

Victor Valley Intergroup, Central Office, Inc.
18888 Highway 18, Suite 107
Apple Valley, CA 92307
Telephone: 760-242-9292; Email: vvigco_aa@yahoo.com;
Web site: www.victorvalleyaa.org



Contempt Prior To Investigation (A brief history)

“There is a principle which is a bar against all information, which is proof against all arguments and which cannot fail to keep a man in everlasting ignorance—that principle is contempt prior to investigation.”

Herbert Spencer?

by Thomas K.

This quotation first appeared as the prelude to a story **An Artist’s Concept** in the *First Edition of the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous*, p. 380 and in *Experience, Strength & Hope*, p. 130 (stories from the first three editions of *Alcoholics Anonymous*). The author, Ray C., also designed the original dust jacket cover for the 1st edition of the Big Book, so he certainly made important contributions to the early history of A.A. The author used the quotation to explain the alcoholic’s mental condition when it came to religion as a cure. He goes on to say that when the alcoholic finally comes to the realization that there is something out there larger than he, the word “contempt” changes to “hope” and ultimately “fulfillment.” As I read **An Artist’s Concept**, the quote from his story “self-will was already drugged with poison – that it was very sick” really hit home with me early in my sobriety, as my self-will was of no use to me at all. A second quote also hit home: “I also knew that a person constrained to temperance by the domination of will is no more *cured* of his vice than if he were locked up in prison.” This was something that I experienced in my early sobriety as I was still obsessed with drinking but had gotten just far enough into the program to realize I couldn’t drink any-

more. I was in the category of white-knuckling it and devoid of anything remotely spiritual. For me it took several months before the contempt was replaced with hope and finally fulfillment. If you can grasp this concept of something great than yourself sooner rather than later the path will certainly remain clear of many obstacles.

While doing further research on this quotation, I found that there is a well documented opinion that Spencer never said the quotation he is credited for. Herbert Spencer (1820 – 1903) was an English philosopher, biologist, and sociologist who wrote a huge number of books in his lifetime on these topics and more. He studied Darwin as a biologist and is credited with the quotation “Survival of the Fittest,” not Darwin as many people have come to believe. While many believe that the quotation came from his Biology book nothing can be found in these writings. He was also an atheist, which distances him further from the quotation if you accept the religious connotations of the quote.

There is a paper written by Michael St. George, in 2005 that isn’t conclusive proof, but he does seem to have done his homework in attempting to document exactly where the quotation was first written.

St. George attributes the original quotation to British theologian William Paley (1743 – 1805). The quotation reads as follows: “*The infidelity of the gentile world, and that more especially of men of rank and learning in it, is resolved into a principle which in my judgment, will account for the inefficacy of any argument, or any evidence whatever vis. Contempt prior to examination.*”

Parry was talking about the ancient Greeks and Romans and their refusal of the Christian faith in a book called **A View of the Evidences of Christianity (1794)**. The stance that many of the Greeks and Romans adopted fits the religious view of the quote. In 1879 the Reverend William H. Poole in a book **Anglo-Israel** quoted Paley but the quotation had already been reconstructed.

Another example of the use of the quotation was from the founder of the Jehovah’s Witnesses Charles T. Russell (1852 – 1916) who wrote the following in one of his mail order advertisements. “*One of the world’s greatest observers and critics once said: There is one thing which constitutes an effectual barrier against all progress; which holds out a restraining hand against the onward march of all attainment; which damps the glow of*

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study and research; which blocks the channel to an endless succession of happiness and that thing is—condemnation without investigation.” It is fairly easy to see how Russell adapted the quotation to fit his religious views.

With the publishing of the Second Edition of the Big Book in 1955, the **Artist’s Concept** story was replaced but the quotation of “. . .contempt prior to investigation . . .” was added to the end of the **Spiritual Experience** article.

The quote now has a deeper meaning for me now as I know how the quote has evolved over 300 years. This article can be found on pages 569-570 in the [2nd, 3rd, and 4th] editions of the Big Book, and also included in the article is another famous quotation from the pen of William James who talked about the “educational variety” of spiritual experience. The placement of the quotation at the end of this article was well thought out and perfectly fits the spiritual concept idea explained. I came into this program with no spiritual feelings in my life and, as a result, was immediately guilty of contempt in the beginning of my journey.

Today this quotation is something that I think about on a daily basis whenever I’m confronted with a number of situations in my life. I’ve come to believe in a power greater than myself, and my will is no longer mine, so the spiritual concept of this statement is not an issue, but I’m constantly challenged to keep quiet and allow the other person their point of view. I can be very quick to form an opinion the opposite of what you think and challenge your thoughts and ideas while attempting to change your opinion. The bottom line is that it isn’t important what I think and whether or not my feelings are hurt, angered, or it causes resentment from the other person. Today I’m perfectly willing to let you voice your opinion.

Whether or not it was Herbert Spencer, William Paley, Rev. Henry Poole, or A.A. who said the contempt quotation it is not important where it came from. The data that I gathered is for information purposes only. I present the information as I read it and offer no opinion. I can say that remembering the quotation in our everyday lives as members of A.A. is certainly a positive force and over time will enrich our lives.

Via, The San Diego AA Coordinator

Sober at 29

Ruth O’Neil of Toms River, NJ, passed away on Sunday, April 22, 2012. She was 97 years-old and had just celebrated 68 years of sobriety on April 14. Sober since 1944, it is possible Ruth had the longest living sobriety of any woman or man at the time of her death. She also knew and helped Dr. William D. Silkworth, who wrote most of “The Doctor’s Opinion” in the Big Book.

Ruth was a wonderful power of example in all that she did. She loved to laugh, to eat, to sing and dance, to speak at meetings and she loved her chocolate! She was a wonderful friend and a great sponsor. We will surely miss you, Ruthie!

In 1995 at the International [Convention] in San Diego at the long-timers’ meeting, the crowds went wild, begging for additional time allowance after she was “gonged” for her time being up. Her talks were a great wealth of history.

Within a few months after she got sober, at a meeting in Brooklyn, NY, she was given a business card by another A.A. member. On one side of the card was the “Four Absolutes of the Oxford Group (Absolute Honesty, Absolute Unselfishness, Absolute Love, and Absolute Purity), and on the other side of the card was the following prayer. She recited it daily and shared it when she spoke. It has come to be known as “Ruth’s Prayer:”

*“Thank You, dear God, for another day,
The chance to live in a decent way,
To feel again the joy of living,
And happiness that comes from giving.
Thank You for friends who can understand,
And the peace that flows from Your loving hand.
Help me to wake with the morning sun,
With the prayer today, ‘Thy will be done.’
For with Your help I will find the way.
Thank You again, dear God, for A.A.”*

Bill Cleveland

Submitted by,
Ron M., Victorville, CA

Minutes of the
Victor Valley Intergroup Meeting
April 21, 2012

The meeting was called to order at 9:30 a.m. by Sam D. who led us in the Serenity Prayer. Chad F. read the Twelve Traditions.

There were no minutes of the February meeting and Wayne U. was absent. Business was conducted by memory.

Treasure's Report: Chad gave the Treasure's report. As of March 31, 2012, there was a net income of \$2,624.24. The Y.T.D. balance is \$4,350.39. This, however, was temporary as April had several large expenses. Eleven groups donated a total of \$604.00, and 13 "Faithful Fivers" donated \$130.00

Office Manager's Report: Craig B. gave the Office Manager's Report. The office had 93 visitors, 2223 information calls and 1 12 Step call. Call forwarding had 167 information calls and 2 12 Step calls. Craig also said we may need a new webmaster. Anyone interested can contact him at the office. He reported that all the office shifts are filled, but we can always use alternates to volunteer. The convention gave a donation of \$2,000.00. The Ride to Recovery donated \$2,689.00. "Thank YOU" to all of you!

Old Business: We have a new printer for our newsletter. So far we have saved \$300.00. Thank you, Betty! General Service Office now has e-book downloads at its web site for a price. Central Office is still selling chips, medallions, book covers, jewelry, etc. There is no news on the Founder's Day Picnic.

There was no New Business.

No New Business. The meeting adjourned with the Serenity Prayer at 10:05 a.m. The next meeting will be June 16, 2012, at 9:30 a.m. at Central Office.

Respectfully submitted,
Doug H., Co-chairman

Upcoming Events

June 16, 2012

Intergroup meeting, 9:30 a.m. at Central Office. Call 760-242-9292 for information.

"Beer is proof that God loves us and wants us to be happy."

~Benjamin Franklin

WARNING: The consumption of alcohol is a major factor in believing you can dance.

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"Without question, the greatest invention in the history of mankind is beer. Oh, I grant you that the wheel was also a fine invention, but the wheel does not go nearly as well with pizza."

~Dave Barry

WARNING: The consumption of alcohol may cause you to tell your friends over and over again that you love them.

Submitted by, Bill P., Victorville, CA

And Finally . . .



Submitted by Eric S., Apple Valley, CA

Stolen from Scott Stantis and UFS, Inc.