders of AA, Bill W. and Dr. Bob, were both Ouija board-using occultists who claimed direct communication with the dead and with spirits. Bill W. claimed he received the Twelve Steps from a spirit named Boniface while in a trance. Bill W's wife, Lois, was a Swedenborgian and Dr. Bob was a Freemason, both of which systems deny the divinity of Christ. Before the *Big Book* was written, newcomers were handed Emmet Fox's *Sermon on the Mount, The Key to Success in Life*, which unambiguously denies the divinity of Christ. Yet, Christian newcomers are typically duped into believing it is loosely a Christian-based fellowship, or that AA is indifferent to one's religion. AA has its own set of dogmas and will tolerate no others before it, as every newcomer soon learns. In fact, much of the "sharing" on spirituality from members begins with sanctimonious invective against organized religion leading to a profession of one's new-found, higher level of spirituality through AA. AA people love to say they're "spiritual, not religious," while listening to them makes it clear most are neither. This self-indulgent "spirituality" may explain AA's appeal to those looking for the consolation of religion without the consequences of its teachings, making AA itself the "easier, softer way" it claims to oppose. A favorite theme of AA is that the AA higher power or god speaks through other people, whose will, coincidentally, will turn out to be uncannily like one's sponsor's and the other "oldtimers" in the group. One has to wonder at the fact that AA's dogmatic *indifferentism* and heresy continues to be hosted primarily by Christian churches, and that these churches have not issued an ultimatum to AA to desist or be banned from using their facilities.

The actual beliefs of Bill W. and Dr. Bob are probably impossible to determine at this remove, but there is no doubt about their occultism, and both men were members of Moral Rearmament, a messianic, theosophical movement based on indifferentism. Bill W. and Dr. Bob, along with their wives and guests, regularly held seances in their homes. In my experience, the flavor of AA "sharing" on spirituality today is mostly self-idolatrous New Age-ism, much like an avid follower of Oprah subscribes to; for example, Marianne Williamson's *Course in Miracles*, or Rhonda Byrne's *The Secret*, are both big hits in AA circles. In any case, any "sharing" on putative spirituality is acceptable, just so long as it's not a profession of one's Christian faith. The latter will always elicit coughs, agitated body language, and chairs moving about to indicate disapproval. On the other hand, the *de rigueur* bashing of organized religion (and it's understood the religion is Christianity) invariably elicits snickering laughter, smirks, and enthusiastic nods

from the group.

In the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* (the canonical guide book to the Twelve Steps), the chapter on Step Two, which is "Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity," calls for a transcendence from atheism, agnosticism, *and* the religion of the Bible to a supposedly higher plane of spirituality based on the teachings of Bill W. and Dr. Bob. AA, consequently, should pose no threat to the confirmed atheist or agnostic because one's higher power can be anything at all, including mathematics, the sun, Richard Dawkins, or even Christopher Hitchens. For the atheist or moral relativist, for whom the nonexistence of God follows from the impossibility of His measuring up to the claims of *Scientism* on the one hand, or to one's ideosyncratic notions of social justice on the other, AA will prove a welcoming and ready soapbox to express such views. The prudent way to gain instant approval, friends, and be lavished with praise, however, is to announce one has decided to call the group his higher power. For the religious believer, on the other hand, the cacophony created as one narcissist after another gushes "my truth" may prove next to intolerable--particularly when one considers the nonexistent credentials of those implying they've examined the theology, ethics, morality, culture, art, scholarship, history, and civilizing propensities of organized religion and found it wanting in light of AA's self-indulgent New Age-ism.

Anyone considering joining AA should be aware that the coercion to accept AA's dogmas and practices is extreme, although masked by the cheerful welcome. AA intends to become your life, for the rest of your life. The newcomer is saturated with endless slogans designed to short-circuit rational thought and independent action, and to the extent they are successfully embedded in the newcomer's mind, they are a very potent form of brainwashing. The overwhelming pressure to conform is relentless, augmented by canned testimonials from the group's members that they, too, were once in denial; and from testimonials from members "telling their story" about their drunken immersion in sin, miraculous recovery, and subsequent conversion. One hears constant talk about the "unconditional love in these rooms," which is sheer, hypocritical nonsense and, in fact, nothing but loaded language for acceptance by the group which is in every respect conditional on demonstrating one's unquestioned orthodoxy and loyalty. There are many threats in the *Big Book* and *Twelve and Twelve*; for example, that one must work the program to merely stay alive, while those who quit are doomed to "jails, institutions, and death." Many are so brainwashed by AA that they come to believe in the AA "death threats;" that is, in the false choice between AA or "jails, institutions, and death," and tragically do bring that very result upon themselves. The overt *Schadenfreude* at such tragedies is institutionalized in what AA people refer to as "keeping it green," on the pretext that, like so many other egregious practices, their lives depend on it.

There's a social undercurrent to any AA group that may be baffling to the newcomer, and can be explained by the interaction of cliquish subgroups consisting of sponsors and their "sponsees." In every group there is a cadre so devoted to AA that they actively recruit newcomers for indoctrination and, critically, vouch to the group at large for the newcomer's conversion. Newcomers who stay for any length of time, think for themselves, and don't get a sponsor in the group are shunned and then ostracized. One's standing will mirror the standing of one's sponsor. Therefore you might also say AA is a cult of sponsorship, particularly since members are

expected to have a sponsor at all times, even if they haven't had a drink in many years. Sponsorship is critical to maintaining doctrinal continuity and obedience in AA, and some will go so far as to speak of their sponsor's sponsor as their "grand-sponsor."

A major hurdle for any newcomer is "working a 4th and 5th Step," which is nothing less than writing out a confession of all one's faults and sins and, incredibly, presenting this list for review by one's sponsor, who is not only *not* an ordained minister or priest, but a stranger if you think about it, and quite possibly a mentally unstable voyeur. Newcomers will *always* be indoctrinated to "turn their will and their life over to the care of a power greater than themselves," which in practice means precisely this: To the daily administration of their lives by their sponsor, and to the continued scrutiny by the group at large for signs of apostasy or doctrinal deviancy.

Nearly the entire alcohol and drug rehab industry is based on AA's Twelve Steps and its cult-like practices. Many, if not most, counselors at these rehabs are themselves AA zealots getting paid to indoctrinate people in a most vulnerable state. Other certified alcohol and drug counselors in private practice or working for an agency are also, more often than not, anonymously AA zealots, making them little more than paid recruiters for AA.

There are other important issues that should be investigated, not least of which are AA's claims for success, which are flatly contradicted by many first-rate university studies. As an organization, AA is anything but anonymous, and relentlessly promotes itself to clergy, doctors, politicians, and the press to such an extent its claims have become enshrined in our culture. Yet, becoming immersed in the AA cult for the rest of one's life is an existentially hellish price to pay if the study by Harvard is correct, and AA is no better than no treatment at all. Therefore, one cannot stress too strongly the need of every prospective member and his or her family to research both sides of the debate over whether AA is a cult or not, its effectiveness, and to seek out alternative modes of therapy or treatment if they find that AA is not for them.