

On January 30th 1961, Carl Jung wrote to a certain Bill W explaining the importance of faith (“real religious insight”) and fellowship (“the protective wall of human community”) for any “ordinary man”. Anybody wishing to read this short letter for themselves can find it on pages 280 and 281 of this book, *The Language of the Heart*. Bill W had written to Carl Jung just a week earlier, acknowledging the debt that the blossoming fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous owed to Jung for its very existence. Some 30 years earlier, Jung had conveyed to one of his patients – a Rowland H – that medical treatment no longer promised any significant hope for the latter’s alcoholism - and that only a spiritual conversion might save him. Rowland H sought and found help in the Oxford Groups, eventually assisting one Ebby Thatcher who turned out to be an old friend of Bill W. Bill W recognised the importance of what Jung had been saying to Rowland H because it chimed so closely with what he been told himself about his own sad prospects by another sympathetic physician, Dr William Silkworth (who refers on at least two counts - in AA’s “Big Book” - to the alcoholic’s need for “moral psychology”).

January 30, 1961

Dear Mr. W.

Your letter has been very welcome indeed.

I had no news from Rowland H. anymore and often wondered what has been his fate. Our conversation which he has adequately reported to you had an aspect of which he did not know. The reason that I could not tell him everything was that those days I had to be exceedingly careful of what I said. I had found out that I was misunderstood in every possible way. Thus I was very careful when I talked to Rowland H. but what I really thought about, was the result of many experiences with men of his kind.

His craving for alcohol was the equivalent, on a low level, of the spiritual thirst of our being for wholeness, expressed in medieval language: the union with God.

How could one formulate such an insight in a language that is not misunderstood in our days?

The only right and legitimate way to such an experience is, that it happens to you in reality and it can only happen to you when you walk on a path which leads you to higher understanding. You might be led to that goal by an act of grace or through a personal and honest contact with friends, or through a higher education of the mind beyond the confines of mere rationalism. I see from your letter that Rowland H. has chosen the second way, which was, under the circumstances, obviously the best one.

I am strongly convinced that the evil principle prevailing in this world leads the unrecognized spiritual need into perdition, if it is not counteracted either by real religious insight or by the protective wall of human community. An ordinary man, not protected by an action from above and isolated in society, cannot resist the power of evil, which is called very aptly the Devil. But the use of such words arouses so many mistakes that one can only keep aloof from them as much as possible.

These are the reasons why I could not give a full and sufficient explanation to Rowland H. But I am risking it with you because I conclude from your very decent and honest letter that you have acquired a point of view above the misleading platitudes one usually hears about alcoholism.

You see, alcohol in Latin is “spiritus” and you use the same word for the highest religious experience as well as the most depraving poison. The helpful formula therefore is: *spiritus contra spiritum*.

Thanking you again for your kind letter,

I remain

yours sincerely

C. G. Jung