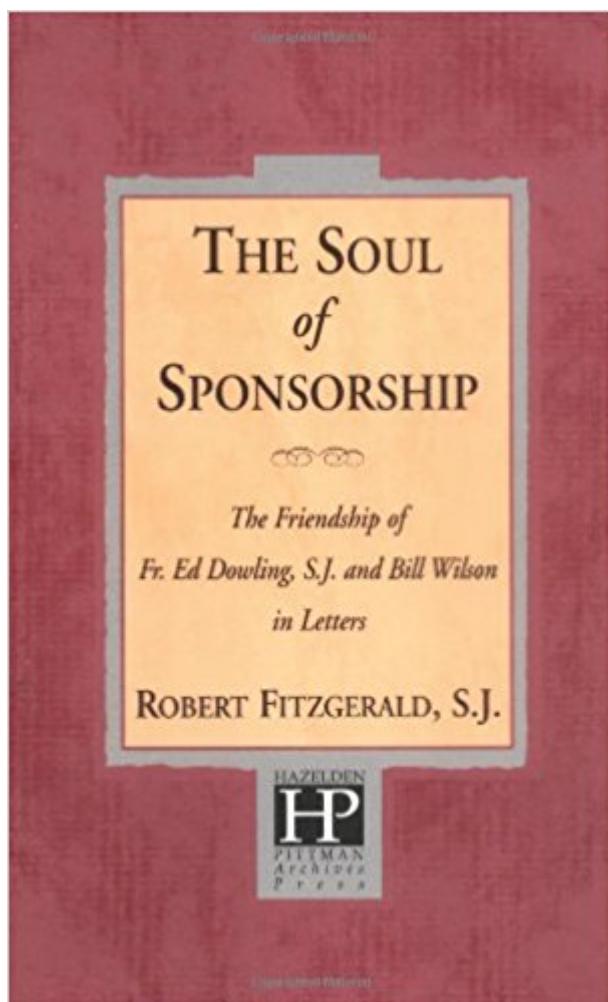


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# The Soul Of Sponsorship: The Friendship Of Fr. Ed Dowling, S.J. And Bill Wilson In Letters



## **Synopsis**

The Soul of Sponsorship explores the relationship of Bill Wilson, cofounder of Alcoholics Anonymous, and his spiritual adviser and friend, Father Ed Dowling. The Soul of Sponsorship explores the relationship of Bill Wilson, cofounder of Alcoholics Anonymous, and his spiritual adviser and friend, Father Ed Dowling. Many might consider that such a remarkable individual as Bill Wilson, who was the primary author of AA literature, would be able to deal with many of life's problems on his own. Reading The Soul of Sponsorship will illuminate and answer the question of how Father Ed, an Irish Catholic Jesuit priest who was not an alcoholic, was able to be of such great help to Bill Wilson. Part of AA's Twelfth Step reminds us "to carry this message to alcoholics," and The Soul of Sponsorship illustrates how sober alcoholics still need the principles of the Twelve Steps brought to them by friends, sponsors, and spiritual advisers. Some of the problems faced by Bill Wilson were: depression in recovery, dependency issues, whether or not to experiment with LSD, the place of money and power in AA, knowing God's plan and will, learning from mistakes. Father Ed taught Bill the importance of "discernment." In Father Ed's Jesuit tradition, discernment was a gift, passed down to him from St. Ignatius, the founder of the Jesuits, who described his own struggle with discernment in *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius. The Twelve Steps of AA and the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius presuppose that there is a caring God whose will can be known. The act of tuning in to God's action at one's center is discernment. The big question is, how do you know your Higher Power is speaking and revealing Himself through your feelings and desires? What Bill learned from Father Ed can be found in books and articles he wrote for AA. For the good of AA and himself, Bill learned to listen to his desires, be aware of his inner dynamics, and tune into the action of God within. Doing this meant learning to recognize and identify his personal movements -- those inner promptings and attractions often called emotions or affections -- which are part of ordinary human experiences. The person who helped Bill grow in discernment was Father Ed, the Jesuit priest with a cane who limped into the New York AA clubhouse one sleet-filled November night in 1940. The two "fellow travelers," Father Ed Dowling and Bill Wilson, gave each other perhaps the greatest gift friends can give: calling on each to know who he is -- before God.

## **Book Information**

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## Customer Reviews

Anyone who's read the early history of AA knows about Father Ed Dowling, the Jesuit priest who was sponsor & spiritual advisor to Bill W. The story of how he turned up at Bill's place one wet winter's night, to discuss AA's 12 Steps and "Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius" (which, at the time, Bill had never heard of), is legendary. It was the beginning of a long and wonderful friendship. From that night in 1940, to Fr. Ed's death in 1960, he and Bill regularly wrote to each other. Bill relied on Fr. Ed as friend and confessor; he discussed his troubles and sent him the drafts of the "Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions" as they were written. He trusted his insight and compassion. This book, by fellow Jesuit, Fr. Robert Fitzgerald, is based on those letters. He could always count on Fr. Ed to bring him down to earth, back to first principles, the first three Steps. Ed would remind him of the need to let go of the ego; of the central place of suffering in redemption; that "God resists the proud, assists the humble. The shortest cut to humility is humiliations, which AA has in abundance

Most AA histories say that Bill Wilson's sponsor was Ebby Thatcher who introduced Bill to the Oxford Groups from which much of AA is derived. Ebby had trouble staying sober, and it is not clear to me that Bill used him long term as a sponsor. I find two aspects of this book interesting. First, Bill used Ed Dowling as a sponsor and spiritual director. Bill was "willing to go to any lengths," even if that meant getting out of his spiritual comfort zone (he was a good New England Protestant by background). He wound up using the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola (the founder of the Jesuits) because he figured it would improve his spiritual condition, an essential element in anyone's sobriety. The other aspect is his long term fight with depression. I suspect depression is very common among recovering alcoholics; I have had my own problems with it. I was glad to see Bill working at it - without a bunch of items from the pharmacist. This is an excellent book. I did some searching and bought Jim Harbaugh's A Twelve Step Approach to the Spiritual Exercises of St.

Ignatius." A very interesting follow-on.

A great book for anyone in a 12 step program

The letters are really interesting and it was helpful to read about Bills struggles with depression, but the book is laid out SO poorly! The time line is all over the place. It would have also been helpful if the author included more information about the circumstances and or results of issues they wrote to one another about. Still, I do think it's worth reading for anyone in recovery.

Really like this little book. I wanted to know how, if at all, he guided/supported Bill Wilson's spiritual life. Now I do and I am so very grateful this kind man followed his heart to Bill and, therefore, to all of us in 12 step programs.

I have been in AA for a half century and sober for forty seven years. This book opened my eyes and heart to how Bill and Father Ed struggled to find truth. This is a process and I am living proof of God's love and forgiveness.

Great story and filled with tons of wisdom, much of which I find myself using almost daily. I highly encourage you to read this book if you are interested in AA history and Bills insight into Spirituality. Easy read, interesting stuff on almost every page.

Great insight and touching to the relationship of Bill W. and Father Ed Dowling. Father Ed is very instrumental in the spiritual progress of AA's co-founder.

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