Hervé Talom
LE 5: AA/12-Step meeting & Paper
CD702: Working With People
Professors: Dr. Martin Sanders, Ph. D., D. Min
Program Director; Michelle Park, M. A., LMFT

Americans spend hundreds of billions of dollars on alcoholic beverages and then billions more to treat our addictions. Alcoholics Anonymous is widely embraced as one of the most effective treatments. AA was developed in 1945, justice prohibition was ending, and there were no effective treatments for chronic inebriates, as they were called when you sent somebody to a hospital to detox them, and that was what treatment was. Thus, AA developed this set of spiritual steps that people can follow to overcome their addiction. Moreover, it became a very, very segregated realm. There is no other realm of medicine that is so segregated as AA.

Recently I had an opportunity to attend an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting locally. This paper will discuss a few of my impressions from the experience. On February 24th, 2023, I visited "The Workshop," an Alcohol Anonymous fellowship resource center in Rochester, New York. During my visit, over twenty members were present. Most participants were primarily men, but there were also a few women. The ages varied from the mid-twenties to the late fifty. The meeting officially opened centered around "The Twelve-Steps Oath," which reminded me of the Ten Commandments.

Regarding the meeting, I was first struck by the vulnerability evidenced by what each individual shared. The thought occurred to me that this kind of humility. And openness to admitting one's failings. This is at the core of probably every world's major world religion. But there was, I think, as in Shakespeare, that humility at the core of the major world religions is more honored in the

breach than the observance. It got me thinking, yes, a such vulnerability that I saw in this 12-step meeting. Why not if it does not characterize conventional religion and religious observance? My observation is that authentic spirituality can, and unfortunately often does, degenerate quickly enough to simulate another expression of what psychology would call personal identification with one's ego. If the ego is what one author calls identifying with the false, mind-made self. Then we can find plenty of evidence of such egocentrism everywhere, including the religious settings.

The moderator (Patrick) allowed the members to decide on the day's topics. The subjects were: **1) Gratitude, 2) "The Twelve-Steps Oath, "and 3) Fellowship.**

"Gratitude," many reacted in a very meek and unworthy manner. Many of them felt that forgiveness would take a lifetime because they had previously let down their families and God. I learned by listening to their heart that they all wanted to be treated as responsible adults, accepted, and reconciled back to God, their loved ones, and their communities. However, they realize this will be a slow process.

In addition, going to the "AA" meetings plays a sufficient role in each participant's life because of the support which is given when an unforeseen desire comes upon them, it can cause them to relapse back into their Achilles heel (their drinking). For example, as previously mentioned.

"The Twelve-Steps Oath" plays a significant part because it helps them focus on a particular oath they can meditate on. Oath number six says, "We are entirely ready to have God remove all of our characters from us. "This refers to the old character, which has caused harm to themselves, and others and broken relationships. However, it also establishes hope to let go of what once was and to embrace what God has called a "new creature" (2 Corinthians 5:17). This allows them to strive for "Spiritual Growth" and not "Spiritual Perfection" as a member state.

"Fellowship," the members began to speak more about their need to find and rely on God. Many expressed how they felt God intercede on their behalf when experiencing temptation from within. Some relied on Scriptures like, "God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation, He will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it" (1 Corinthians 10:13). While others depended upon support and strength from their "sponsor" Henry (Anonymous name) expressed so emotionally how his Job had become his identity he further stated that COVID affected his Job and accelerated his dependency on alcohol to cope throughout the pandemic. He related how he needed God to strengthen and deliver him from feeling this way because even though it was not his fault, this guilty feeling could cause him to drink again.

After the meeting, I asked some AA members about their experience with AA meetings. They provided two answers. First, the 12 steps radically dismantle identifying with the ego. Secondly, they have referred to the 12 steps are the 12 traditions. These are set up to guard the integrity of other 12-step groups against megalomaniacs and media intrusion. This meeting was a radical form of honesty and interpersonal respect, where I experienced people sharing that there was much evidence of self-forgiveness. Unlike the 12 steps, I saw that self-forgiveness was mentioned as all those factors. Today, self-forgiveness seemed like in terms of individuals they would share, as well as the spirit of loving kindness towards one another as they honored the sincerity of each one of their respective paths to recovery. ***AA 12 -steps programs work because they are anonymous. Whatever happens in the 12-step group stays in the group.***

There are some myths about the 12 steps program. ***One of the biggest myths about 12-step programs is that they do not work because they are not scientists***. On the contrary, studies show that the 12-step program model is as effective as other treatments. Some organizations include the National Institute of Health, NIH, the American Psychiatric Association, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, and the Department of Veterans Affairs Healthcare System. The 12-step program is an effective method for reaching and maintaining sobriety. Here is the thing, many people suffering from addiction needs a combination of treatments. These include outpatient clinics and residential and day programs. These are expensive programs only sometimes covered by health insurance. 12-step programs are free. They are available in most cities and countries, and other types of care are unavailable on many holidays, weekends, and evenings—religious programs.

The second myth about 12-step programs is that they are religious programs that reinforce helplessness and powerlessness well. To admit powerlessness over addiction is to face the fact that addiction is an illness. Some choose to rely on their perception of a higher power for help. Believing in God or a higher power is not a prerequisite for attending.

The last myth is that attending 12-step meetings creates a personal responsibility and accountability to the group and self-sponsor. The group fosters social networks that increase individuals' ability to cope with sobriety. Addiction, Disease, and genetics play no role. While the environment is critical for developing an addiction, genetics also play a role. Some people are genetically predisposed to addiction. Their environment and experiences can trigger the addiction. Many people suffering from addiction may also have other mental health issues. These issues also play a role in addition. The 12-step programs are helpful tools when dealing with many types of addictions.

My visit to "The Workshop" was very informative because it helped me to realize that we are all in a program, whether we want to admit it or not. The Workshop allows one to tell the truth and to share "the darkness or the shadow" of their soul. It reminds me of the church, where we all come to God to cast all of our cares and burdens (1 Peter 5:7). I believe that if "the church" would come together and "confess their sins one to another and pray one for another" (James 5:16), then we could not only be healed, but we will also see clearly how we are many members, but one body in Christ to work together for "The Kingdom" (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). In addition, I believe that the church can implement the same system to strengthen the community and improve the spiritual health of the Church. I witnessed the love and respect during the workshop. When one member broke down crying several members ran to comfort with genuine compassion.

The church can learn how to be a part of each other's transformation by not being judgmental but by sitting with a member and spending time sharing their life experiences, both challenges and victories. The knowledge gained from "The Workshop" will enhance my approach and care towards those struggling with various addictions.

"The Workshop" portrays the true church. The level of vulnerability and support I witnessed in the 12 steps meetings are a few things missing in our churches and Christian gathering. The body of Christ has a long way to go in building an environment where people can come in and express themselves and their struggles without anybody judging them or classifying them based on their addictions.