

**A.A. Meetings in
Akron and Cleveland
1938-1942**

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The Hindsfoot Foundation is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1993 for the publication of materials on the history and theory of alcoholism treatment and the moral and spiritual dimensions of recovery.

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Front cover: home of T. Henry and Clarace Williams. After the first A.A. group was started in Akron in the summer of 1935, all the Akron alcoholics were expected to show up every week at the Wednesday night Oxford Group meeting at T. Henry and Clarace Williams' home at 676 Palisades Drive in Akron, Ohio. These mandatory Wednesday Oxford Group meetings continued until October 1939, when the Akron members of the "alcoholic squad" withdrew from the Oxford Group and began holding their Wednesday formal meeting (now restricted to alcoholics and their spouses) at Dr. Bob's house.

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T. Henry and Clarace Williams' living room. After the first A.A. group was started in Akron in the summer of 1935, all the Akron alcoholics were expected to show up every week at the Wednesday night Oxford Group meeting at T. Henry and Clarace Williams' home at 676 Palisades Drive in Akron, Ohio. These mandatory Wednesday Oxford Group meetings continued until October 1939, when the Akron members of the "alcoholic squad" withdrew from the Oxford Group and began holding their Wednesday formal meeting (now restricted to alcoholics and their spouses) at Dr. Bob's house.

Part I

The Documents



In October 1939, the Akron members of the “alcoholic squad” withdrew from the Oxford Group and began holding their Wednesday evening formal meeting at Dr. Bob’s house (where they continued to meet until January 1940, when the meetings became so big they had to start holding them at the King School).



Dr. Bob’s living room

CHAPTER 1

The Combination of Four Different Spiritual Traditions

In early Akron A.A., members were expected to show up every day, six days a week, at Dr. Bob's house,

(a) in the morning for a short service led by Dr. Bob's wife Anne, based on a reading from the Southern Methodist meditational booklet called *The Upper Room*, together with coffee and discussion as to how everyone was getting along,

(b) or in the evening, when everyone would sit around in the kitchen or living room, and talk about any problems they had had during the day.

(c) Or an A.A. member could drop by Dr. Bob's office at any time during the day and talk with him one-on-one there.

But all the recovering alcoholics were also expected to show up every week at the Wednesday night Oxford Group meeting at T. Henry and Clarace Williams' home at 676 Palisades Drive in Akron, Ohio:

This was an Oxford Group meeting, not an A.A. meeting *per se*. The hosts of the meeting — T. Henry and Clarace Williams — were not alcoholics themselves, and neither were many of the other

people who regularly attended that Wednesday night meeting. Henrietta Seiberling, who was not an alcoholic of course, often played a role in leading the Bible study at the meeting (it was at her house in Akron, as we remember, that Bill W. and Dr. Bob had their first meeting on May 12, 1935).

This weekly meeting at T. Henry and Clarace Williams' home already contained a mixture of elements from four different religious and spiritual traditions:

1. Oxford Group practices

This included such things as the use of automatic writing, the Four Absolutes, "checking," and so on.

2. American frontier revivalism

We see them making new alcoholics go through an American frontier revivalist style surrender to God / Jesus on their knees. This is one way of interpreting the Third Step Prayer from page 63 of the Big Book: "God, I offer myself to Thee — to build with me and to do with me as Thou wilt. Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do Thy will"

Many people who come to A.A. still do this prayer on their knees, and visitors to Dr. Bob's house in Akron can still frequently be seen kneeling beside the bed in an upstairs bedroom and repeating a prayer of surrender to God, along with a prayer for God's help.

We need to remember that the final working manuscript of the Big Book, as it was typed up in February 1939, gave the Seventh Step as "Humbly, on our knees, asked Him to remove our

shortcomings — holding nothing back.” The frontier revivalist style of surrender ourselves to God was still on their minds.

But in the printed version which came out in April 1939 (the first printing of the first edition of the Big Book), the phrase “on our knees” was removed, and the seventh step was changed to read simply “Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.”

We see A.A. from 1938 to 1942 progressively becoming less and less influenced by American frontier revivalism.

3. The Upper Room

In February 1938, the group gathered at the Williams’ house would read from a Bible devotional at the beginning of the meeting, usually the Southern Methodist meditational booklet called *The Upper Room*, which taught people to turn to the religion of the heart. The people in Nashville, Tennessee, who edited the little booklet were strongly opposed to inflicting hundreds of doctrines and rules and dogmas on everyone, and were very hostile to the custom practiced in some churches, of continually threatening people with hellfire and eternal damnation to try to get them to come to church and follow their long lists of religious rules.

The Upper Room taught a spirituality of the “educational variety” (as the American Methodists called it), that is, a slow steady process (insight by insight) in which I let God (and God’s people) love me until I could learn to love myself and others.

Its watchword was: “God is love.” The Southern Methodists regarded the central part of the Bible passage in 1 John 4 (verses 7–8, 10–12, 16b–19, and 20) as one of the most important parts of the Bible, and a perfect expression of their core beliefs:

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.

In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because he first loved us.

Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.

4. Emmet Fox's Sermon on the Mount

Newcomers were instructed to read Emmet Fox, *The Sermon on the Mount*, a book that came out of what was called the New Thought tradition. Fox's little pieces on "The Golden Key" and "Staying on the Beam" were also popular reading in A.A. and were regarded as excellent guides to staying sane and sober. I needed to learn that when I had problems with other people, the problem usually lay more with me than with them, and at any rate, the only person I could genuinely change most of the time, was me. I could change my own attitude and behavior.

This was the basic principle embodied in the A.A. Fourth Step. When I learn what is wrong with me in the process of working that

step, I will find that I can make the whole world around me change miraculously for the better simply by replacing my old bad attitudes with new ones formed deep in my heart.

We should also note that the Third Step, as it appears on page 59 of the A.A. Big Book, could easily be interpreted in terms of an American frontier revivalist surrender to God in which we pledged to regard him as our sole savior: “Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him.*”

But in the immediately following pages of the Big Book (pages 60-63) it gives an Emmet Fox type interpretation of what this step entails: all the world’s a stage, it says there, but I thought I was the stage director. I had to learn to step back every time I found myself doing this, and saying something to remind myself that God was totally in charge, and that all I had to do was to quit interfering and let him run things.

In the following chapters, the descriptions of how the earliest A.A. meetings were conducted in Akron and Cleveland, have been drawn from Mitchell K.'s *How It Worked* (containing Clarence Snyder's accounts of early A.A. life), J. D. Holmes' reminiscences in *Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers*, and the 1942 Akron Manual.

CHAPTER 2

Akron: February 1938, Oxford Group meeting at T. Henry and Clarace Williams' home

The following material is excerpted verbatim from the second edition of Mitchell K., *How It Worked*, Chapt. 3, Sect. 8, where Clarence Snyder described the first Oxford Group meeting which he attended at T. Henry and Clarace Williams' home.

Before the meeting started, William Van Horn (author of "A Ward of the Probate Court") handed Clarence Snyder a piece of paper with these words on it (2 Cor. 5:17 KJV):

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a
new creature: old things are passed away;
behold, all things are become new."

There were about fifty people at the meeting: alcoholics from Akron, a few from Cleveland, and the balance "just plain old

sinner who didn't drink," as Clarence put it. The chosen leader for that night was, as Clarence remembered, Paul Stanley (author of "Truth Freed Me" in the first edition).

WE ARE QUOTING FROM MITCHELL K.'S BOOK IN THE FOLLOWING PAGES OF THIS CHAPTER:

Paul opened the meeting with a prayer for all of those in attendance and for those unfortunates who were still living in sin on the outside. Paul then read a verse or two out of the King James Version of the Bible.

Clarence remembered that the particular verses, as well as everything at the meeting, had been "gotten from guidance" before the meeting. In the Oxford Group, guidance was by the Holy Spirit and was received through "two-way" prayer. There was a prayer to God for guidance and then listening for leading thoughts from God. The person who through guidance was chosen to lead the meeting would pray for God to "guide" him or her as to what to read and say at the meeting. Then there would be "quiet time" spent silently waiting for, and then listening to God's response. The Group would then read from a Bible devotional — usually *The Upper Room*. This was a publication of the Methodist Church South out of Nashville, Tennessee.

The Upper Room was, and is, a daily devotional, published as a quarterly every three months, and in the 1930's it cost five cents per issue. For each day of the month, there was an inspirational Bible quote, then a verse from the Bible to study, then two or three paragraphs pertaining to this particular Bible verse as it related to what was then the modern world. Then there was a prayer and a thought for the day. *The Upper Room* is still published today, and except for the price per issue, contains

essentially the same type of material that it contained from its inception in 1935.

After the group at the Williams' home completed its prayer, Bible reading, quiet time, and reading from the Bible devotional, the leader would "give witness" (tell about his or her past life and what God had done for him or her). This witness lasted about twenty to thirty minutes. Then the leader "giving witness" would open the floor to those in attendance at the meeting. Those present would raise their hands; the leader would call upon them, and then they too would "give witness."

But for a shorter period of time as Clarence described it, "They went on and on with all kinds of things. People jumping up and down and witnessing and one thing or another. Some of 'em would get pretty emotional and carried away. Crying and all kinds of business going on." Clarence went on to say, "It sure was a sight to see, especially for this rummy. After all, just being on the bum like I was, and a total stranger to all of this mumbo-jumbo stuff."

On Monday nights there was a preparatory meeting, called for all of those who were, according to Clarence, considered "most surrendered." These were people, Clarence said, who had already made their full surrender according to the tenets of the Oxford Group. This preparatory meeting involved, among other things, sitting in T. Henry's living room and praying for "guidance" from God as to who should be the leader for the regular Wednesday night meeting. There was a "quiet time" of complete silence. Those assembled would then write down on a piece of paper, the name of a person God had revealed to them in answer to their prayers. Clarence said he had been absolutely amazed to see that, on most of these occasions, a majority of these people, and sometimes all of

them, ended up with the same name on their respective papers.

There were specific instructions for newcomers—what they were to read and how they should begin making their moral decisions:

New people were told they had to read the Bible — the King James Version of the Bible. They were instructed to do this on a daily basis. Clarence said that newcomers were also told to read *The Upper Room* daily and to read *The Sermon on the Mount* by Emmet Fox.

Clarence said the new people were then instructed on the Four Standards. These were Biblical principles, in his belief, which the Oxford Group people had found in the Bible. These Four Standards were also called the Four Absolutes — Absolute Honesty, Unselfishness, Love and Purity.

There was also a period for fellowship time after the formal meeting, just as is often still the case in modern A.A., where it can be one of the most important parts of the meeting:

The early meetings ended with “fellowship time,” a period of time which was set aside for socializing, exchanging telephone numbers, speaking with newcomers, and making plans. These plans were for social events, in which all participated, in the regular meeting for the next week.

Clarence was asked to make a frontier revivalist style surrender as the emotional mark or symbol of his surrender to God and Jesus:

It was the custom for the older Oxford Group people to participate in the “surrender” of the newer members. When

Clarence had attended weekly meetings for a couple of months, he was taken upstairs to make his surrender.

Doc told him, “Young feller, it’s about time you make your full surrender.” Clarence was still unsure what this meant, but he knew that Doc never steered him wrong and that he had to listen to Doc in order to continue in his new life. A life now free from alcohol and the resulting misery that had always accompanied his drinking.

At Clarence’s surrender, T. Henry, Doc, and a couple of the other Oxford Group members went into T. Henry’s bedroom. They all, including Clarence—who by now was used to this kneeling—got down on their knees in an attitude of prayer. They all placed their hands on Clarence, and then proceeded to pray.

These people introduced Clarence to Jesus as his Lord and Savior. They explained to Clarence that this was First Century Christianity. Then they prayed for a healing and removal of Clarence’s sins (according to the Oxford Group, sin was anything that separated us from God and from others), especially his alcoholism. When he arose, said Clarence, he once again felt like a new man.

CHAPTER 3

Dr. Bob and Clarence Snyder in the Hospital: February 1938

Excerpts taken from Mitchell K., *How It Worked*, (2nd edition), Chapter 3, Section 6.

Clarence Snyder had his last drink on Friday, February 11, 1938 and Dr. Bob put him in the hospital. On Wednesday, February 16, 1938:

Doc then took Clarence by the hand and “hailed” him off of that “nice warm nest” [the hospital bed], as Clarence put it, and down to the cold, hard, concrete floor — Clarence in his shorty hospital nightshirt tied together in the back by a couple of strings; Doc in a suit with a loud colored tie, argyle socks, and a diamond stick pin with a lion’s head. What a sight to behold! Both men on their knees, by the side of the hospital bed, in an attitude of prayer. Doc uttered some sort of a prayer, pausing every few words so that Clarence had the time to repeat them.

Clarence didn’t quite remember the words of the prayer exactly, but he did remember its being something like this:

Jesus! This is Clarence Snyder. He’s a drunk.
Clarence! This is Jesus. Ask Him to come into your life. Ask Him to remove your drinking problem, and pray that He manage your life because you are unable to manage it yourself.

After they had concluded this simple prayer, they rose from the side of the bed. Doc shook Clarence's hand and said to him, "Young feller, you're gonna be all right."

Clarence Snyder had an overwhelming emotional response to what had just happened. This was a standard and expected response in the Protestant frontier revivalist tradition, when this kind of prayer of total surrender went the way it was supposed to.

Clarence sat back down on the side of the bed. He was sweating profusely. But he was feeling something strange, something he had probably never felt before in his entire life. He felt absolutely clean. He also felt relieved of a great burden that had weighed heavily upon him for what had seemed forever. He had just prayed that prayer — not like he had done so many times in the past, not like he had prayed in Sunday School, in churches and in the missions — he had prayed this particular prayer like he really meant it, meant every word that had come out of his mouth. He prayed the prayer directly from the center of his heart and not from a brain befogged from alcohol. He had prayed that way because he had felt his very life had depended upon each and every word that came out of his mouth.

CHAPTER 4

Cleveland A.A. meetings May–November 1939

The Cleveland alcoholics declared their independence from Akron on May 10, 1939, and started holding their own independent meeting on the next day, May 11, at the home of Albert (Abby) Golrick and his wife Grace at 2345 Stillman Road in Cleveland Heights.

Mitchell K., in *How It Worked*, 2nd edit., Chapt. 5, Sect. 1, tells how Clarence Snyder described the new Cleveland A.A. meetings in a letter written in June, a little over three weeks later:

In a letter to Hank P[arkhurst], dated June 4, 1939 Clarence described how the Cleveland meetings were being conducted: “Not too much stress on spiritual business at meetings.” Clarence always felt that overt spirituality belonged between a “baby” and his sponsor. Prayer and Bible reading was a prerequisite, Clarence felt, but only at home

The meetings were very simple. They opened with a prayer or the reading of a verse from the Bible. This was followed by the leader’s speaking for one half hour to forty-five minutes. Then the meeting was over. At least the “official” part of the meeting was over. The remainder of the evening was spent with members and their families in fellowship with each other. “Plenty of hot coffee and doughnuts to go around,” said Clarence. In Cleveland, there are still some meetings that are held in this manner—a short “lead,” questions, and then fellowship.

Mitchell K. went on in Chapt. 5, Sect. 5 to discuss the way A.A. meetings were conducted in Cleveland slightly later in that year, in late 1939:

Cleveland, Ohio was a hub of A.A. activity in late 1939 A.A.'s spoke with the wives and husbands of the alcoholics either prior to, or during their hospitalizations. Family members were invited to attend meetings, were given a copy of the book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, and were told to read the daily devotional in *The Upper Room* every day.

Then Mitchell K., in Appendix C to his book, gave the full text of the sermon, "Mr. X and Alcoholics Anonymous," preached by Rev. Dilworth Lupton at about the same time, that is, in late 1939. Mitchell introduced this appendix by describing when and where the sermon was preached, and how printed copies of it were used by Cleveland A.A. down into the early 1940's:

The following sermon was preached on November 26, 1939 by Dilworth Lupton at the First Unitarian Church at Euclid Avenue and East 82nd Street, in Cleveland, Ohio. Mr. X was Clarence H. Snyder. This was one of the first pamphlets concerning A.A., and was used by A.A. members in Cleveland from the end of 1939 into the early 1940's.

One small section of that sermon is important for our present study, where Rev. Lupton gave a brief but useful description of how the A.A. meetings were held at that time:

Not long ago I accepted an invitation from Mr. X to attend one of their meetings, held in a private home. They are simple affairs: First a brief prayer, then four or five give public testimony to their experiences, refreshments are served, and there is general fellowship.

CHAPTER 5

The 1942 Akron Manual: the end of Oxford Group practices

The Akron group published a booklet in the summer of 1942 which gives a lot of detail about how A.A. meetings were being conducted there by then. It was formally entitled *A Manual for Alcoholics Anonymous*, but is usually simply referred to as the Akron Manual.¹

The cover of the pamphlet talked about alcoholics in Akron who had five, six and seven years of sobriety, and on page 15 it stated that the Akron Group had been in existence for seven years. Dr. Bob and Bill Dotson both got sober in June 1935, which meant that they would have had seven years of sobriety in June of 1942. That consequently meant that the Akron Group also would have been in existence for seven years in June 1942.

And the manual could not have been written any earlier than that, because the latest book on the Manual's reading list — E. Stanley Jones' *Abundant Living* — was not published until 1942.

The use of *The Upper Room* was mentioned twice in the Akron Manual: a prayer from that little booklet was suggested as one way to open the A.A. meeting, and it recommended that members start their day every morning by reading from "*The Upper Room* or whatever you think best for yourself."

The pamphlet obviously described an early stage in the development of the Akron A.A. group, because it assumed hospitalization at St. Thomas Hospital under the care of Sister Ignatia and the overall supervision of Dr. Bob as the normal first step in recovery.

But it is also clear that the break with the Oxford Group had already occurred: we see no mention of specifically Oxford Group customs being practiced anymore.

In January 1940, Sister Ignatia negotiated a working agreement between Dr. Bob, St. Thomas Hospital, and her superior, Sister Clementine, which subsequently became the model for Catholic participation in Alcoholics Anonymous all across the country. There would now be an officially sanctioned A.A.-based alcoholism treatment program in place at St. Thomas Hospital, but Sister Ignatia was quite clear about one central requirement: Although the hospital was run by a Catholic religious order, St. Thomas was “nonsectarian” (her word), and admitted patients regardless of their religious affiliation. The Oxford Group however, in the judgment of Sister Ignatia and Sister Clementine, was a “sect” (Sister Ignatia’s word, what we would today call a “cult”) which showed no tolerance within their group for anyone who held beliefs at variance with their own.²

The A.A. program had to be run the same way as St. Thomas Hospital, as a non-sectarian organization for the treatment of alcoholism, which offered help to everyone in need, regardless of religious affiliation, and which did not make anyone listen to people preaching any kind of religious dogma as a precondition for receiving treatment. Roman Catholics in Alcoholics Anonymous would not try to preach their faith to the Protestants, but they would expect mutual tolerance back the other way. Protestant

Fundamentalists would be allowed to join A.A., as long as they followed the same rules: no attempts at taking over the group, no continual preaching of fundamentalist dogma and belief at AA meetings, and so on.

In the first part of the booklet, fairly close to the beginning, Section VI talked about A.A. meetings as part of its instructions to newcomers:

Section VI

First off, your day will have a new pattern. You will open the day with a quiet period. This will be explained by your sponsor. You will read *The Upper Room*, or whatever you think best for yourself. You will say a little prayer asking for help during the day. You will go about your daily work, and your associates will be surprised at you clear-eyed, the disappearance of that haunted look and your willingness to make up for the past. Your sponsor may drop in to see you, or call you on the telephone. There may be a meeting of an A.A. group. Attend it without question. You have no valid excuse except sickness or being out of town, for not attending. You may call on a new patient. Don't wait until tomorrow to do this. You will find the work fascinating. You will find a kindred soul. And you will be giving yourself a new boost along the road to sobriety. Finally, at the end of the day you will say another little prayer of thanks and gratitude for a day of sobriety

Your sponsor will take you to your first meeting. You will find it new, but inspirational. You will find an atmosphere of peace and contentment that you didn't know existed.

After you have attended several meetings it will be your duty to get up on your feet and say something. You will have something to say, even if it is only to express gratitude to the group for having helped you. Before many months have passed you will be asked to lead a meeting. Don't try to put it off with excuses. It is part of the program. Even if you don't think highly of yourself as a public speaker, remember you are among friends, and that your friends also are ex-drunks.

Get in contact with your new friends. Call them up. Drop in at their homes or offices. The door is always open to a fellow-alcoholic.

Then the last part of the pamphlet had a long section entitled Meetings:

MEETINGS

It has been found advisable to hold meetings at least once a week at a specified time and place. Meetings provide a means for an exchange of ideas, the renewing of friendships, opportunity to review the work being carried on, a sense of security, and an additional reminder that we are alcoholics and must be continuously on the alert against the temptation to slip backward into the old drunken way of life.

In larger communities where there are several groups it is recommended that the new member attend as many meetings as possible. He will find that the more he is exposed to A.A. the sooner he will absorb its principles, the easier it will become to remain sober, and the sooner problems will shrink and tend to disappear.

As a newcomer you will be somewhat bewildered by your first meeting. It is even possible that it will not make

sense to you. Many have this experience. But if you don't find yourself enjoying your first meeting, pause to remember that you probably didn't care for the taste of your first drink of whiskey — particularly if it was in bootleg days.

Again, you may feel like a “country cousin” at your first meeting. Your sponsor should see to it that this is not the case. But even if he neglects his duty, don't feel too badly. Don't be afraid to “horn in.” If you are being neglected it is just an oversight, and you are entirely welcome. It is possible that you may not even be recognized because your appearance has changed for the better. In a week or two you will find yourself in the middle of things — and very likely neglecting other newcomers.

So attend your first meeting with an open mind. Even if you aren't impressed try it again. Before long you will genuinely enjoy attending and a little later you will feel that the week has been incomplete if you have not attended at least one A.A. meeting.

Remember that attendance at meetings is one of the most important requisites of remaining sober.

A.A. of Akron gets many inquiries about how to conduct a meeting. Methods differ in many parts of the country. There are discussion groups, study groups, meetings where a leader takes up the entire time himself, etc.

Here, briefly, is how meetings are conducted in the dozen or more Akron groups, a method that has been used since the founding of A.A.:

The speaker can be selected from the local group, someone from another group or another city, or on occasion, a guest from the ranks of clergymen, doctors, the judiciary, or anyone who may be of help. In the case of such an outsider, he is generally introduced by the secretary or some other member.

The leader opens the meeting with a prayer, or asks someone else to pray. The prayer can be original, or it can be taken from a prayer book, or from some publication such as *The Upper Room*.

The topic is entirely up to the leader. He can tell of his drinking experiences, or what he has done to keep sober, or he can advance his own theories on A.A. His talk lasts from 20 to 40 minutes, at which time he asks for comment or testimony from the floor.

Just before the meeting closes — one hour in Akron — the leader asks for announcements or reports (such as next week's leader, social affairs, new members to be called on, etc.). In closing the entire group stands and repeats the Lord's Prayer. It is courteous to give the speaker enough advance notice so that he may prepare his talk if he so desires.

The physical set-up of groups varies in many cities. Those who are about to start new groups may be interested in the method used by Akron Group No. 1. It is merely a suggestion, however.

When there are but very few members it is customary to hold the meetings in private homes of the members, on the same night of each week. When the group becomes larger, however, it is desirable to hold the meeting in a regular place. A school room, a room in a Y.M.C.A. or lodge, or hotel will do.

It has been the experience throughout the country that the more fluid the structure of the group the more successful the operation.

Akron Group No. 1 has a very simple set-up. There is a permanent secretary, who makes announcements, keeps a list of the membership, and takes care of correspondence. There is also a permanent treasurer, who takes care of the money and pays bills. Then there is a rotating committee of

three members to take care of current affairs. Each member serves for three months, but a new one is added and one dropped every month. This committee takes care of providing leaders, supplying refreshments, arranging parties, greeting newcomers, etc.

As the group grows older certain qualifications, in terms of length of sobriety, can be made. Akron Group No. 1 requires a full year of continuous sobriety as qualification to hold an office or serve.

There are no dues. There is a free-will offering at each meeting to take care of expenses.

There is probably an older group in some community within easy traveling distance of yours. Someone from that group will doubtless be happy to help you get started.

CHAPTER 6

Early Akron Member J. D. Holmes: Memories from 1936–1938

James D. “J. D.” Holmes, the founder of A.A. in Indiana, was born c. 1895, a native of Graves County, Kentucky. He eventually ended up working on a newspaper in Akron, Ohio. He got sober there in September 1936, a member of the original Akron group, which centered around Dr. Bob’s house in Akron.³

When Dr. Bob’s son Smitty came in 1999, many years later, to give an Al-Anon lead at a conference in South Bend, Indiana, I asked him if he remembered anything at all about James D. Holmes. Smitty had to stop and think, and then suddenly he smiled and said, “Oh, you mean J. D. — everybody called him J. D. That’s amazing, meeting you here and you asking about J. D. I remember old J. D. He was tall and thin, as I remember. And balding. Wasn’t he a traveling salesman?” That had been over sixty years earlier, of course: Smitty had just graduated from high school and had started college, but at the University of Akron, so he was still living partly at home. In fact, it was Smitty (he told me) who went with Bill W. to pick up J. D.’s wife Rhoda after she phoned and asked about the new A.A. program, so Smitty himself played a direct role in bringing J. D. into the program.

J. D. was a newspaperman in Akron. After the newspaper he worked for was sold, he moved to Evansville, Indiana, on May 30, 1938, and got a job selling advertising for a newspaper there. He started the first A.A. meeting in Indiana in Evansville on April 23, 1940 (this group, now called the Tri-State Group, still meets every Tuesday night to this day). After the second A.A. group in the state was founded by Doherty “Dohr” Sheerin in Indianapolis six months later, on October 28, 1940, the two of them — J. D. and Dohr — teamed up for the next ten years to spread A.A. all over the state. J. D. would spend almost every weekend in his car or on a train, helping to get a new A.A. group started, or bringing books and A.A. literature to these new groups, while Dohr used letters or phone calls to find out where J. D. should visit next.

J. D. and Dohr formed a marvelous team. One of their most famous accomplishments came on November 10, 1943, when Father Ralph Pfau came into A.A. in Indianapolis, and chose Dohr to be his beloved sponsor. Father Ralph was the first Roman Catholic priest to get sober in Alcoholics Anonymous, and eventually came to be A.A.’s third most published author. (Only Bill Wilson and Richmond Walker had a greater influence on how early A.A. people understood the program.)

Indiana, and particularly the Evansville–Indianapolis axis, thereby became one of the most influential A.A. centers in the country, and spread the program not only throughout Indiana, but also over into southern Illinois, western Kentucky, and even Kentucky’s major city Louisville.

After ten years or so in Indiana, around 1951, J. D. Holmes returned to Akron, where he became a writer for the *Akron Beacon-Journal*. J. D. died at his home in Akron at the age of 66

on Saturday, May 27, 1961, with 24 years of sobriety, shortly after the twenty-first anniversary of his founding of A.A. in Indiana.



Akron 1936–1938

When J. D. first came into the program in Akron, all the A.A. members were expected to attend the weekly Oxford Group meeting at T. Henry and Clarace Williams' home on Wednesday evenings, and also to make one or two meetings at Dr. Bob and Anne's home on the other six days of the week. In *Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers*, the authors made good use of a number of detailed descriptions which J. D. Holmes gave of the way these meetings were conducted and what happened at them.

“I met seven other men there who had a drinking problem,” J. D. said, “together with Dr. Bob and Bill Wilson. They all told me their stories, and I decided there might be hope for me.” They conducted it a little bit like they used to do when they gave you the third degree at a police station — you know, the bright light shining in your eyes, everything except beating you with a rubber hose — the old timers weren't kidding around when they did a twelfth step on you!

“I sat under a bridge lamp, with the rest of the crowd facing me. My wife told me I sat there with a silly grin on my face like Calvin Coolidge for the whole night. But I was embarrassed, you know, among strangers. After the meeting, Bill talked to me for about 30 minutes, and the other boys also came up and talked. Then we had coffee in the kitchen.

“The next day, I called some of the fellows, and that night, two of them called at my home. It seems as though we just lived together when I first came into the group — me and Paul ___ and Harold G___. We would go from house to house during the day and wind up one place every night — Bob Smith’s.”⁴

During this period, J. D. recalled, he saw Dr. Bob every day of the week, either at his office or in his home.

“I was over there four or five times a week in the daytime, and then I’d wind up there at night. I’ve gone to their home on a morning, opened it up, and gone in,” J. D. said. “No one up. I’d just go ahead and start the pot of coffee going. Somebody would holler out, ‘Who’s down there?’ — thinking maybe it would be a drunk who had stayed overnight. Anne never knew who would be on her davenport when she got up in the morning.”⁵

The early A.A.’s in Akron continued to stick together. Talking about the period somewhere around early 1938, J. D. told how

Ernie’s mother used to throw a party every two weeks during this period. She’d make the doughnuts, and though everybody was broke, we all brought something. It was nothing unusual to see 25 or 30 people over there drinking coffee and eating doughnuts.⁶

The Oxford Group custom of “checking” another group member whose behavior or attitude was bothering you, was not one which

could be safely continued in A.A., where hot-tempered thin-skinned alcoholics would have gotten in screaming matches over this, or maybe worse! But in the very early days, at the Wednesday night meetings at T. Henry and Clarace Williams' home, the alcoholics did sometimes become involved in this practice.

... when the alcoholics in Akron were still meeting with the Oxford Group, J. D. said that there was one woman who "used to get on my nerves with her constant chatter. One day, I called her into T. Henry's study and said, 'I don't like you for some reason or other.'" (In the Oxford Group, you were supposed to "check" people like that, as they called it.)

"You interrupt and talk too much. I'm getting a lot of resentment here, and I don't like it, and I'm afraid I'll get drunk over it."

"She laughed and said something. Then we sat down and had a very pleasant visit. And I lost all resentment."⁷

The Oxford Group practice of preaching to newcomers that they had to accept Jesus as their personal savior, and that this was the way the program absolutely had to be worked, was also something that early A.A. eventually learned was not a good idea. By the time the finished version of the twelve steps had been written, the early A.A. people realized that they needed to speak of God "*as we understood Him*" with the understanding that each A.A. member had to work out his or her own concept of a higher power.

By the time the Big Book was published in 1939, the name of Jesus Christ was mentioned only once in the first 164 pages, on page eleven, where Bill W. said that, speaking honestly, when he first got sober, as far as he was concerned, Jesus was no more than

a great moral teacher from a long dead era of history. And again, speaking honestly, as far as he could see, those who claimed to be Christians had never followed Jesus' real teaching very closely anyway.

But in Akron in September 1936, the early A.A.'s were still closely attached to the Oxford Group, and they assumed that alcoholics had to be persuaded to accept Jesus Christ as their personal savior before the program would work. So since J. D. had his problems with the spiritual part of the program, they preached Christ at him over and over again, even if they did it alcoholic-fashion by swearing at him while they were doing it. J. D. said that

“Ernie G. and Paul S. were at his house one day trying to explain it to him, when Ernie said, ‘Why, Jesus Christ is sitting right on the arm of that chair by you. Damn it, He wants to help you if you just reach out your hand.’

“Well, I did chuckle for a few minutes,” J. D. said. “Then I got to thinking about it — ‘Maybe the guy is right.’ And I began to give this thing a great deal of spiritual thought after that. You know how crudely Ernie talked. But I would listen to him trying to explain it to me a lot quicker than I would a polished man like T. Henry. Isn't that peculiar?”⁸

CHAPTER 7

Bill Wilson — Cleveland A.A. and the break with Oxford Group

Clarence Snyder maintained, to the end of his life, that the Cleveland A.A. group which was started on May 10–11, 1939, had been the first meeting actually called an “Alcoholics Anonymous” group — he argued that all the meetings up that point, all over the United States, were Oxford Group meetings — which made him one of the founders of A.A., along with Bill W. and Dr. Bob.

During the review of the manuscript for *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age* (which was published at the end of 1957), Bill Wilson wrote to Clarence in a letter dated March 20, 1957, taking issue with Clarence’s claims.⁹

In particular, Bill W. pointed out that A.A. in New York completely parted company with the Oxford Group in 1937, which meant that A.A.’s break with Oxford Group began very early on the East Coast even if it took more time to happen in Akron and Cleveland.

... Relative to what you say about “In Cleveland many persons are proud of the distinction that A.A. did start there,” I can’t find myself in full agreement. This seems to be a sort of hairsplitting question as to just who got there first. You folks who started the Cleveland group had been under the Oxford Group influence at T. Henry’s. When you

shifted to Cleveland, you merely changed your address and then had a meeting composed of alcoholics only. In fact, you carried the Oxford Group Absolutes with you and have used them ever since.

Even so, Cleveland did not actually have the first AA meeting of alcoholics only. In New York we had completely quit the Oxford Group by 1937. Between then, the text of the AA book was done in New York between that time and the spring of 1939. The name Alcoholics Anonymous was also coined there. So, the AA book itself was off the press before there was any meeting in Cleveland at all. This would seem to indicate that there was quite a lot of straight AA going on before anything happened in Cleveland itself. In fact, it was the appearance of the AA book that actually split the meeting at T. Henry's. At least, as I remember it¹⁰

Then nine and a half years later, in a November 21, 1966, letter about Clarence to Dorothy S. (Clarence's ex-wife) Bill W wrote:

... Today the feeling in Cleveland seems quite different. As a fact, in 1955 the Cleveland Central Bulletin published a most moving apology to me for all the nonsense that had gone on. As you remember when "A.A. Comes of Age" was in preparation in 1957, we made a most careful inquiry into the facts of the early times. A chapter draft of this was sent to you and Clarence. An exchange of letters with him was interesting. After my reply to the first one, pointing out some of his errors, he pulled his head way in, and replied in a very friendly way to the second letter. He could hardly do otherwise I guess, because we had, after all, contacted other early Clevelanders and had their versions of the beginnings there. In the second letter, he admits that "A.A. didn't start in Cleveland" — that the first group there had simply borrowed the A.A. name from the title of the upcoming

A.A. book. The rest of his comments had to do with the order or precedence of the hospitals who helped us out in Cleveland [and] Akron respectively. In short, he assented to the story the way it was published.

So, I look at his recent performance in the Bay area and the even more amazing report of it to be just another example of his extreme persuasiveness — in which he actually persuades himself!¹¹

CHAPTER 8

The Appendix in the Second Edition of the Big Book: 1941

Already in the second printing of the Big Book (which came out on March 2, 1941) Bill Wilson made it a point to insert an appendix on Spiritual Experience to try to counter the belief that some kind of Protestant revivalist experience was necessary or even common in Alcoholics Anonymous. He decided that his wording in the Big Book had not been careful enough on the topic and had perhaps misrepresented actual A.A. experience during its first six years of existence:

Big Book pages 567–568

The terms “spiritual experience” and “spiritual awakening” are used many times in this book which, upon careful reading, shows that the personality change sufficient to bring about recovery from alcoholism has manifested itself among us in many different forms.

Yet it is true that our first printing gave many readers the impression that these personality changes, or religious experiences, must be in the nature of sudden and spectacular upheavals. Happily for everyone, this conclusion is erroneous.

In the first few chapters a number of sudden revolutionary changes are described. Though it was not our intention to create such an impression, many alcoholics have nevertheless concluded that in order to recover they must acquire an immediate and overwhelming “God-consciousness” followed at once by a vast change in feeling and outlook.

Among our rapidly growing membership of thousands of alcoholics such transformations, though frequent, are by no means the rule. Most of our experiences are what the psychologist William James calls the “educational variety” because they develop slowly over a period of time. Quite often friends of the newcomer are aware of the difference long before he is himself. He finally realizes that he has undergone a profound alteration in his reaction to life; that such a change could hardly have been brought about by himself alone. What often takes place in a few months could hardly be accomplished by years of self-discipline. With few exceptions our members find that they have tapped an unsuspected inner resource which they presently identify with their own conception of a Power greater than themselves.

Most of us think this awareness of a Power greater than ourselves is the essence of spiritual experience. Our more religious members call it “God-consciousness.”

Most emphatically we wish to say that any alcoholic capable of honestly facing his problems in the light of our experience can recover, provided he does not close his mind to all spiritual principles. He can only be defeated by an attitude of intolerance or belligerent denial.

We find that no one need have difficulty with the spirituality of the program. *Willingness, honesty and open mindedness are the essentials of recovery, but these are indispensable.*

Now it has often been pointed out that William James did not actually ever use the phrase “educational variety” in his book *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), but the basic idea appeared in that work. And most importantly, referring to the overall work of salvation and sanctification as a gradual “educational” process was in fact a major part of the teachings of the classical Protestant liberal tradition.

In Methodism, the largest classical liberal group in American Protestantism, arguments had begun arising as early as the 1840’s over the question of how *sanctification* occurred (that is, how conversion ultimately led people into true moral behavior). In the early nineteenth century, the Methodists had been one of the largest Protestant groups following the American frontier westward and holding loud, enthusiastic revivals everywhere they could; they were sometimes nicknamed “the shouting Methodists.” The people in the congregation were exhorted to make an altar call, where they came down to the front and knelt and gave themselves to Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, in what was an overwhelming emotional experience.

But by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, American Methodists had almost completely gotten out of the business of holding huge revival meetings. This was important because the Methodists were the group, we remember, which produced the early A.A. devotional booklet called *The Upper Room*.

Horace Bushnell, Christian Nurture

In the Methodists’ development away from revivalism (and from an insistence upon instantaneous radical conversion experiences), they became heavily affected (along with many other classical liberal Protestants) by the teachings of Horace Bushnell,

an American Congregational minister from Connecticut, who had written a book called *Christian Nurture* back in 1847. In that book, Bushnell acknowledged that revivalism had been useful and appropriate in certain parts of the early American frontier, where most of the settlers had become completely divorced from the western Christian heritage and were totally churchless. But, he argued, this kind of revivalism had now become bad for the Christian church. In fact, he said, no one became a genuinely committed Christian overnight in some sudden burst of emotion. The emotional thrill quickly faded over the days and weeks that followed, at which time the person usually fell back into his or her old beliefs and pattern of behavior.

Even more importantly (as we see from the title of Bushnell's book) he insisted that children brought up in the church should be *nurtured* and slowly *educated* into Christian belief throughout the course of their childhood, so that they would never need to have a dramatic conversion experience.

If we pick up his book on *Christian Nurture* and look at passages like this one from page 97, we can see how Bushnell argued his position:

When ... the Great Revival [of the 1730's and 40's], under Whitefield and Edwards, inaugurated and brought up to its highest intensity the new era of individualism — the same overwrought, misapplied scheme of personal experience in religion, which has continued with some modifications to the present day [what we observe] is a religion that begins explosively, raises high frames, carries little or no expansion, and after the campaign is over, subsides into a torpor.

Considered as a distinct era, introduced by Edwards, and extended and caricatured by his contemporaries, it has one

great merit, and one great defect. The merit is that it displaced an era of dead formality, and brought in the demand of a truly supernatural experience. The defect is, that it has cast a type of religious individualism, intense beyond any former example. It makes nothing of the family, and the church, and the organic powers God has constituted as vehicles of grace.

It takes every man as if he had existed alone; presumes that he is unreconciled to God until he has undergone some sudden and explosive experience in adult years, or after the age of reason; demands that experience, and only when it is reached, allows the subject to be an heir of life.

Then, on the other side, or that of the Spirit of God, the very act or *ictus* [sudden beat, blow, stroke or seizure] by which the change is wrought is isolated or individualized, so as to stand in no connection with any other of God's means or causes — an epiphany, in which God leaps from the stars, or some place above, to do a work apart from all system, or connection with his other works.

Religion is thus a kind of transcendental matter, which belongs on the outside of life, and has no part in the laws by which life is organized — a miraculous epidemic, a fire-ball shot from the moon, something holy, because it is from God, but so extraordinary, so out of place, that it cannot suffer any vital connection with the ties, and causes, and forms, and habits, which constitute the frame of our history.

Hence the desultory, hard, violent, and often extravagant or erratic character it manifests. Hence, in part, the dreary years of decay and darkness, that interspace our months of excitement and victory.

And in A.A., where people frequently came in with hopelessly childish ideas about spirituality, it was important to realize that, just as with dealing with children anywhere, slow nurturing over

the months and years would work a whole lot better than telling A.A. newcomers that none of them would ever get the program until perhaps, some day in the future, they had an overwhelming emotional experience, the kind in which “God leaps from the stars” and we feel as though we have been hit by something like “a fireball shot from the moon.”

CHAPTER 9

Bill Wilson in the NCCA Blue Book

In 1960, Bill Wilson gave a quite long statement about what he believed A.A. had gotten from the Oxford Group in a speech he gave to the Roman Catholic organization (founded by famous early A.A. author Father Ralph Pfau) called the National Clergy Conference on Alcoholism (NCCA). This group was composed of Catholic priests and nuns who were recovering alcoholics, or who worked with alcoholics. A transcript of his speech appeared in that organization's annual publication called the *Blue Book*, Vol. 12 (1960) 179-210.¹²

In that talk Bill W. admitted that the early A.A. people had first found out about the importance of divine grace and its ability to heal the human soul, from two sources:

1. The Oxford Group
2. But before that from Dr. Carl Jung in Switzerland (via Rowland Hazard and Ebby Thacher) and Dr. William Duncan Silkworth in New York City.

Jung and Silkworth both agreed that the hold of really severe alcoholism could only be broken by going to some kind of spiritual source.

It is important to note, by the way, that here in 1960, Bill Wilson was insisting that *A.A.'s first and primary inspiration came, not from the Oxford Group, but from the ideas on religion and spirituality taught by the famous Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung*. Anyone who wishes to obtain a deeper grasp of the ideas that underlay the teachings of early A.A. should absolutely study some Jungian writings from that period, such as Jung's *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, which came out in 1933, only two years before Bill W. and Dr. Bob met for the first time.¹³

The A.A. understanding of the healing power of grace actually started however as traditional Roman Catholic teaching

Bill Wilson went on however, and told this Catholic group that, even though it had been Carl Jung and Dr. Silkworth (followed by the Oxford Group) who had initially introduced A.A. to the idea of grace, he had subsequently learned that this teaching about the healing and saving power of divine grace actually went back two thousand years, and that this saving message had been passed along to the modern world by the Catholic Church and its great teachers like St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas. He had come to realize that A.A. had an even greater debt of gratitude to the Catholic Church than it had to Drs. Jung and Silkworth and the Oxford Group.

Every thoughtful A.A. realizes that the divine grace which has always flowed through the Church is the ultimate foundation on which A.A. rests. Our spiritual origins are Christian. Therefore the transforming grace that expels our alcohol obsession has come down across the centuries through you

Bill explained how he had first begun finding out about the importance of the Catholic tradition in 1940, when he met a Roman Catholic priest named Father Edward Dowling, a Jesuit priest who then became Bill's A.A. sponsor for the next twenty years (until Father Ed died on April 3, 1960, shortly before this Catholic conference was held).

In this connection I'd like to tell you the story of my long connection with Father Edward Dowling, whose funeral I have just attended. Never shall I have a finer friend, a wiser adviser, nor in all probability such a channel of grace as he personally afforded me over the years

My first unforgettable contact with Father Ed came about in this way. It was early in 1940, though late in the winter. Save for old Tom, the fireman we had lately rescued from Rockland Asylum, the club was empty. My wife Lois was out somewhere It was a bitter night, frightfully windy. Hail and sleet beat on the tin roof over my head.

Then the front doorbell rang and I heard old Tom toddle off to answer it. A minute later he looked into the doorway of my room, obviously much annoyed. Then he said, "Bill, there is some old damn bum down there from St. Louis, and he wants to see you." Great heavens, I thought, this can't be still another one! Wearily, and even resentfully, I said to Tom, "Oh well, bring him up, bring him up." Then a strange figure appeared in my bedroom door. He wore a shapeless black hat that somehow reminded me of a cabbage leaf. His coat collar was drawn around his neck, and he leaned heavily on a cane. He was plastered with sleet. Thinking him to be just another drunk, I didn't even get off the bed. Then he unbuttoned his coat and I saw that he was a clergyman

We talked of many things, not always about serious matters either. Then I began to be aware of one of the most

remarkable pair of eyes I had ever seen. And, as we talked on, the room increasingly filled with what seemed to me to be the presence of God which flowed through my new friend. It was one of the most extraordinary experiences that I have ever had. Such was his rare ability to transmit grace. Nor was my experience at all unique. Hundreds of AA's have reported having exactly this experience when in his presence

Bill Wilson wanted to make it clear that he realized that the A.A. understanding of the power of divine grace to heal the human soul was simply good traditional Catholic teaching which had been passed down to the modern age.

What A.A. learned from the Oxford Group

But even though it may have been Catholic teaching in terms of its ultimate origins, the immediate source of much of A.A.'s understanding of divine grace at the beginning of their movement, had in fact been the Protestant evangelistic organization called the Oxford Group. In fact, Bill W. said, that was one of the first matters which he began discussing in St. Louis when he went to visit Father Ed Dowling and some of the other Jesuits there:

I explained [to Father Dowling and his fellow Jesuit priests] how a few years earlier some of us had been associated with the Oxford Groups; that we had picked up from these good people the ideas of self-survey, confession, restitution, helpfulness to others and prayer, ideas that we might have got in many other quarters as well. After our withdrawal from the Oxford Groups, these principles and attitudes had been formed into a word-of-mouth program, to which we had added a step of our own to the effect "that we were powerless over alcohol." Our Twelve Steps were the result of my effort to define more sharply and elaborate

upon these word-of-mouth principles so that alcoholic readers would have a more specific program: that there could be no escape from what we deemed to be essential principles and attitudes. This had been my sole idea in their composition. This enlarged version of our program had been set down rather quickly — perhaps in twenty or thirty minutes — on a night when I had been very badly out of sorts. Why the Steps were written down in the order in which they appear today and just why they were worded as they are, I had no idea whatever

But Bill W. insisted that Carl Jung had been more important than the Oxford Group

Bill admitted the importance of the early Oxford Group connection, but he said that he also wanted to emphasize that, in his belief, the influence of the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung on the formation of A.A. was even more important than that of the Oxford Group:

Though A.A. roots are in the centuries-old Christian community, there seems little doubt that in an immediate sense our fellowship began in the office of the much respected Dr. Carl Jung of Zurich.

Shortly thereafter Dr. Jung's patient — one I shall call Rowland — joined up with the Oxford Groups, a society which in more recent years has been called Moral Re-Armament. As we shall see, A.A. owes this fellowship a great deal on two counts. From them we learned what, and what not to do. At any rate, our friend Rowland did there find a truly transforming experience, an experience that kept him in sobriety for a number of years.

As one of those unusual Oxford Groupers interested in alcoholism, Rowland went out of his way to help a former school mate of mine. A serious alcoholic, my old school

chum “Ebby” was about to be committed for alcoholic insanity just as Rowland reached him.

Now when Rowland contacted my friend Ebby, another element was cast into the synthesis that was to become A.A. Here was one alcoholic talking to another He could ... tell Ebby what conditions needed to be met in order to become worthy of such a gift of grace — namely, self-survey, an examination of conscience (as you would call it), restitution for harms done, helpfulness to others without demands of prestige or money reward, prayer to God as we understand Him. These were the essential attitudes and principles that Rowland transmitted to Ebby, who was to become my own sponsor.

The moment Ebby accepted these principles and conditions, he was released from his desire to drink, and this release lasted for a couple of years, during which he contacted me

One day, while on [a drinking] bout ... here was my old friend Ebby I pushed a crock of gin towards him. But he said, “No thanks” What on earth had got into him? When I put this question, he replied, simply and smilingly, “I’ve got religion.”

.... I said, “So you’ve got religion, Ebby? Well, tell me what brand it is.” He replied that it wasn’t exactly a brand — he wouldn’t exactly call it a religion. Then he explained how he had run into those Oxford Groups. He also added that they were pretty evangelical for him. Nevertheless he had met a drunk or two there, notably one Rowland, who had been a patient of Dr. Jung’s. And then he outlined the simple program that I have just described. He told me just how it worked for him, how quite unaccountably he had been released the moment that he became willing to accept it

Bill W. returned however to stressing the importance, in his own story, of visions and direct experiences of the presence of God

Once again however, we must note how Bill Wilson insisted that, in his own freedom from the compulsion to drink, it was not an Oxford Group sort of experience which saved him, but an ecstatic experience (a vision of the Divine Light) which finally gave him the power to stop drinking. He probably felt safe in talking about this at length to this particular audience, because of the long tradition of Catholic saints who had had visions of various sorts at the center of their religious experience,

But it must be confessed that I still gagged on a belief in God. I could and would try anything else — but not this. But I always had to come back to the thought that Ebby was released. He was sober, and I was hopelessly drunk. Who was I to say there is no God? Maybe I had better go to the hospital and get Dr. Silkworth to sober me up. Of course there mustn't be any emotional conversion — that wouldn't do for a Vermont Yankee! Anyway, I'd have a good clear look

In three days time, I was perfectly sober. One morning my friend Ebby appeared in the doorway and he found me in a terrible depression. I was still in rebellion — against God

Out of my black depression I found myself crying, just like a child in the dark, “If there is a God, will He show Himself? Now I am ready, ready to do anything, even to believe.” Then came the great experience.

The room filled with a blinding white light. I was caught into an ecstasy for which there is no description. In my mind's eye I seemed to be on a mountain top; a great wind was blowing. Then I thought, “This is not air, this is spirit.

This is the God of the preachers.” How long this state lasted I have no idea. But at length I found myself still, of course on the bed. Now however I seemed to be in a new dimension. All around and through me I felt a sense of Presence.

A great peace settled over me. With this came the mighty assurance that no matter how wrong things were with the world, all things were right with God. I had a tremendous sense of belonging. Here was purpose and destiny. Here was God. Such, in substance, was my transforming experience. I later found that my obsession to drink was snapped off instantly — never to return again in any dangerous form. Almost immediately a vision of a chain reaction among alcoholics, one carrying the good news to the other, began to possess me.

**Adding a warning however: most A.A.’s had
NOT received visions or sudden overwhelming
experiences of the numinous**

Now this talk to the gathered priest and nuns was being given in 1960, long after the wording of the Twelfth Step in the Big Book had been altered and the appendix on Spiritual Experience added to the end of the book, but Bill Wilson was nevertheless careful to add a word of warning:

It might be well to here observe that every A.A. does have a transforming spiritual experience, though it seldom has the suddenness or dramatic content that mine did. What happened to me in perhaps six minutes, may in most cases require six months or even a year or more. But the fruits are the same. There must always be that same ego collapse at depth, at least, so far as alcohol is concerned. There must also be a turning to a higher Power for God’s gift of grace,

without which the obsession can practically never be expelled

A.A. is a sort of spiritual kindergarten, but that is all. Never could it be called a religion

The Twelve Steps and the Oxford Group

Bill Wilson gave the assembled priests and nuns an account of how the Twelve Steps were created, which unfortunately ignored the influence of the doctrine of the 5 C's which was passed down to them from the Oxford Group, but which did make mention of the rough sort of "six step" system that the A.A.'s were using down to the publication of the Big Book in 1939.

The story of the writing of the Twelve Steps and what preceded this event has been told in our history book, *A.A. Comes of Age*. This account reflects not only my own recollection of the matter; it has been carefully checked with other A.A.'s who were living at the time. I believe it to be substantially true. This account shows that A.A.'s First Step was derived largely from my own physician, Dr. Silkworth, and my sponsor Ebby and his friend, from Dr. Jung of Zurich. I refer to the medical hopelessness of alcoholism — our "powerlessness" over alcohol.

The rest of the Twelve Steps stem directly from those Oxford Group teachings that applied specifically to us. Of course these teachings were nothing new; we might have obtained them from your own Church. They were in effect an examination of conscience, confession, restitution, helpfulness to others, and prayer.

Before the Twelve Steps were written, these ideas were circulated in some six "word of mouth" steps. I don't remember that anybody in particular formulated these. If this formulation was the work of some one person, he

merely stated in our language what we had already learned from the Oxford Groups. When the Twelve Steps were written, it was thought wise to further define and amplify these basic ideas

[Why the A.A. movement decided that it was necessary to separate from the Oxford Group and abandon many of their beliefs and practices]

In passing, I should acknowledge our great debt to the Oxford Group people. It was fortunate that they laid particular emphasis on spiritual principles that we needed. But in fairness it should also be said that many of their attitudes and practices did not work well at all for us alcoholics. These were rejected one by one and they caused our later withdrawal from this society to a fellowship of our own — today's Alcoholics Anonymous

Before leaving the subject of the Oxford Groups, perhaps I should specifically outline why we felt it necessary to part company with them. To begin with, the climate of their undertaking was not well suited to us alcoholics. They were aggressively evangelical, they sought to re-vitalize the Christian message in such a way as to “change the world.” Most of us alcoholics had been subjected to pressure of evangelism and we had never liked it. The object of saving the world — when it was still much in doubt if we could save ourselves — seemed better left to other people. By reason of some of its terminology and by the exertion of huge pressure, the Oxford Group set a moral stride that was too fast, particularly for our newer alcoholics. They constantly talked of Absolute Purity, Absolute Unselfishness, Absolute Honesty, and Absolute Love. While sound theology must always have its absolute values, the Oxford Groups created the feeling that one should arrive at these destinations in short order, maybe by

next Thursday! Perhaps they didn't mean to create such an impression but that was the effect. Sometimes their public "witnessing" was of such a character as to cause us to be shy. They also believe that by "converting" prominent people to their beliefs, they would hasten the salvation of the many who were less prominent. This attitude could scarcely appeal to the average drunk since he was anything but distinguished.

The Oxford Group also had attitudes and practices which added up to a highly coercive authority. This was exercised by "teams" of older members. They would gather in meditation and receive specific guidance for the life conduct of newcomers. This guidance could cover all possible situations from the most trivial to the most serious. If the directions so obtained were not followed the enforcement machinery began to operate. It consisted of a sort of coldness and aloofness which made recalcitrants feel they weren't wanted. At one time, for example, a "team" got guidance for me to the effect that I was no longer to work with alcoholics. This I couldn't accept.

Another example: When I first contacted the Oxford Groups, Catholics were permitted to attend their meetings because they were strictly non-denominational. But after a time the Catholic Church forbade its members to attend and the reason for this seemed a good one. Through the Oxford Group teams Catholic Church members were actually receiving very specific guidance for their lives; they were often infused with the idea that their own Church had become rather horse-and-buggy, and needed to be "changed." Guidance was frequently given that contributions should be made to the Oxford Groups. In a way this amounted to putting Catholics under a separate ecclesiastical jurisdiction. At this time there were few Catholics in our own alcoholic groups. Obviously we could not approach any more Catholics under Oxford Group

auspices. Therefore this was another and the basic reason for the withdrawal of our alcoholic crowd from the Oxford Groups notwithstanding our great indebtedness to them.

CHAPTER 10

The 1942 Reading List in the Akron Manual: Part One

This simple little reading list is one of the most valuable documents we possess for understanding the kind of spiritual beliefs which a visitor would have encountered when attending A.A. meetings in Akron in the summer of 1942. They absolutely have to be studied and discussed in order to understand where A.A. had evolved by that point, and what people would in fact have been talking about at meetings. A good many popularly held beliefs about what early A.A. was like, fall to pieces when we start looking carefully at what the old-timers were actually telling newcomers to read back then.

The pamphlet

The Akron A.A. group published a pamphlet in 1942 entitled *A Manual for Alcoholics Anonymous*.¹⁴ This little booklet, commonly referred to simply as “the Akron Manual,” was handed out to newcomers when they were admitted to Sister Ignatia’s alcoholism treatment program at St. Thomas Hospital. This was presumably done, not only with the agreement of the Akron A.A. group, but also with the approval of both Dr. Bob and Sister Ignatia. This pamphlet is therefore a very good statement of what A.A.’s were

believing and practicing by the end of the period we are looking at in this book (1938–1942), at one of A.A.’s two major centers — and in this case the center we are focusing on is Akron, frequently regarded as the more conservative of the two.

The cover of the pamphlet talks about alcoholics in Akron with five, six and seven years of sobriety and on page 15 it states that the Akron Group has been in existence for seven years. Dr. Bob and Bill Dotson both got sober in June 1935, which meant that they would have had seven years of sobriety in June of 1942. Likewise, the Akron Group would have been in existence for seven years in June 1942. In addition, the latest book on the Manual’s reading list — E. Stanley Jones’ *Abundant Living* — was not published until 1942, so we know the pamphlet could not have been written earlier than that date.¹⁵

What A.A. historian Dick B. said about the Akron Manual should also be noted, including particularly the statement that all the members of the Akron A.A. group had voted on the matter, and had approved the pamphlet.¹⁶

Mitch K. supplied the author with a pamphlet given him by Clarence S., and which is entitled “A Manual for Alcoholics Anonymous.” It states: “This pamphlet was written and edited by members of Alcoholics Anonymous Group No. 1, popularly known as the King School Group. Akron Group No. 1 is the original chapter of Alcoholics Anonymous and includes in its active membership one of the organization’s founders, the first person to accept the program, and a large number of other members whose sobriety dates back five, six and seven years. The text of this pamphlet has been approved by the membership.”

Evan Williams was the author of the pamphlet, and Gary Neidhardt says that it was written by him by request of Dr. Bob himself.¹⁷

**Reading in early AA: the
Evan W. pamphlets at Akron**

I'm sure you already have the folder provided by the Akron Intergroup that is provided when one buys the five standard Evan W. pamphlets. But just in case some folks here don't have that information, here's how it reads:

“This historical Literature was written by Evan W. at the request of Dr. Bob. He felt that the newly written Big Book was too difficult for the blue-collar worker to read. Evan was a former writer for the newspaper and wrote ‘A Manual for Alcoholics Anonymous’ in 1941,¹⁸ followed by ‘A Second Reader for Alcoholics Anonymous.’ These pamphlets were completed by 1950 and reflected the early mindset of Akron’s earliest members. This literature is preconference and is still serving members of A.A. around the world.”

Jared Lobdell has given us lots of information about Evan Williams and his family:¹⁹

**EVAN WILLIAMS as author
of the Akron pamphlets**

Henry Evan Williams Jr (b. March 1899 d. October 1954) was a son of the great Ohio (and Welsh) tenor [Henry] Evan Williams (1867–1918), who, it is said, sang his way “from the coal mines to the top of the world.”

Evan Jr. was a reporter for one of the Akron daily papers in the 1930s and at the time his mother died in 1944 was described as being with the Akron Chamber of Commerce.

He married Fredda Slater and their only son Evan III (b. 1925) died in Akron in 2003. Evan III's son Evan IV is a lawyer in Illinois — I'm writing him to see if he has any information on his grandfather. Evan Jr's brother Edgar Morgan Williams had (as of 2010) a surviving son Edgar Jr, in Cambridge MD, who might have known his uncle Evan, and to whom I will also be writing (if I can find that he's still alive).

I think it was Edgar Sr. who married a daughter of Senator Dick of Ohio — in which case both politically and culturally our Evan had good connections — father a great tenor (more than 75 recordings for Victor Red Label and HMV — including his rendition of “When You and I Were Young, Maggie” — but better known for singing Handel.

THE READING LIST

One of the most important parts of the pamphlet appeared at the end of the booklet in its original 1942 printing (as opposed to the version now being sold at Dr. Bob's house, which is a later version, cut up by some ignorant editor, with all sorts of sections missing).

It was a list of *ten recommended things for A.A. newcomers to read*, so that they could better understand the spiritual aspects of the program. In the manual the list was given as follows, quoting exactly what was said there at the end of the pamphlet:

SUGGESTED READING

The following literature has helped many members of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Alcoholics Anonymous. (Works Publishing Company.)

The Holy Bible.

The Greatest Thing in the World. Henry Drummond.

The Unchanging Friend. (A Series) (Bruce Publishing Co., Milwaukee.)

As a Man Thinketh. James Allen.

The Sermon on the Mount. Emmet Fox (Harper Bros.)

The Self You Have to Live With. Winfred Rhoades.
(Lippincott.)

Psychology of Christian Personality. Ernest M. Ligon.
(Macmillan Co.)

Abundant Living. E. Stanley Jones

The Man Nobody Knows. Bruce Barton

(1) The Big Book

The first item on the list was of course the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous. From the time of its publication in April 1939, this was the number one book that A.A. members were instructed to study.

(2) The Christian Bible

Here in 1942 when this pamphlet was written, the second item on the list was the Bible. This is important to note: for A.A.'s at this time, only the Big Book surpassed the Bible in importance. Five parts of the Bible — *the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7, the letter of James, 1 Corinthians 13, and Psalms 23 and 91* — had all been mentioned earlier in the pamphlet and assigned special importance.

These were favorite passages, particularly the *Sermon on the Mount*, for early twentieth century classical Protestant liberals.

We might look for example at the enormously popular book by Adolf Harnack, *What Is Christianity?*, which was a major liberal Protestant manifesto. The true Christian religion, Harnack proclaimed, preached the simple teaching of the historical Jesus, as shown especially in passages like the Sermon on the Mount. It did not preach all the complex doctrines and dogmas, cast in pagan Greek philosophical terms, which began taking over Christian teaching in the second and third centuries. These pagan philosophical terms appeared nowhere in the Bible, Harnack said, and were a later medieval distortion.

Real Christianity was not about saying the right technical doctrinal words, but about showing love and compassion towards our fellow human beings. As the *Letter of James* said, “Faith without works is dead,” with the understanding that the principal work of true faith was to love all the other human beings around us, and to try to help them in every possible way, without discrimination of any sort, regardless of who they were or how much money they made, or what kinds of clothes they wore, or what sins or wrongdoing they had committed.

1 Corinthians 13 contained the famous passage where the Apostle Paul explained in greater detail exactly what this kind of love entailed. It should be noticed that real love was not a warm, goosy sentimental feeling that we felt when we sat in our chairs and looked around and did nothing. Genuine love was a way of acting, a concrete way we were supposed to behave towards others on a continuous, unbroken everyday basis:

Love is big-hearted and patiently continues to give acceptance and affirmation.

Love acts with kind and useful help,
is not jealous or competitive.

Love does not behave with the kind of vanity which tries to think itself better than everyone else,
does not act the pompous blowhard,
does not violate good manners or show disrespect,
is not self-seeking,
is not touchy or instantly triggered into rage,
does not resentfully keep a score of past wrongs,
is not filled with joy by something wrong,
but rejoices in the truth.
It always shields and protects,
always trusts,
always hopes,
always stands firm and stays alive.

(It should be noted that A.A. in most parts of the U.S. and Canada rapidly got rid of the Four Absolutes once they had broken with the Oxford Group, and regarded 1 Corinthians 13, along with the St. Francis Prayer, as far more practical and useful guides to making truly moral decisions — also as guides which forced us to probe far more deeply into our real motives and what was really wrong with our behavior.)

The Upper Room, which was the meditational book most often used by early A.A.'s during the 1935–1948 period before Richmond Walker's *Twenty-Four Hour* book came along, was published by the classical Protestant liberals and was a good statement of their fundamental principles: *we needed to start the day with prayer and meditation, using short Bible verses for each day's reading* — passages that stressed dependence on God as our loving Father, and on walking with Jesus and his love in our hearts, along with practicing continual God-consciousness, doing good, and showing love to everyone around us.

**IMPORTANT TO NOTE: THERE WERE NO OXFORD
GROUP BOOKS OR PUBLICATIONS ON THIS LIST**

By 1942, when this reading list was published, even Akron A.A. had broken completely away from the Oxford Group. They did not want their members to be reading any of the long list of Oxford Group literature any longer. It is important to remember that during the period which we are looking at in this book — 1938 to 1942 — Alcoholics Anonymous was going through major evolutionary changes.

No matter how much A.A. had originally learned from the Oxford Group, *they had discovered that having alcoholics continue to read the old Oxford Group literature, hindered rather than helped alcoholic recovery.*

WE NEED TO REMEMBER THIS TIMELINE

May 10–11, 1939 — the alcoholics from Cleveland, led by Clarence Snyder, stopped going to the Wednesday night Oxford Group meeting in Akron and set up their own Cleveland meeting, which was for alcoholics only and had discarded some of the Oxford Group format.

October 1939 — five months later, the Akron alcoholics finally saw that Cleveland had been right. They stopped going to the Wednesday night Oxford Group meeting at the home of T. Henry and Clarace Williams, and began holding their weekly formal meeting at Dr. Bob's house.

January 1940 — the Akron alcoholics moved from Dr. Bob's house to King School in Akron for their Wednesday night formal meeting.

(3) Only one work from the nineteenth-century Protestant revivalist world was listed

Henry Drummond, The Greatest Thing in the World: originally an informal talk on the Apostle Paul’s Hymn to Love in 1 Corinthians 13, given in 1884, it was eventually published in book form at the strong urging of the famous American revival preacher Dwight L. Moody, who had been conducting huge revivals all over Great Britain in 1873–75 and 1881–84.²⁰

In 1 Corinthians 13, the Apostle Paul had said in the final verse, “And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love” so Henry Drummond decided to entitle his little book *The Greatest Thing in the World*.

As Rev. Moody told the story of its writing later on in the 1890’s:²¹

I was staying with a party of friends in a country house during my visit to England in 1884. On Sunday evening as we sat around the fire, they asked me to read and expound some portion of Scripture. Being tired after the services of the day, I told them to ask Henry Drummond, who was one of the party. After some urging he drew a small Testament from his hip pocket, opened it at the 13th chapter of I Corinthians, and began to speak on the subject of Love.

It seemed to me that I had never heard anything so beautiful, and I determined not to rest until I brought Henry Drummond to Northfield to deliver that address. Since then I have requested the principals of my schools to have it read before the students every year. The one great need in our Christian life is love, more love to God and to each other. Would that we could all move into that Love chapter, and live there.

Henry Drummond (1851–1897) was a Scotsman, educated at the University of Edinburgh, who was Professor of Natural Science at the College of the Free Church of Scotland, and had become involved in evangelical preaching more or less on the side.

The most important thing to note about the Akron Manual putting this particular book on its reading list, was that it showed the enormous importance, in good early A.A., of teaching newcomers how to treat other people with love. Real love was not a kind of sentimentalistic emotion, where we sat around feeling all warm and goosy inside. Real love was a way of *acting* towards other people, regardless of the emotions we were feeling — with clear-cut guidelines and rules to show us the way we should act. In order to get sober and stay sober, alcoholics had to learn how to love others and let themselves be loved. For beginners who could not handle the idea of God or a higher power, working at learning how to treat other people with love would get them through the early months of the program all by itself. That is why the Akron A.A. group stressed this so strongly.

Just as an aside, Drummond was most famous during his lifetime for a book called *Natural Law in the Spiritual World* (1883), which was an attempt to make peace between science and religion. In particular, he argued that Charles Darwin's doctrine of evolution, and its teaching of the survival of the fittest, could be fitted smoothly into agreement with good religious belief. (Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* had come out fairly recently, in 1859, and his book on *The Descent of Man* had come out only twelve years earlier in 1871.)

Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley, who had been the founders during the 1730's of the modern evangelical movement and its practice of preaching

huge revivals, were both fascinated with the new science and eagerly accepted its discoveries: Newton's laws of physics, John Locke's invention of modern psychology, the movement toward the practices of modern medicine, and so on.

This is important, because early A.A. had no sympathy whatsoever with religious people who were completely anti-scientific in their attitudes and who tried to deal with modern science by rejecting its findings. Most early A.A. people believed that there was a spiritual dimension of reality which went beyond anything which the scientific method could investigate, but they also realized that the profound discoveries of modern science could neither be denied nor neglected.

The Protestant Fundamentalist movement, with its often negative attitude toward modern science, did not come along until almost two centuries after Edwards and Wesley and the rise of the modern evangelical movement. Fundamentalism had its beginning in a series of events which took place in 1895–1919, and centered on the denial of Darwin's doctrine of evolution. Fundamentalists believed that the world and all the species of plants and animals which had ever lived on it had all been created around 4004 B.C. They also insisted that the Bible was completely infallible and inerrant (with no internal contradictions, incorrect historical statements, or mythical beliefs).

But the Fundamentalist movement was still fairly small during the 1930's and 1940's, and looked down on by the majority of Americans. And as far as I have been able to determine, there were no major Protestant Fundamentalist elements in early A.A.

The Oxford Group people were well-educated folk who wanted nothing to do with Fundamentalist beliefs,

and as we see here, even within Protestant revivalism, where preachers gathered huge crowds so they could urge them to kneel and accept Jesus as their Lord, it was not until well into the twentieth century that fundamentalists and revivalists began to become almost automatically linked in the way in which they are today.

(4) **New Thought**

As we have seen, there was only *one volume* in the ten-book list that came from the world of nineteenth century Protestant revivalism, and *no books at all* from the Oxford Group.

But there were a total of THREE works that came out of the world of New Thought. This shows how important their ideas were in early A.A. teaching. These religions are sometimes also referred to as *the metaphysical family* of spiritual teaching. William James referred to them as the *mind-cure* movement, and devoted one of the major sections of his *Varieties of Religious Experience* to this kind of religious belief.

The New Thought movement in America originally grew out of the teachings and practices of Phineas Quimby from Maine (1802–66), who used hypnotism to treat people who had various kinds of illnesses. He taught that disease was caused by false beliefs, and used hypnotism and other methods to change the way people thought and believed.

In the 1870's and 1880's, various American religious leaders began dropping Quimby's use of hypnotism, but taking his original underlying idea — that the way our minds thought had a powerful shaping effect on the world around us, including the health of our physical bodies — and combining this with strong religious beliefs. A number of religious denominations were formed,

including the Church of Divine Science (founded in 1888, the church to which Emmet Fox belonged), Unity Church (1889), and Religious Science (1927).²²

William James, in his famous book *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, sums up their beliefs this way:²³

The leaders in this faith have had an intuitive belief in the all-saving power of healthy-minded attitudes as such, in the conquering efficacy of courage, hope, and trust, and a correlative contempt for doubt, fear, worry, and all nervously precautionary states of mind. Their belief has in a general way been corroborated by the practical experience of their disciples; and this experience forms to-day a mass imposing in amount.

A.A. people in general never accepted the New Thought belief that *all* the physical ailments with which human beings could be afflicted could be cured simply by changing the way we thought (cancer, tuberculosis, diabetes, and so on). However alcoholism had a physical component — it was in fact a disease or illness or malady — and Alcoholics Anonymous people believed deeply that changing our inner thoughts could remove the irresistible compulsion to drink.

And even more importantly, the New Thought authors believed that when the external world appeared to be filled with all sorts of strife and conflict, and people who treated us badly, that we needed to look inside ourselves for the solution to these problems. If we went around all the time filled with resentment and rage, then we would continually find more and more people in the external world who were treating us in ways that made us feel even more resentment and rage. But if we concentrated on filling our minds with love, we would find, to our intense surprise sometimes, that

we were encountering more and more loving people everywhere we turned.

Belief in some of the basic principles of New Thought was part of the basic structure of the A.A. understanding of the world, and the New Thought theory about how deep spiritual healing could best be obtained. This understanding was not part of American frontier revivalism; nor was it truly a part of Oxford Group belief, although the Oxford Group did believe that it could produce changed lives. This belief that we could change the world around us by changing our own attitudes towards that world, came from New Thought, and in good A.A. meetings even today, one will find this attitude simply being assumed by the people who are trying to help newcomers.

*(a) Emmet Fox, The Sermon on the Mount,*²⁴ was the one New Thought book which was recommended reading for A.A. newcomers everywhere around in country in the 1930's and 1940's.

(b) James Allen, As a Man Thinketh, taught a Buddhist version of New Thought. The New Thought movement was deeply influenced in its earliest stages by the world of Asian religions: Hindu Vedanta thought and, especially in James Allen's case, Buddhism as well.²⁵ They believed that the phenomenal world external to our own minds was a form of what the Hindu tradition called *maya*, that is, they held that the material world around us was simply an *illusion*, a screen of false and unreal things which blocked us from the knowledge of what was actually real. And they taught that events within this realm of *maya* followed what Hindu and Buddhist spirituality called the law of karma.

New Thought spirituality taught that we captives to the world-illusion could be freed from the chains of karma by learning how to “see through” the illusion and discover its falsity. If we were feeling pain and suffering — including inner resentment, continual inner rage, fear, worry, anxiety, shame, and guilt, but also pain and suffering caused by external material things such as physical illness, problems in our relationships with other people, money problems, lawsuits, and so on — we could heal these problems simply by learning how to think about them differently.

James Allen, the author of *As A Man Thinketh*, was born in 1864 in Leicester, England, about fifty miles south of Sherwood Forest (the forest of Robin Hood fame). He eventually moved to Ilfracombe on the seacoast, down on the southwestern tip of England, to become a fulltime writer. He died in 1912 at the young age of 47, but managed to write nineteen books in all.

As A Man Thinketh, the second book he produced, was written in 1903 and quickly became a popular success. It has never been out of print in all the years that have followed.

The title is taken from a phrase in the Judeo-Christian Bible, found in the book of Proverbs, chapter 23, verse 7. Taken in context, that verse is a rather peculiar saying. If we look at verses 6 to 8 to get the full context, this is a warning not to accept gifts from evil people, because the gifts will always in the long run prove to be as foul and nasty as their giver (I am giving the King James Version of these verses here):

⁶ Eat thou not the bread of him that hath an evil eye, neither desire thou his dainty meats:

⁷ For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he: Eat and drink, saith he to thee; but his heart is not with thee.

⁸ The morsel which thou hast eaten shalt thou vomit up, and lose thy sweet words.

After using this biblical reference in the title of his book, James Allen immediately leaves the world of Judeo-Christian teaching behind, and begins Chapter 1 of his book with a long quote from the Buddhist scripture called the *Dhammapada*:²⁶

Thought in the mind hath made us. What we are
 By thought was wrought and built. If a man's mind
 Hath evil thoughts, pain comes on him as comes
 The wheel the ox behind If one endure in purity
 Of thought, joy follows him as his own shadow — sure.

The entire emphasis is shifted. The line in Proverbs is a warning to me about *other people*. It talks about the way another person with evil thoughts can give me gifts that look sweet on the surface, but turn out to be as evil as their giver. The passage from the Buddhist holy book is a warning to me about *myself*, and the evil which I will end up doing to myself if I continually think evil thoughts and act with evil intentions towards other people.

This is the classic Buddhist description of karma. And in his chapter on “Visions and Ideals,” James Allen praises Buddha in the highest possible language:

Buddha beheld the vision of a spiritual world of stainless
 beauty and perfect peace, and he entered into it.

This is what James Allen — and the people in the early Akron A.A. group — were offering to us: the power to reframe our minds so we (like Buddha) could enter “a spiritual world of stainless beauty and perfect peace.”

(c) *Winfred Rhoades, The Self You Have to Live With* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1938) was a much more practically oriented book. In many ways, it was at least as much a work of classical Protestant liberalism as it was a product of New Thought.

It eliminated most of the more esoteric metaphysical ideas, and simply explained, in a matter-of-fact way, how I could reframe the way my inner self thought about the world. This world of inner thought and emotion was “the self I had to live with,” and was far closer and more immediate than anything in the external world. Even if everything was going perfectly for me in the outer material world, as long as the ideas and feelings floating around in my mind were filled with pain and misery, I would find that I could not appreciate or enjoy anything in the external physical world.

But this was the basic message of the New Thought movement, so I believe it would be better to list this book in that category.

The Alcoholics Anonymous movement was deeply influenced by these ideas. So in the A.A. system of twelve steps, for example, the Fourth Step was designed to start ferreting out the major painful feelings which could dominate the life of my inner self, and the subsequent steps (fifth, sixth, seventh and so on) were designed to start healing those faulty ideas and feelings.

CHAPTER 11

The 1942 Reading List in the Akron Manual: Part Two

(5) The Classical Protestant Liberals

(a) *Bruce Barton, The Man Nobody Knows: A Discovery of the Real Jesus (1924, 1925).*²⁷ The author — Bruce Barton (1886–1967) was an American advertising executive and politician, who came from a Congregationalist background. He said that as a child he was very much put off by the books which featured the traditional image of Jesus as “the ‘lamb of God’ who was weak and unhappy and glad to die.” So he decided that he was going to write a different kind of book about Jesus.

Some of his images — Jesus as successful modern American businessman and corporate executive taking charge of the situation! — are amusing, and would be easy to ridicule and make fun of, but the presence of this book on the Akron List is nevertheless important.

It helps to establish something I have already argued in earlier pieces that I have written, namely that the “center of gravity” within A.A. in its earliest stages (the center of the bell-shaped distribution curve in earliest A.A.) lay with the kind of classical Protestant liberalism which we see in Adolf Harnack’s *What Is Christianity?* (he was a German Lutheran theologian), Horace

Bushnell's *Christian Nurture* (he was a New England Congregationalist), and the meditational book called *The Upper Room* (published in Nashville, Tennessee, by the Southern Methodists).

As a side note: at one extreme end of the bell-shaped curve there were a few agnostics and even some atheists in A.A., and at the other extreme end of the bell-shaped curve there were representatives of the old frontier-style Protestant revivalism with its threats of hellfire and damnation, and its insistence that everyone had to have a highly emotional “born again” conversion experience.

There were a few Jews in the A.A. fellowship (Irwin Meyerson was one famous example) and, beginning in the summer of 1939, steadily increasing numbers of Roman Catholics. This Catholic contingent eventually grew to 25% of the membership.

But *the center of the bell-shaped curve*, where most of the membership was massed, *lay with the Classical Protestant Liberals* — people who belonged to the so-called mainline Protestant denominations like the Methodists, the Northern Baptists (nowadays called the American Baptists), the Episcopalians, the Christian Church (also called the Disciples of Christ) — along with the Congregationalists and the Evangelical and Reformed Church (now joined together as the United Church of Christ). Some of the Lutherans and Presbyterians also fell over into the liberal camp.

Classical Protestant Liberalism was a religious movement which sought to *discard the Christianity of the Middle Ages* (with its ornate churches decorated with Gothic arches and huge stained glass windows, its clergy marching around in robes made of embroidered silk tapestry, and its elaborate philosophical doctrines

using fancy Greek and Latin words) and replace it with *the simple religion of the real historical Jesus*.

The endeavor to write an accurate account of Jesus's life and teaching — an attempt which provided one of the major roots of Classical Protestant Liberalism — went all the way back to the eighteenth century, around the time of the American Revolution. Protestant Liberalism of this sort was most definitely not just some newfangled modern idea. Albert Schweitzer's *Quest of the Historical Jesus* (1906) was one famous historical catalog of attempts to reconstruct a picture of the real historical Jesus, going all the way back to that late eighteenth century period.

Thomas Jefferson was one famous American figure from that early period who made the attempt to write a life of the real historical Jesus, producing what was called the *Jefferson Bible* in 1820, in which he discarded all the parts which seemed to him to have been incursions of obvious myth and legend, and then attempted to reconcile all of the contradictions and differences in chronology between the accounts of Jesus' life and message as given in the four different gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John).

Bruce Barton was following in that tradition, and in particular he was following the spirit of the enormously influential German theologian Adolf Harnack, who proclaimed in 1900 that we needed to toss aside most of the traditional complex doctrines of the Trinity, the Chalcedonian Definition of the union of the divine and human in Christ, the substitutionary doctrine of the atonement, and so on, and concentrate instead on producing a completely human picture of Jesus as a real live human being with a teaching which was very simple and phrased in easy-to-understand everyday

language but which also provided the key to living a truly good life.

So wherever Barton mentioned a traditional Christian doctrine about Christ's person and work — for example, the “divinity” of his mission — he tried to explain it, not in terms of ancient Greek and medieval Catholic philosophy and metaphysics, but as a kind of extension of rather commonplace things that would make sense to an everyday American (in this case, he argued, it referred to his total conviction about the sacredness of his mission). In other words, Barton was enthusiastically doing (from his own businessman's perspective) exactly what Harnack said that we should do.

Barton helped to make it clear to early A.A.'s that they were not to seek an other-worldly spirituality where they walked around two feet off the ground with their hands folded piously in front of them and tried to achieve the perfection of a plaster saint gazing soulfully upwards towards heaven. They were to seek a kind of spirituality which gave them the ability to take action, even forceful action if necessary, and learn how to deal with the real world on real world terms — while nevertheless not falling prey to petty vengefulness, trying to over-control, exploding in out-of-control rage, or other counterproductive kinds of responses.

When people referred to early A.A. as “a return to true first century Christianity,” this was what they were talking about: not some fundamentalist insistence on the literal inerrancy of the Bible, accompanied by threats of hellfire and damnation for anyone who questioned any of the traditional dogmas about Christ, but a group of people who wore simple, ordinary clothes and preached a simple commonsense message put in language which anyone could understand — people who had no expensive

buildings or organized clergy, but met in people's houses or rented rooms, owning only a coffee pot and a copy of the A.A. Big Book.

*(b) CLASSICAL PROTESTANT LIBERALISM COMBINED WITH NEO-FREUDIAN PSYCHIATRY — Ernest M. Ligon, *The Psychology of Christian Personality*, 1935.* This book gave a careful interpretation of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in terms of modern psychological theory. It was a very popular book back in that era: first published in 1935 (the year A.A. began), the copy I have is the 18th printing, dated 1950.²⁸

Ligon (1897-1984) originally came from Texas, and spent his childhood in Clay County, which was located north of Dallas and Fort Worth, right on the Oklahoma border.²⁹ The population of the whole county today is only 10,000 or so people. On the 1920 census, Ligon was listed as the pastor of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Byers, a tiny town in the northern part of the county, only three or four miles from the Red River which separates Texas from Oklahoma.

The Christian Church, also known as the Disciples of Christ, arose as part of the early frontier revivalist movement. Under the influence of classical Protestant liberalism, their denomination rejected all the creeds and divisive dogmas that developed in Christianity after the New Testament period, and sought to recreate the simple first-century Christianity of the historical Jesus.

Ernest Ligon earned a B.A. and M.A. from Texas Christian University, which was located in Fort Worth, Texas and was affiliated with the Disciples of Christ. But he then went to Yale University, where he did a seminary degree, as well as a Ph.D. in Psychology.

The Yale University seminary degree meant that he was trained in the best Protestant theology and biblical studies of that period. It

was classical Protestant liberalism, of course, so Ligon believed in modern biblical criticism, and acknowledged in his book that not all the sayings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount were genuine words of Jesus, or (in the case of some other passages) may not have originally been spoken by Jesus in those precise words. He was most definitely NOT a Fundamentalist.

An additional note: the Fundamentalist movement had gotten started in the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century, but was still having relatively little influence during the 1930's. And in fact, Protestant Fundamentalism seems to have had little if any effect at all on early A.A., as far as I can see from my own researches. I have found no A.A. writings from the early period arguing for any of the “Christian Fundamentals” which that movement was dedicated to defending, e.g. by asserting the verbal inerrancy of scripture or defending the doctrine of the Virgin Birth or the physical resurrection of Jesus, or attacking Darwin's theory of evolution, or arguing that the entire universe (with all the species of plants and animals which had ever existed) was created all at once around 4000 B.C.

In *The Psychology of Christian Personality*, Ligon analyzed the Sermon on the Mount and its relationship to modern psychology. He was basically a Neo-Freudian: the goal was to fully “integrate” the personality, and deal with problems in the individual's socialization, and so on. In the bibliography at the back of his book, he mentioned two books by the Austrian psychiatrist Alfred Adler (1870-1937), one of the most famous of the Neo-Freudians.

As an additional note: we remember that Bill Wilson's mother Emily Griffith Wilson traveled over to Vienna to study Adlerian psychiatry, and then came back to the United

States and worked in San Diego, California, as an Adlerian psychoanalyst. Through his mother and by many other routes, Bill Wilson knew a lot about Adlerian psychology. One could easily interpret pages 60–63 in the Big Book (the section right after the listing of the twelve steps, which explains how to work the Third Step) in terms of Adler's theory of what he called "the inferiority complex." These pages in the Big Book described the alcoholic as an egomaniac with an inferiority complex, as A.A. people sometimes phrase it. Pages 60–63 talked about alcoholics being "egotistical" and "egocentric," and described how this egomania, which invariably ended up failing to control the world, then drove these alcoholics back into the opposite extreme, where they developed massive inferiority complexes, filled with self-pity and fear, and the feeling that the society had wronged them, and that they had lost everything.

And one can also see the influence of other Neo-Freudian psychiatrists on Ligon's book. F. H. Allport's *Social Psychology* was listed in his bibliography (this was the brother of the psychologist Gordon W. Allport). The citing of this fundamental work on social psychology indicated the special importance of social factors in Ligon's psychological thought.

The term Neo-Freudian refers to a group of psychiatrists including Alfred Adler, Karen Horney, Harry Stack Sullivan, Eric Fromm, and Erik Erikson. (Carl Jung is sometimes also included in this group, but his ideas had no role in Ligon's thought.) The Neo-Freudians whom we are talking about here modified orthodox Freudian doctrine by talking about the importance of other issues such as social factors, interpersonal relations, and cultural influences in personality development and in the development of psychological illnesses and disorders. They believed that social

relationships were fundamental to the formation and development of personality. They tended to reject Freud's emphasis on sexual problems as the cause of neurosis, and were more apt to regard fundamental human psychological problems as psychosocial rather than psychosexual.

In his book, Ligon said that the two great dangers to spiritual and psychological health were inappropriate (1) anger and (2) fear — the same basic position taken in the Big Book when talking about how to work the Fourth Step. He defined what was meant by the “natural instincts” in ways closely similar to the chapter on the Fourth Step in *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*. My feeling is that Bill W. must have either read Ligon's book, or picked up some of Ligon's ideas from talking to people who had read this book (or at least read something by a closely similar psychologist).

A real issue for A.A. was that most psychologists and psychiatrists of that time were staunch atheists who tried to get their patients to toss away all that superstitious guilt-inducing nonsense (as they regarded it) that religious teachers had loaded them down with. So A.A. people eagerly praised psychologist William James and psychiatrist Carl Jung, two respectable professionals who nevertheless both acknowledged the importance of the spiritual dimension. Alcoholics Anonymous was not anti-psychological, not at all. But their program could not make use of any psychological or psychiatric theory which attacked the necessary spiritual dimension of recovery.

As a result, when the A.A. people in Akron discovered Yale-trained psychologist Ernest Ligon, who argued that Jesus' spiritual teaching in the Sermon on the Mount was in fact good psychology of the best sort, they eagerly and enthusiastically put his book on their recommended reading list.

(c) *CLASSICAL PROTESTANT LIBERALISM — THE PRAYERFUL SIDE — E. Stanley Jones, Abundant Living (1942).*

E. Stanley Jones (1884–1973) was a Methodist who went as a missionary to India. He started out as a man who was totally involved in the nineteenth century Protestant revivalist tradition. Asbury College, where he was educated, gives lots of details about Jones' early life on its website.³⁰ He had a conversion experience around 1901 when he was seventeen.

He went to Asbury College, as was noted, in Wilmore, a small town in the Kentucky Bluegrass region a little south of Lexington, Kentucky. Asbury was linked to the Methodist/Wesleyan tradition, but the most conservative group within that tradition, the so-called Second Blessing Methodists, who gave rise to the Holiness Movement. In its strongest form, they believed that to be saved, people first had to undergo a highly emotional conversion experience (of the sort which nineteenth century revivalism tried to produce) which was the first great work of God's grace. But then they eventually had to experience the second work of grace (a second highly emotional experience called the Second Blessing, which came in an instant), in which the person achieved *Christian perfection* (here in this life), after which the person would no longer commit conscious deliberate acts of sin properly so called, but be made instantaneously perfect *in an absolute sense*.

Asbury College said that while E. Stanley Jones was a student there:³¹

In February of 1905, Jones and three other men were having a private prayer meeting when, about 10 p.m., the Holy Spirit seemed to enter the room. Other students joined them, and revival spread across the Asbury campus and around the town of Wilmore. There were confessions of sin, powerful prayers, and new deeper commitments to the Lord.

In his spiritual autobiography, Jones said that this revival liberated him from a sense of superiority, which prepared him for future work as a missionary, opened his ears to the Holy Spirit, and led directly to his calling to the mission field.

Jones graduated from Asbury in 1906, and then in 1907 (when he was only twenty-three years old) went as a missionary to India, serving under the Board of Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church (the largest of the American Methodist denominations at that time). In India he met a fellow missionary, Mabel Lossing, whom he married in 1911.

The years in India slowly changed him: he turned into a classical Protestant liberal. In *Abundant Living*, he tells us that our job is “seeking the Kingdom of God” and “working to bring about the Kingdom of God on earth” — typical phrases from Protestant liberal authors at that time.

When the United States was forced into the Second World War in December 1941, E. Stanley Jones was visiting the United States, while his family had stayed behind in India. Non-military vessels were not allowed to cross the Pacific to Asia, so Jones was left totally stranded in the United States. He was 57 years old, and had spent over thirty years living and working in India. It was then that he wrote *Abundant Living*, which came out in 1942.

The book was written in such a way that it could be read from beginning to end as connected book. But it was divided up into 364 short sections, each of which could also be read all by itself as a morning devotional. Each of these little sections began with some Bible verses to read, followed by Jones’ discussion of some important topic, and finished with a short prayer at the end.

Were some of the Akron A.A. people trying to introduce this book as a replacement for *The Upper Room*? Or at least as an

alternative for those who preferred to use Jones' book? It goes into a good deal more detail about the spiritual life than *The Upper Room* does.

Hindu Vedanta thought — entering the Divine Silence. While he was over in India, E. Stanley Jones had not only begun turning into a Protestant liberal, he had also started learning a good deal about the spiritual traditions of that country. The place we can notice this most distinctly is in his discussion of prayer.

Abundant Living has a section on "Prayer is Surrender," and another entitled "The Morning Quiet Time." I would assume that he must have been influenced by the Oxford Group or some associated group in his choice of this latter phrase (the Oxford Group we remember came out of the missionary movement in Asia). Jones gives a good deal of detail on what we are supposed to be doing during this Morning Quiet Time, including talking about the role of the subconscious in this process.

He also talks about how to deal with the problem of "wandering thoughts," and what to do when we are confronted with what the medieval tradition called aridity (where it doesn't "feel" like we are in real contact with God, and where we have extraordinary difficulty forcing ourselves to pray at all). On both of these latter issues, he had clearly read John Wesley's *Standard Sermons* (probably back when he was a student at Asbury College) including especially Wesley's sermons on "Wandering Thoughts" and "Heaviness through Manifold Temptations."

Prayer is self-surrender, he tells us, it is "alert passivity." Prayer involves bodily relaxation but also spiritual relaxation. We must create "islands of solitude."

Above all, we need to learn how *to enter the Divine Silence*. This was a kind of prayer that had been held out as the highest kind

of prayer in parts of the medieval Catholic and Eastern Orthodox tradition: one can look for example at the famous work by St. Bonaventure (1221–1274) called *The Mind's Road to God*, or at the teaching of the medieval Hesychastic monks of Mt. Athos in Greece. One of the most important kinds of ancient Gnosticism taught that *Sigê* (silence) was the name of one of the archons who formed doorways for the ascent to a vision of the Unknown God at the top of the divine hierarchy.

The monks of Mt. Athos were called Hesychasts because they taught a method of meditative prayer designed to lead the mind to a state of total *hêsychia*, a Greek word which meant silence, stillness, rest, or quiet. Their method was based on Jesus' words in Matthew 6:5–8. "And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."

Metropolitan Kallistos Ware (who was one of the two people who gave me my oral examination on my doctoral thesis at Oxford University) described the Hesychast method as "the practice of inner prayer, aiming at union with God on a level beyond images, concepts and language."

But there is no indication that E. Stanley Jones would have learned about any of these medieval Christian prayer techniques in his early education, nor does he use any of the technical language

or phraseology that would indicate that he had learned anything from those teachers about methods for entering the Divine Silence.

What E. Stanley Jones does sound like, is someone who had learned about various standard theories of prayer in the Hindu Vedic tradition. Entry into the Divine Silence was the goal of certain kinds of Hindu prayer and meditation.

When Richmond Walker wrote *Twenty-Four Hours a Day* in 1948, the “little black book,” which was published at first through the Daytona Beach A.A. group in Florida, soon became the standard A.A. meditational book all over the United States, replacing everything which had been used before. I think it very likely that he had read E. Stanley Jones’ *Abundant Living*, because so many of Jones’ ideas also show up in Walker’s book.

But if Walker did not get the idea of entering the Divine Silence from E. Stanley Jones, he shows signs of also having been in contact with Hindu spiritual teachers, such as in Walker’s case, the Hindu yogi named Paramahansa Yogananda, the author of *Autobiography of a Yogi*.

Why the turn to Richmond Walker’s book in A.A. in 1948? E. Stanley Jones’ book was still centered on Jesus Christ, and learning to use him as our spiritual focal point and source of divine power, and by 1948 many A.A.’s were no longer comfortable with that. Walker on the other hand had no references to Christ in his little volume.

But Walker attended services at the Unitarian Church all his life, from his childhood through to his old age, and this church was part of the classical Protestant liberal tradition, even if well over on the radical wing. So what we have in both Walker’s book and E. Stanley Jones’ book is classical Protestant liberalism combined with a few motifs and practices drawn from the Hindu tradition.

The Seven Ways of God's Guidance: I suspect that E. Stanley Jones may have deliberately set out his own ideas about seeking divine guidance in *Abundant Living* to counter the widespread interest in Oxford Group ideas. Jones made no mention at all of using automatic writing techniques, the most distinctive feature of Oxford Group practice, but instead laid out a quite different system, which he called the Seven Ways of God's Guidance.

(6) Roman Catholic

The Unchanging Friend, a series published by the Bruce Publishing Co. in Milwaukee. Neither Mel Barger nor I were able to come up with any specific information about this publication.

But William George Bruce (1856–1949) was a well-known Roman Catholic figure who set up a publishing company in 1891 which continued turning out large numbers of publications all the way down to 1968 (when it was bought by Crowell Collier and Macmillan): magazines and journals, and two thousand books.

Many of these books were on Roman Catholic religious subjects, so this was probably the largest Catholic publisher in the United States during that period.

Although Bruce was a layperson (he was married and had three children) he was held in considerable respect by the Roman Catholic Church: in 1920, Pope Benedict XV made him a Knight of St. Gregory, and in 1947 (the year he turned ninety-one), the University of Notre Dame awarded him its prestigious Laetare Medal.

The presence of *The Unchanging Friend* on the Akron reading list is a sign of the dramatic change in the Roman Catholic presence in Alcoholics Anonymous by the summer of 1942, when the list was assembled.

It was only three years earlier, in April and May of 1939, when the first Roman Catholics in large numbers began coming into A.A., beginning in Cleveland, where the A.A. group there finally split with Akron on May 10, 1939 to make it possible for these Catholics to belong to their group. In October 1939, the Akron alcoholics finally stopped attending the weekly Oxford Group meeting at the home of T. Henry and Clarace Williams, and began holding their formal weekly meeting at Dr. Bob's house, now set up as a non-Oxford Group meeting, which only alcoholics and their spouses could attend. Alcoholics Anonymous was now officially open to Roman Catholics. In January 1940, this Akron A.A. meeting had grown so large that it was moved to King School.

Around the same time, in January 1940, Dr. Bob got Sister Ignatia to set up an AA-based alcoholism treatment ward at St. Thomas Hospital. Sister Ignatia set it up as a quiet arrangement with her superior, Sister Clementine. The two nuns however made it clear that A.A. had to break all ties with the Oxford Group, if any of these remained. St. Thomas Hospital, although run by a Roman Catholic religious order, was "nonsectarian" (her word), and admitted patients regardless of their religious affiliation. The Oxford Group on the other hand was a "sect" (again her word, what we would today call a "cult") which showed no tolerance within their group for anyone who held beliefs at variance with their own.

So the AA program had to be run the same way as St. Thomas Hospital, as a non-sectarian organization for the treatment of alcoholism, which offered help to everyone in need, regardless of religious affiliation, and which did not make anyone listen to people preaching any kind of religious dogma as a precondition for

receiving treatment. Roman Catholics in Alcoholics Anonymous would not try to preach their faith to the Protestants, but they would expect mutual tolerance back the other way.

The floodgates were opened, and by the Fall of 1940, it was estimated that Alcoholics Anonymous had become 25% Catholic.³² This figure is particularly impressive, because Roman Catholics at that time made up only one sixth of the U.S. population, which meant that the percentage of Catholics in A.A. was actually higher than it was in the general American population.

The fact that *The Unchanging Friend* was the Catholic work chosen to put on the 1942 list was a sign however, that the Akron A.A. group wanted to supplement or replace the two works which Sister Ignatia had been using at St. Thomas Hospital. After her treatment program had been set up in January 1940, most new alcoholics who joined the Akron A.A. group were sent there first for detoxing.

When an alcoholic “graduated” from the treatment program, Sister Ignatia gave the patient a copy of one of these two books:

Thomas à Kempis’ *De imitatione Christi* (in English *The Imitation of Christ*, or in the translation Sister Ignatia used, *The Following of Christ*). This was a work which came out of the late medieval *devotio moderna*, which taught a deep skepticism about the scholastic theologians at the universities and all the minute theological distinctions they made in their discussions of the hundreds of complex doctrines and dogmas they had devised.

Or she gave them a little meditational book composed of excerpts from the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius Loyola, the man who had been the founder of the Jesuit order. The *Spiritual Exercises* was used to train Roman Catholic monks and nuns in the spiritual life in a large number of

religious orders, not just the Jesuits. Sister Ignatia (who took the saint's name as her religious name) had been trained in the *Exercises* when she became a nun in the religious order called the Sisters of Charity of Saint Augustine.

Again, it is not known why the Akron Manual chose *The Unchanging Friend* instead of one of those two works to represent the Catholic understanding of spirituality.

But in the next year (1943), a Roman Catholic priest in Indianapolis named Father Ralph Pfau, who was both an alcoholic and an addict, came into the A.A. program and got sober. And in 1947 he published the first of his fourteen Golden Books, which quickly began being read by A.A. members all around the U.S. and Canada (and in Spanish translation in countries like Mexico). He became one of the three most-published early A.A. authors — only Bill Wilson and Richmond Walker (author of *Twenty-Four Hours a Day*) ended up selling more books — and Catholics finally got their full voice in the program.

But the Akron Manual's gesture in including a Catholic work in their recommended reading list was a symbol that A.A. was quickly going to break its way out of being a purely Protestant-aligned spiritual program.

Part II

Four Different Spiritual Traditions

CHAPTER 12

Early American Frontier Revivalism

In the A.A. meetings held in Akron and Cleveland from 1938 to 1942, we see a combination of elements drawn from early American frontier revivalism, the Oxford Group, Emmet Fox, and the Upper Room. In particular, *American frontier revivalism* (and the *Protestant evangelical theology* which lay behind it), often had a major influence on early A.A. beliefs and practices.

The beginnings of the evangelical movement and modern Protestant revival preaching

What we call evangelical Protestantism and modern revival preaching was developed in the early eighteenth century by two brilliant young theologians, a generation before the American Revolution began.

Jonathan Edwards in colonial Massachusetts (1703–1758) was the one who first developed the theories and methodology of revivalism and preached the first modern revival services. He gave detailed descriptions of this kind of preaching in his book *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton*, which came out in 1737.

Edwards was also America's greatest native-born philosophical theologian. There has been no match for him anywhere in the now-getting-close-to three centuries that have followed.

We should make special notice of one part of Edwards' methodology which I would call his use of the "Jonathan Edwards test." He interpreted the experience of conversion in ancient Augustinian illuminationist terms as the gracious act of a God who was Truth Itself, who gave us by his grace a new insight into who we had been and who we could be. When it was a real conversion, it produced a sweeping psychic change, which gave us a whole new set of values AND the power to begin acting on the basis of those new values. In a small New England town, like the one Edwards lived in, everyone knew what everyone else was doing, so the way one determined whether a person had really had a genuine conversion experience, was to see if the person's behavior suddenly underwent an impressive change for the better, and *stayed* changed over the months and years that followed.

Early A.A. inherited a number of early evangelical beliefs, and in particular Alcoholics Anonymous worked to produce a profound psychic change in people, just as Jonathan Edwards had done, based on new insights into the truth of what they really had been doing with their lives, and how they could become far better people. And the A.A. people likewise measured their success on totally pragmatic grounds. Did the people actually quit drinking? did they quit getting themselves in trouble by dangerous explosions of anger? did they begin acting more responsibly both at home and at work? were they able to stop losing so much time wallowing in purposeless shame, guilt, self-pity, self-hatred, and crippling depression?

John Wesley (1703–1791), a priest of the Church of England (what we call the Episcopal Church in the United States), was a biblical and classics scholar who taught at Oxford University in England, and founded the Methodist Church. He obtained a copy of Jonathan Edwards’ book, and on May 24, 1738 went to a meeting in London of Moravians (a sect of German pietists from the Lutheran part of Germany) where he had his own conversion experience in which, as he put it, “he felt his heart strangely warmed.” In April 1739, he preached his first revival, to miners and their families, in an open field near Bristol, England. He and his followers, who were nicknamed the *Methodists*, subsequently began preaching revivals all over the British Isles in the same way that American revivalists (following in Jonathan Edwards’ footsteps) had already begun preaching in the Thirteen Colonies.

Perhaps partially because of the Moravian pietistic influence which had started to become part of his life beginning in 1735, Wesley regarded the conversion experience as a quiet but profound change in our hearts at the emotional and feeling level. I suddenly felt a deep awareness that God loved me, and would help me and watch over me, and would not condemn me for anything I had done or not done in the past, if I were willing to just accept his free offer of help.

Later on, A.A. likewise tended to emphasize quiet and subtle changes, and new awarenesses, developed deep in our hearts. These were ideas which came from Wesley and the Methodist tradition via *The Upper Room* (an influential Methodist devotional booklet). This tendency was developed in even greater detail by Richmond Walker, the second most-published A.A. author, in his meditational book called *Twenty-Four Hours a Day*.

Tent revivals and camp meetings on the American frontier, and the Keswick Convention in England

In the American version of the evangelical movement, Protestant ministers began preaching to large crowds of people, not just on the east coast, but as part of the spread westward of the American frontier, starting up again with renewed vigor in the nineteenth century following the conclusion of the American Revolution. Sometimes a tent would be erected in an open field to preach a revival, and a camp meeting would be held over a several-day period. People attending the revival would be continually prodded to come down to the front and kneel at the altar, and accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

In England, the evangelicals, in addition to preaching revivals in the coal mining camps and impoverished big city slums, eventually began a major meeting called the Keswick Convention (pronounced KEZ-ik) in 1875. It was held annually in the beautiful Lake District up in the northern part of the country. This was where Frank Buchman, the founder of the Oxford Group, had his conversion experience on July 27, 1908.

The influence of frontier revivalism on earliest A.A. slowly began fading

The strong influence of the American frontier revivalist movement can often be seen in early A.A. This was true particularly in the earliest stages of the movement, although visibly starting to be greatly reduced by April 1939 in the pages of the newly published A.A. Big Book. Already in the Big Book, it should be noted, the name of Jesus was only mentioned once in the

first part of the work (and that in a skeptical context), and very few references were made there to individual Bible passages.

And then over the course of the 1940's, beginning already in the A.A. pamphlets which appeared in 1942 and 1943, publications by A.A. authors usually made no references at all to the figure of Jesus, and biblical references progressively vanished completely or almost completely in the years that followed.

And traditional Protestant evangelical hymn-singing was totally absent from A.A. from the very beginning. John Wesley, one of the two eighteenth-century co-founders of modern evangelical Protestantism, had started the practice of using hymn-singing as an alternative way of introducing strong ritual elements into Protestant group worship, using them as a replacement for the traditional elaborate Catholic rituals. John Wesley and his brother Charles wrote a large number of hymns themselves for the new Methodist movement, and the enthusiastic singing of these hymns, along with others written by Protestant figures like Isaac Watts, became traditional parts of Protestant worship services in the English-speaking world, including a heavy use in American frontier revival-type services.

One of the possible reasons why A.A. immediately dropped the use of the hymns written by John and Charles Wesley and Isaac Watts, was that they had such a strong Christian doctrinal content. They contained careful teachings about the substitutionary doctrine of the atonement (Christ's blood shed for us), the real presence of Christ transmitted through the bread and wine of the eucharist, and so on.

But for whatever reason, this hymn-singing was absent from early A.A. gatherings from the very beginning, and A.A. people also quickly discarded the long extemporaneous prayers which

were so much a part of traditional revivalist-based Protestant services.

Surrendering to God on our knees

On the other hand, in the earliest days, *new converts to A.A. were often asked to make a classic early American frontier revivalist style surrender to God (and/or Jesus) on their knees.* On the surface at least, this (or something much like it) seems to have been what was originally implied by the wording of the Third Step on p. 59 in the Big Book: “Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God” And we could make a similar interpretation of the Third Step Prayer on page 63 of the Big Book:

“God, I offer myself to Thee — to build with me and to do with me as Thou wilt. Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do Thy will. Take away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of Thy Power, Thy Love, and Thy Way of life. May I do Thy will always!” We thought well before taking this step making sure we were ready; that we could at last abandon ourselves utterly to Him.

(On the other hand, the explanation of Step Three which we see on pp. 60–63 of the Big Book makes the step sound a good deal more like Emmet Fox’s teaching in *The Sermon on the Mount* and in his little piece on “The Golden Key.” We will discuss Emmet Fox’s contribution to A.A. later on, but for now, let us just observe that the creative combination of different pre-existing religious elements was part of Alcoholics Anonymous teaching and practice from the very beginning.)

And the practice of requiring *all* A.A. newcomers to get down on their knees and make a traditional Protestant revivalist style prayer of commitment to God and/or Jesus seems to have begun disappearing fairly rapidly.

Likewise, the final pre-printed manuscript of the Big Book gave the Seventh Step as “Humbly, on our knees, asked Him to remove our shortcomings — holding nothing back,” but shortly afterwards, in the first printed version of the Big Book in the Spring of 1939, the phrase “on our knees” was removed, and this step was changed to read simply “Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.”

CHAPTER 13

The Oxford Group

The Oxford Group had its foundations in the experiences of Protestant foreign missionaries from the English-speaking world who went into non-Christian lands during the latter nineteenth century and early twentieth century.³³ These missionaries had rapidly realized that there was no way of setting up a tent revival in a country like China or Egypt or India where large crowds could be gathered to hear a revival preacher delivering hours-long sermons and exhorting the people in the crowd to come down to the altar rail and get down on their knees and be saved.

Instead, the missionary who wanted to convert people to Christianity had to learn to practice some kind of one-on-one missionary strategy. One of the best methods worked out was the one described in a book by Howard A. Walter called *Soul-Surgery: Some Thoughts on Incisive Personal Work*, which was published in 1919.³⁴ Walter was an American Congregationalist (the same Protestant denomination to which Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob had belonged when they were children). While serving as a missionary, trying to convert people to Christianity in the Muslim city of Lahore in what is now Pakistan, Walter died of influenza at the age of 35. He was yet another victim of the worldwide 1918 flu epidemic which killed 50 to 100 million people all around the world (three to five percent of the world's population).

Howard A. Walter said that the foreign missionary had to practice the 5 C's, which in his version were listed as Confidence, Confession, Conviction, Conversion, and Conservation. In the Oxford Group later on, Conservation was changed to Continuance.

1. Confidence. I had to gain the other person's *confidence* or I would get nowhere.

2. Confession. This was usually best done by *confessing* my own moral problems and explaining how God had removed them. I had to quit trying to appear morally superior, and I had to quit "talking down" to the other person. I had to practice real humility, and begin talking with the person I was trying to convert and confessing to that person some of the really bad things I had done myself, the memory of which had been destroying my life. And I had to confess my own most deeply felt moral problems to the other person with thorough and ruthless honesty.

3. Conviction. I needed to remember that the person to whom I was trying to carry the message always had at least one big sin or character defect or shameful behavior which the person was trying to keep secret from everybody else. These people were inevitably trying to stay in denial, and give excuses and alibis, and keep secret — even from themselves — the full realization of how bad their behavior was. The people whose lives I wanted to change, had to become convinced that their present spiritual condition was too miserable and horrible to endure any longer. They had to become willing to change. And this meant that they had to be made to stand *convicted* in their own eyes, and admit to themselves how really terrible and indefensible their behavior was. Until that had happened, they could never be motivated to really change.

4. *Conversion.* The people to whom I was trying to pass the message had to undergo a real soul change or psychic change which led them to make a full surrender to God, a surrender and commitment in which (as the Oxford Group put it later on) they gave “as much of themselves as they could to as much of God as they understood.”

We need to remember that this method was first worked out, as we have said, in the context of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Protestant foreign missionary work in countries where the majority of the population were Muslims, Hindus, Taoists, Confucianists, or members of some other non-Christian religion. You cannot do effective missionary work among people who do not accept anything about Christianity at all — who do not really even know much about genuine Christianity — by insisting that they have to accept, from the beginning and all in one fell swoop, all of the hundreds of doctrines and dogmas that your particular form of Christianity adheres to.

And A.A. likewise later discovered that practicing alcoholics, with their mostly confused memories of their over-simplified childhood religious teaching, were often no better prepared than people with no religious background at all, when it came to understanding what a true conversion involved. So for them too, it had to be regarded as an acceptable conversion experience (third step), if they just gave “as much of themselves as they could to as much of God as they understood.”

In the doctrine of the 5 C’s, a real conversion automatically meant going out and “making restitution” as the Oxford Group called it: that is, the new converts had to reach out, right on the spot, to a small number of people whom they had hated and

resented in their hearts or hurt by their actions, and they needed to make immediate amends to these people in some kind of way.

This was one of the most distinctive features about Oxford Group practice, and one that A.A. elevated perhaps to even greater importance than the Oxford Group. In what eventually became the fully developed form of A.A. practice, newcomers wrote long written lists of amends which they owed, and might end up having to spend weeks and months laboriously carrying these amends out. It is true of course that Protestantism and Catholicism both encouraged people to atone for their sins, and that this atonement might well include trying to recompense other people for anything we might have done to harm them. But this was not emphasized nearly as much, and I do not in fact know of any other major Christian group which tried to systematize making amends (or making restitution) and formalize it to so great a degree.

It does need to be noted that there was nothing in Howard A. Walters' original system, or the Oxford Group method derived from it, that even remotely resembled the present day A.A. fourth step involving a long written inventory and a detailed spiritual self-diagnosis, nor the equally long and involved A.A. process of carrying out one's eighth and ninth step amends. As far as I have been able to determine, writing out a truly long and detailed fourth step inventory may have been derived from a Roman Catholic practice in which people sometimes made what was called a general confession. At any rate, this practice of making greatly detailed self-inventories did not start being introduced into A.A. practice until a large number of Roman Catholics had joined, a process that did not begin until October 1939.

5. *Continuance.* Life-changers had to remember that this was where the hard work began. The people whom you had been

working on, had to be helped and encouraged in every possible way, to continue in this good new life which they had now chosen. The person carrying the message had to provide a long term *continuing* context where the other people would not simply fall back into their old ways. This was absolutely necessary, if one wished to do any permanent good. This meant a program of regular group meetings and fellowshiping with other people in the program, accepting advice and criticism from them, practicing prayer and meditation and quiet times, reading good spiritual literature to learn more about the spiritual life, turning to God for guidance whenever we had to make decisions, and so on. And becoming carriers of the message ourselves was the keystone of continuance. In other words, the missionary group needed to practice the equivalent of A.A. steps 10, 11, and 12.

Frank Buchman, the founder of the Oxford Group, worked as a foreign missionary in India and the Far East in 1915 and 1917-1919, immediately *before* he started the Oxford Group (1920-1929). There in 1920, he simply adapted these ideas from the foreign missionary field and began using them to do evangelical work among university students, first at Cambridge University and then at Oxford University,³⁵ the two institutions in England where the elite sent their children to study. The groups of dedicated converts which Buchman set up in England quickly began to include, not just young students from these elite universities, but also older people, primarily men and women who were fairly affluent or who held important positions in the government, the military, or the church.

This was one of the factors which attracted a number of the people from early A.A. history and pre-history to join the Oxford Group. Rowland Hazard was an extremely wealthy and successful

American businessman. Ebby Thacher came from a family of high achievers in business, politics, and the church. Dr. Bob Smith, M.D., was a skilled surgeon. And Bill Wilson wanted desperately to be wealthy and respected. The Oxford Group was a Protestant evangelical movement, but it was not made up of poor and uneducated men and women, meeting in ramshackle wooden buildings, and screaming out hymns at the top of their lungs while talking in tongues — it was a group which those who were possessed of a little bit of snobbery, perhaps, could join without personal embarrassment.

Frontier revivalist conversion experiences vs. Oxford Group practices in early A.A. In Alcoholics Anonymous, during the period from 1938 to 1942 which we are focusing on in this book, there were many instances in which new members were made to get down on their knees, either in a meeting or in private, and make the same kind of prayer that had been demanded of new converts back during the tent revivals of the American frontier period.

This frontier revivalist-style conversion experience was in fact *very different from normal Oxford Group practice*, where they instead wanted the person to do one of the following two things:

- (a) It could be regarded as *an Oxford Group conversion experience* if the person immediately began making restitution (just like making amends in A.A. Step Nine). This was what happened in the conversion experience which Frank Buchman, the founder of the Oxford Group, underwent while attending the Keswick Convention, an annual gathering of Protestant evangelicals in the Lake District of England. And this was the way that Dr. Bob's

conversion experience, after he had his last drink, was described in early A.A. lore.

(b) Or it could be regarded as *an Oxford Group conversion experience* if the new convert suddenly confessed his or her deepest, most secret sin to another human being (like A.A. Step Five). This was what happened in the story of the conversion of Sam Shoemaker, the Episcopalian priest who later became the head of the Oxford Group in the United States. And this was the goal which Frank Buchman himself often seemed to be trying to reach in his own Oxford Group missionary work.

Now while it is true that a very few A.A. people (like Dr. Bob for example) had an Oxford Group kind of conversion experience, nevertheless early A.A. people as a whole tended to regard *the A.A. foundational conversion experience (the third step)*:

(a) as an American frontier revivalist surrender to God on one's knees,

(b) or as a decision to begin practicing Emmet-Fox-type acceptance (in the New Thought manner) by stopping their continual attempts to control everything in the world around them.

The Four Absolutes: Dr. Bob used the Oxford Group teaching about the four absolutes to help make his everyday decisions, and the practice was carried over notably into early Cleveland A.A., where the Cleveland intergroup office still sells a small pamphlet describing the absolutes.³⁶

The idea of the Four Absolutes was invented by a man named Robert E. Speer (1867-1947), who did only one year of the three-

year beginning seminary program at Princeton —he was in no way a trained theologian or biblical scholar — but then went straight to work for the Presbyterian foreign missionary program. Eleven years later he wrote *The Principles of Jesus* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1902). In Chapter 6, “Jesus and Standards” (pp. 33-36), Speer laid out his theory of what he called absolute principles:

Jesus was ... the teacher of absolute principles. He made no comparisons, no abatements for human lust or weakness. Perfection was His standard (Matt. 5:48). He had attained it (John 8:29). He demanded it. We are to be His disciples in this. Right is to be right. Thinking it right or thinking it wrong does not make a thing right or wrong. It is right or wrong irrespective of our thought about it. To know whether it is right or wrong, drag it into Jesus’ presence, and see how He looks at it and how it looks before Him.

Speer defined the Four Absolutes as follows, citing Bible verses in defense of his theories:

Jesus set up an absolute standard of truth If Satan is the father of lies, how can any lie be justifiable? Jesus did not make truthfulness depend upon its profitableness or its loss. Men must be true and speak the truth regardless of consequences.

Jesus set up an absolute standard of unselfishness. This was His own spirit (Mark 10:45; Luke 22:27). The incarnation was the great self-emptying (Phil. 2:7). The kingdom with its service of God and man was to be above home, friends, comfort, life (Luke 14:26 ; Matt. 19:29). He made no room for reservations.

Jesus set up an absolute standard of purity. He tolerated no uncleanness whatsoever. The inner chambers of imagery and desire must be pure (Mark 7:15). A hand or an eye,

outer or inner sin, must be sacrificed to the claims of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:29, 30).

Jesus set up an absolute standard of love (John 13:34). Neither dirt (Luke 16:20), nor poverty (Luke 14:13), nor social inferiority (Luke 7:39), were annulments of the law of love. He Himself loved to the limit (John 13:1), and with no abatements. The law of love makes it impossible to say : “I don’t like those people. I can’t love them.”

The only other author I have found who mentions the Four Absolutes (outside of Oxford Group and early A.A. sources) was a man named Henry B. Wright (1877-1923) who wrote a book called *The Will of God and A Man’s Lifework* (New York: YMCA, 1909).³⁷ He talked about the Four Absolutes on pages 167–207 of that work.

Purity was one of the absolutes, we remember, and to an even greater degree than Speer, he interpreted Absolute Purity in totally sexual terms (p. 167):

For this is the will of God that ye abstain from fornication, that each one of you know how to possess himself of his own vessel in sanctification and honor but fornication, and all uncleanness, let it not even be named among you nor filthiness Set your mind on the things that are above put to death therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire.

The Oxford Group, in promoting Absolute Purity, made continual attacks on masturbation, and on homosexual, lesbian, and transgender people. With a deep Victorian prudery, Wright gave a long list of things that had to be avoided in order to remain “pure” (p. 181):

Impure imaginations and thoughts.
 Objects pure in themselves which by association recall impure images.
 Slighting references to women.
 Ballet — Many forms of vaudeville and much in modern drama.
 Many modern so-called physical culture publications.
 Biographs and living pictures.
 Advertisements which appeal to the passions and much which goes under the name of “art” in modern magazines.
 Certain forms of souvenir postal cards.
 Some fiction, art. and dress styles.
 Flirtation where no true bond of love is intended.

As another example of the actual way Wright understood these so-called absolute principles when translated into practice, he gave the following list of ways that we could fail to meet the requirement of Absolute Love (pages 211–212):

Laziness.
 Cowardice.
 Not expressing thanks for gifts or favors (especially tuition scholarship in college).
 Never telling your parents or friends—those in the intimate circle—how much you think of them (i.e. tell your mother that you love her and appreciate what she has deprived herself of for your sake).
 Neglect of prayer and church attendance.
 Neglect of duties as citizen—voting, protest, etc.
 Refusal to help (not necessarily to give money to) beggars and tramps because they are probably fakes
 Avoidance of marriage and children.
 Neglect of correspondence with family or friends.

It should be noted that no trained New Testament scholar has ever attempted to use the Four Absolutes to interpret the New Testament or the teaching of Jesus. They are not helpful tools and they almost totally fail to understand the world in which early Christians lived, and their real concerns. People like Jesus, Paul, and the evangelist John were trying to teach truly profound spiritual truths. The Four Absolutes in the way that Speer and Wright laid them out were basically just statements of Victorian prudery, coupled with attempts to proof-text in order to try to read their rules back into the mouths of Jesus, Paul, and John.

Once they were fully independent of the Oxford Group, the A.A. fellowship quickly sought to reinterpret or totally replace the Four Absolutes. From a very early point, Bill Wilson was deeply opposed to setting absolute virtue as our goal. The Four Absolutes were never mentioned in the Big Book, which came out in 1939. Likewise, the overwhelming majority of Alcoholics Anonymous members quickly began to reject the Four Absolutes: they did not want them to become part of standard A.A. teaching.

The Cleveland A.A. intergroup office prepared a small pamphlet where they radically reinterpreted the absolutes. Absolute Purity had originally been a rule condemning masturbation, homosexuality, and transgender behavior; they changed it into a commandment simply to recognize the difference between “right” and “wrong.” Absolute Love, somewhat peculiarly, became for them a commandment to do that which was “beautiful” instead of that which was “ugly,” without any clear explanation as to what this phraseology actually meant.³⁸

Then — already at a very early date — the A.A. movement as a whole began totally replacing the Four Absolutes. First they began

sending newcomers to the description of loving behavior in 1 Corinthians 13, which gave much clearer instructions on how good people were actually supposed to behave. Then after the Twelve and Twelve was published in 1953, A.A. members were sent to the St. Francis Prayer on page 99.

In June 1943, a set of beginners lessons were drawn up in Detroit, and subsequently came to be reprinted by A.A. groups all over the United States, from one coast to the other, because it was the most successful set of beginners lessons ever written. It was called the Detroit Pamphlet, the Washington D.C. Pamphlet, the Tablemate, or the Table Leader's Guide.³⁹ It gave a much longer list of virtues, but experience showed that newcomers who read and studied this, found it much clearer than the extremely vague list of Four Absolutes. And to be blunt, the Four Absolutes never in fact talked explicitly about some of the biggest and most common things which alcoholics tended to do wrong.

The Detroit Pamphlet list ran as follows: Honesty, Simple Justice, Fairness, Generosity, Truthfulness, Modesty, Humility, Honest Pride in work well done, Simplicity, Patience, Industry (go to work and really work), and then (most important of all) Faith, Hope, and Trust:

FAITH — If we have lost faith we must work desperately hard to get it back. Ask God to give us faith in him, our fellow man, and ourselves. **HOPE** — If we have lost hope we are dead pigeons. Only those who have been cruelly hurt and in desperate need can know the wonderful sense of security that lies in hope for better things. **TRUST** — Since our own self-sufficient conduct of our own life has failed us, we must put our trust in God, who has never failed.

The Oxford Group was not a church or denomination of its own. Frank Buchman, the founder of the Oxford Group, started out as a Lutheran minister in America in Pennsylvania Dutch country, where many of the German Lutherans came from Lutheran pietist backgrounds. The pietist movement had begun in the Lutheran church in the late seventeenth century. Pietists went to their regular church service on Sunday, but would also meet in people's homes during the week for bible study and devotion. A great emphasis was placed on developing a spirituality based not on doctrines and church rituals, but on developing a religious life based on *Gefühl* (the German word for "feeling"), that is, the kind of deep religious feeling that went beyond the purely rational, and could transform people's lives.

In a way similar to the practices of the little German Lutheran pietist groups, Frank Buchman designed the Oxford Group as a nondenominational group of especially devout people who would continue to go to their normal Sunday morning church service of whatever denomination they came from (Lutheran, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, or whatever), but would meet on a regular basis in the Oxford Group members' homes or similar places, and study the bible at that meeting and work on becoming better Christians. Laypeople were allowed to lead these meetings — you did not need to have ordained clergy present to run things.

The Oxford Group people were sometimes described as true "first century Christians" because, like Jesus' earliest disciples, *they had no expensive church buildings or priests and bishops marching around in fancy robes.*

We also see a lot of this Lutheran pietist character coming across in early Alcoholics Anonymous in important ways:

- (1) The use of house meetings in early A.A.
- (2) The insistence that any members who wished to continue belonging to an established organized religion be encouraged to keep on doing so.
- (3) And a rejection of “religion” (in the sense of narrowly defined doctrines and dogmas and complex church rituals) in favor of “spirituality.” What early A.A. people meant by that word spirituality was having as our prime concern *what our hearts could “feel” inside* — that meant the realm of *Gefühl*, as this psychological layer of *feeling* had been called in traditional Lutheran pietist terminology, rather than the realm of cold rational analysis. When over-intellectualism began to be used as a way of avoiding feeling (and thereby recognizing) our actual emotions, it became a form of denial. If we spent too much of our energy on playing endless logic-chopping games — about “correct” doctrines and dogmas or anything else — we would fail to pay attention to the subtle cues that allowed us to become aware of, not only deep emotions and feelings, but also moral issues and the sacred dimension of the universe.

The Oxford Group and alcoholism. Many American Protestants of that period were totally opposed to the drinking of alcohol. The Women’s Christian Temperance Union was founded for example back in 1874, and was famous for invading bars and saloons and busting up the liquor bottles on the shelves. American voters (most of them Protestants) who were totally opposed to drinking managed to put nation-wide Prohibition in place from

1920 to 1933, during which time the sale of alcoholic beverages in the United States was totally outlawed.

So the Oxford Group was kind of automatically opposed to the drinking of alcohol, and like many other Protestant groups of that time (the Southern Baptists, the Methodists, and so on) they believed that an alcoholic who had a sincere conversion experience would automatically be able to stop drinking completely and permanently.

But in fact the Oxford Group was not very successful in permanently stopping alcoholics from drinking. Rowland Hazard and Ebby Thacher were able to stop drinking for a while after joining the Oxford Group, but not permanently. Richmond Walker, who eventually became the second most-published early A.A. author, managed to get sober for two and a half years in the Oxford Group, but went back to drinking, and did not obtain genuine long term sobriety until he joined A.A. in May 1942.

The problem was that the initial burst of enthusiasm which accompanied the conversion experience tended to fade away with time. People tended to slowly move away from “riding on a pink cloud” of joy and high spirits, until they suddenly found themselves plunged back into the Dark Night of the Soul. And at that point, if they were alcoholics and no one was helping them in the right kind of way, they would go back to the bottle.

After Bill W. was released from Towns Hospital on December 18, 1934 and began seriously participating in Oxford Group activities, he was only able to stay away from alcohol with great effort (and only by the skin of his teeth) until he met Dr. Bob in Akron, Ohio on May 12, 1935 and the two of them began working together to form the new Alcoholics Anonymous movement. And Dr. Bob had been going to Oxford Group meetings since March

1935 without being able to quit drinking at all, until he and Bill Wilson began developing the new A.A. program.

We also must not forget that Bill Wilson later got kicked out of the Oxford Group in New York City in mid-1937 *for spending too much time working with alcoholics*. The New York people did not want their Oxford Group organization turned into a recovery program for shambling drunks.

What we need to remember here most of all — this is extremely important — is that the Oxford Group was never designed or intended to be a program primarily aimed at getting alcoholics sober. Before A.A. developed, some people tried to quit drinking by joining the Oxford Group, out of desperation, but the Oxford Group’s long-term success rate with real alcoholics seems to have been very small indeed.

The Oxford Group and their use of automatic writing to obtain guidance from God. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, a psychic from the French-speaking part of Switzerland who called herself Hélène Smith (1861-1929, real name Catherine-Elise Müller) became famous for her use of automatic writing to communicate with the spirit world. She was called “the Muse of Automatic Writing” by the Surrealist movement in painting and literature, that is, people like Salvador Dalí, Max Ernst, Man Ray, Hans Arp, and Joan Miró, who believed that they were bringing the images they painted and described directly up out of the subconscious.

During one period of her life, Hélène Smith claimed that she was visiting a civilization on the planet Mars while she was in her trance states. She would use automatic writing to write out messages in what she said was the Martian language, using a form of writing which she claimed was the Martian alphabet. The

problem with this was, that when the “Martian” message was translated by her, it followed the syntax and grammar of a small child speaking French, with what seemed to be a made-up word replacing what would have been the French word in each instance. And the “Martian alphabet” corresponded letter for letter with the Roman alphabet, simply using a different made-up symbol to stand for each sound.

But one can see a much more sophisticated version of this attempt to draw images directly out of the unconscious in a work called *The Red Book*, written and illustrated during that same general period, c. 1914-1930, by the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung. He believed that this sort of imagery drawn from the unconscious did in fact put us in some kind of contact with God and the divine world, via the collective unconscious and its archetypes.

And we can see some especially powerful spiritual messages coming out in the book *God Calling by Two Listeners*. The “Two Listeners” (two women in England, one an Anglican and the other a Roman Catholic) started receiving divine messages in 1932, using a version of the automatic writing technique which the Oxford Group utilized for receiving guidance. One woman heard Jesus speaking in her head, and repeated the words aloud to the other woman, who wrote them down on paper.

They eventually took the whole collection of messages which they had received and sent them to the Oxford Group author Arthur James Russell, who then organized them and published them. The first printing (in England) came out in 1935.

They were very wise and good messages, and Richmond Walker (the second most-published early A.A. author) put extensive excerpts from their messages in the sections at the bottom on each page of his meditational book called *Twenty-Four*

Hours a Day, which was published by the Daytona Beach A.A. group in 1948.

One can also find some pieces of real spiritual wisdom in the work called *A Course in Miracles*, which was written by automatic writing by Helen Schucman, a professor of psychology at Columbia University, over the years 1965 to 1972. She would hear an inner voice, which she believed was the voice of Jesus, speaking in her head, and then would carefully write all the words down.

The Oxford Group way of using this method to obtain guidance from God, was to have a Quiet Time, where we tried to turn our minds off and simply sit without thinking about anything, and then take a pencil and a piece of paper, and start writing down all the thoughts which came up in our minds.

The importance in Alcoholics Anonymous of finding ways to obtain guidance from God: A.A. people, just like the members of the Oxford Group, believed that some method of obtaining special guidance was necessary because many of our most important moral decisions could not be made by simply following a mechanical set of dogmatic rules. I might need to make a decision as to what to spend my time working on this afternoon, where I had to choose between two or three different projects, all of which were good and worthwhile endeavors. Or I might need to figure out what to actually say to a spouse or a coworker who was angrily criticizing me, regardless of the angry and abusive words I *wanted* to say back to the person. I might need to decide whether I should buy such-and-such, even though I only had a limited amount of money at this time, so that this would mean that I would not be able to pay for certain other things that on the surface seemed to be equally important.

Now as we shall note, the early A.A. members in Akron originally participated every week in the automatic writing sessions at the Oxford Group meeting there. But in the process of writing the Big Book, a decision was made to avoid any suggestion that A.A. members should practice automatic writing in order to obtain guidance. We see no statements in that book about people taking out pencil and paper and automatically writing down every idea that popped into their minds. Instead we see on pages 86-88 of the Big Book the simple suggestions:

In thinking about our day we may face indecision. We may not be able to determine which course to take. Here we ask God for inspiration, an intuitive thought or a decision. We relax and take it easy. We don't struggle. We are often surprised how the right answers come after we have tried this for a while. What used to be the hunch or the occasional inspiration gradually becomes a working part of the mind.

Being still inexperienced and having just made conscious contact with God, it is not probable that we are going to be inspired at all times. We might pay for this presumption in all sorts of absurd actions and ideas. Nevertheless, we find that our thinking will, as time passes, be more and more on the plane of inspiration. We come to rely upon it

As we go through the day we pause, when agitated or doubtful, and ask for the right thought or action. We constantly remind ourselves we are no longer running the show, humbly saying to ourselves many times each day "Thy will be done."

Alcoholics were people who generally had a problem making wise and responsible decisions, and handling even their ordinary everyday affairs. They needed help — good help — in making their daily decisions, whether by using Oxford Group type

automatic writing (as some of them did in the beginning) or by some other means. And the Alcoholics Anonymous program did in fact eventually develop methods that worked extremely well.

Many A.A. members went through a chain of marriages and divorces before they came into the program; after they began applying program techniques to running their lives however, their marriages only very rarely ended up in divorce. Likewise, many A.A. members went through one job after another during their drinking days; once in the program however, good A.A. members almost never lost a job through any fault of their own. And this was not just a result of their having quit drinking; it was even more because they were now, with divine help, making far wiser everyday decisions.

But we are primarily interested here in the earliest A.A. practices in Akron, and there as we have seen, automatic writing was still sometimes being utilized. (And in New York, Bill W. continued for many years to employ similar techniques, such as using a Ouija board, in his attempts to obtain guidance and information from sources above and beyond this present material world.)

CHAPTER 14

A Brief Note on the Protestant Fundamentalist Movement

The fundamentalist-liberal controversy divided early twentieth-century American Protestantism into warring camps. Many today make the mistake of assuming that this was just a matter of some people at that time being “a little more conservative” and others being “a little more liberal” in a kind of general and not terribly specific way.

But both Fundamentalism and Classical Protestant Liberalism were fairly clear-cut dogmatic systems with relatively well-defined doctrines.

Fundamentalism was very different from the original evangelical movement as it was founded in the 1730’s and 40’s by Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley. Both Edwards and Wesley had a completely positive attitude toward the new science, whether it was Newton’s laws of motion or John Locke’s discovery of the basic principles of modern psychology and psychiatry. Edwards as a young man had described God as absolute Newtonian space, the framework within which all material objects moved. Wesley had discovered the unconscious, well before Freud, and described the goal of good spirituality as *psychês therapeia*, that is “the healing

of the soul,” or psychotherapy as we would put it in modern English. (Wesley taught classics and New Testament at Oxford University, and left the term in the original classical Greek.)

But when Charles Darwin published *The Origin of Species* in 1859 and *The Descent of Man* in 1871, public controversy over the idea that human beings were descended from apes quickly began to arise in the United States. Many of the evangelical churches fell into bitter disputes which caused them to split apart into fiercely opposed factions.

The Fundamentalist movement attacked the doctrine of evolution by insisting on the literal inerrancy of every word in the Bible, including the story at the beginning of the Old Testament which spoke of the creation of Adam and Eve (described there as the first human beings) as totally separate from the creation of all other species. For good measure, the Fundamentalists also tended to use a dating scheme devised by James Ussher (1581-1656), the Archbishop of Armagh, which stated that the universe was created on October 23, 4004 B.C., based on a literal reading of all the dates given in the Old Testament. This meant that all the creatures which had ever existed on the planet earth were created out of nothing in 4004 B.C., which in turn meant that during the earliest period, dinosaurs and human beings had lived side by side.

Only twenty-four years after Darwin’s book on *The Descent of Man* appeared, what we call the Fundamentalist movement was born when the Niagra Conference in 1895 issued its statement of the “Five Points of Fundamentalism”:

- (1) the verbal inerrancy of scripture,
- (2) the divinity of Jesus Christ,
- (3) the Virgin Birth,

- (4) the physical resurrection of Christ and his bodily return at the end of the world, and
- (5) the substitutionary doctrine of the Atonement.

That last point meant adherence to the medieval doctrine which was first introduced by St. Anselm in 1098 in his book *Cur Deus Homo*. Anselm's doctrine of the atonement was at that time a new theological theory, which held that we were saved from eternal hellfire by Christ's death on the cross, because it paid the penalty due to God for the sins we human beings had committed.

For the first thousand years, Christianity had understood the work of Christ in various kinds of ways, and had tended, particularly in the first few centuries after Christ, to place the real power of salvation in the Incarnation rather than in the Crucifixion. In this early Christian understanding of the person and work of Christ, our task was to follow his path and become deified like him: "He became man so that we might become divine," as St. Athanasius put it in the fourth century A.D. In present-day America, the book called *A Course in Miracles* comes closer in many ways than any other modern system to matching up with what most Christians believed during the first few centuries of the Christian era.

The listing in 1895 of the dogmas which they termed the "Five Points of Fundamentalism" made it clear that *being a Fundamentalist meant adherence to certain specific theological doctrines.*

It is important to understand that Fundamentalism was not at all the same thing as simply reading the Bible regularly, praying daily, and singing the traditional hymns to Jesus at church on Sunday. The classical Protestant liberals of that era did all that, but any Fundamentalist whom you asked about it would make it clear these things did not count unless you agreed with all five of those “fundamental” dogmas at a bare minimum.

Around 1909, the American Protestant Fundamentalist movement began defining itself doctrinally in even more detail in a series of twelve tracts called *The Fundamentals*, which began being published in the United States and was subsequently distributed in other parts of the English-speaking world with American money. In 1919 the World’s Christian Fundamentals Association was formed, which began sponsoring rallies in many American cities.

Then came the event that really put the new Fundamentalist movement in the public eye: In 1925 William Jennings Bryan (a well-known politician from Nebraska, who had earlier unsuccessfully run for the U.S. presidency three times, and was a famous supporter of Prohibition) helped prosecute a Tennessee school teacher named J. T. Scopes for teaching the doctrine of evolution to his students. This court case, which was widely reported by the newspapers, came to be called the Scopes Monkey Trial.

It was only ten years later when Bill W. met Dr. Bob in Akron, and the A.A. movement began. The two of them, along with all the other early A.A. writers and leaders whom I know about, seem basically to have tried to stay out of the newly born Fundamentalist vs. Modernist controversy as much as they could. But they also were very careful indeed to make sure that A.A. members knew

that A.A. people would not be required to believe in any of the Five Points of Fundamentalism.

It is my own belief that there were relatively few genuine Fundamentalists in A.A. during its first five or ten years, and that the largest single group in A.A. during that period held more what we would call classical Protestant liberal beliefs. Unlike modern America, Fundamentalism was still a relatively small movement at that time, so regardless of what was happening over on the outer edges of the Alcoholics Anonymous movement, the “center of the bell-shaped curve” lay with the classical liberals.

By 1939 the A.A. leaders were increasingly recommending that newcomers only read a small selection of biblical passages deliberately chosen because they did not speak at all about the divinity of Christ or contain any notion that people had to pray to Jesus or rely upon his death and resurrection to save them. In the New Testament, in the Sermon on the Mount, prayer is to God the Father, and in the Letter of James, it is to God the Father of Lights. In chapter 13 of First Corinthians (unlike the chapters that come before it and after it), the higher power is spoken of only as the one who already knows us fully, whom we shall at last see face to face.

These were the parts of the Bible that the Akron Manual also emphasized in its recommended reading list, and their choice of those three parts was not accidental. It was a deliberate attempt to keep A.A. out of the Fundamentalist controversy by using biblical passages that nearly all Christians of that time could read together without getting into quarrels. And it was also a deliberate attempt to avoid driving away any Protestant liberals who wanted to join A.A.

CHAPTER 15

Classical Protestant Liberalism

Part One. The Enlightenment and Schleiermacher

Liberalism: how the 17th and 18th century Enlightenment came to liberate the Western world

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a movement called the Enlightenment swept across Western Europe and the English colonies of North America, a movement in the history of ideas which was closely tied to the rise of modern science. It was a rebellion against the Middle Ages, and a rebellion against dogmatic religion and authoritarianism of all kinds. One of the best summaries of its spirit was contained in an oft-quoted essay written by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant towards the end of the eighteenth century. In this little piece — published in 1784 and entitled “What Is Enlightenment?” — Kant explained in blunt and colorful terms what the spirit of his age was all about. If I may give my own translation of its opening lines:

Enlightenment is the exit for human beings from their self-imposed status as minor children. Lack of adulthood is represented in the inability to use one’s own intelligence

without direction from someone else. This lack of adulthood is self-imposed if the cause lies not in lack of intelligence, but in lack of the decisiveness and courage to use it without direction from someone else. *Sapere aude!* — “Have the courage to use your own intelligence” — is therefore the motto of the Enlightenment.

Laziness and cowardliness are the reasons why so great a number of human beings, even after nature has long declared them free from outside direction — *naturaliter maiorennnes* [having by the natural process of growing up legally come of age] — nevertheless gladly continue to act like children all their lives, and their laziness and cowardliness are the reason why it becomes so easy for others to raise themselves up as their guardians.

It is so comfortable being childlike! If I have a book whose intelligence I can put in place of mine, a pastor whose conscience I can put in place of mine, a physician who can evaluate my diet instead of me, and so on, I do not need to put myself to any bother at all. I have no need to think, as long as I can pay: other people will take over that miserable business for me.⁴⁰

Anyone who is seriously interested in studying about the history and recovery strategies of Alcoholics Anonymous should be compelled to read one key book about the Enlightenment, a book by Carl Becker written back in 1932. It would show the flaws in some of the sillier A.A.-bashing literature written during the past several decades, the kind that tries to portray A.A. as an authoritarian and coercive organization which demands the surrender of all our native intelligence, and the abandonment of the will to take control of our own lives. The real nature of A.A. is in fact the exact opposite: by this point in the twenty-first century, the twelve step program remains one of the last major representatives

and defenders of the spirit of the Enlightenment, which is now under such continual attack by conservative political, social, and religious forces.

Carl L. Becker was Professor of History at Cornell University in upstate New York. In the famous book he wrote, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (1932), he gave what is still the best summary in one place of the leading ideas of the great Enlightenment thinkers, and phrases these ideas in ways that allow us to see instantly how A.A. and the Big Book enthusiastically took up so many of the major Enlightenment themes.

The Enlightenment rejected all claims that some religious book or other was directly written by God's own hand, and was infallible, and had to be obeyed blindly and without question. It did not matter whether it was the Christian New Testament, the Hebrew Bible and Talmud, the Koran, the great religious writings of Asia, or what have you. From a modern scientific perspective, these ancient writings were filled with what was to a great extent simply myth, legend and primitive superstition.

We should instead draw our ideas of God and morality, the Enlightenment said, from what they called "the great book of nature" (that is, from natural law). To give some examples, it was clear to any thinking person that no society could allow any of its members to murder anyone else in that society who simply annoyed or offended them for some reason. A community that allowed this would quickly rip itself apart. All stable human societies therefore had laws against murder. In like manner, laws against burglary, fraud, and rape were necessary for the smooth running of a society. You did not need to consult a divine holy book to figure this out — all it required was common sense and simple everyday observation.

It seemed obvious to most Enlightenment thinkers that the physical universe had to be built upon some sort of logical and rational ground, an intellectual system of some sort embodying both the laws of nature which the scientists studied and the moral principles which human societies had to follow to be successful. But as Becker pointed out, most Enlightenment thinkers were a bit uncomfortable referring to this as “God,” because that word was just too much associated in their minds with the world of ancient myths and superstitions, and also made this ground seem a bit too personal. There was no giant personal being in the sky, wearing a beard and sitting on a throne, who had the magical power to change anything in my own world, no matter how small or large, if I simply pleaded with him using the right ritual phrases.

So Enlightenment-era literature often tried to avoid using the word God, and instead used circumlocutions like “Architect of the Universe” or “Author of All Things.” In the same fashion, in good Enlightenment spirit, we see how the A.A. Big Book so often referred to God as “Spirit of the Universe” (p. 10), “Creative Intelligence, Universal Mind or Spirit of Nature” (p. 12), a “Power greater than myself” (p. 12), and so on. Building off of that last phrase, A.A. members quickly began to use the phrase “Higher Power” far more often than they did the word God.

The most important and decisive thing that Ebby Thacher said when he was talking to Bill Wilson in his kitchen, was this one little suggestion he finally made to the angry, rebellious man: he simply asked Wilson, “Why don’t you choose your own conception of God?” The basic idea lying behind this suggestion became the keystone of Bill’s theology.

This was the spirit of the Enlightenment at its best, the point Immanuel Kant was trying to make in his explanation of that

attitude toward life. We have to stop trying to be good little obedient children, Kant said, blindly doing whatever we are ordered and believing whatever we are told. We have to start acting like adults, and going to work to figure out what kind of power underlies the physical universe, and what kind of personal code of behavior I can follow and still live with myself. We have to quit being deliberately stupid and start becoming intelligent; we have to quit sitting up and performing meaningless tricks like trained poodles and start thinking for ourselves.

The great Enlightenment thinkers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were horrified by organized religion, because their ancestors had just lived through the merciless wars of religion which had swept over Europe in the aftermath of the sixteenth century Protestant Reformation, culminating in the wholesale bloodshed of the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648). Catholics and Protestants burnt one another at the stake, tortured one another to death, and massacred whole cities. And then the Protestants began killing other Protestants who did not agree with them on some theological issue (Lutherans against Baptists, Calvinists against Unitarians, Anglo-Catholic English armies marching through Calvinist Scotland, while in England itself Anglo-Catholic armies fought armies filled with Congregationalists and Baptists who held to more strongly Protestant beliefs). And during this whole period, Spanish Catholics continued to torture and murder Muslims and Jews in Spain, and destroy the religions which were followed by the Native American tribes of the New World by killing any of these stone age tribesmen who refused to learn Spanish and attend Catholic mass.

By the latter part of the seventeenth century, sensitive and intelligent people all over northwestern Europe (and in the English

colonies of North America as well) were sick at their stomachs with disgust at the hideous slaughter being carried out by organized religion. The Enlightenment was a rebellion against any and all authoritarian religious systems where one group of people went around telling other people what they were supposed to believe about the nature of God.

The British parliamentary system, as it began developing in the English Civil War (1642-1651), the Cromwellian Republic, the Glorious Revolution (1688), and the appointment of Sir Robert Walpole in 1721 as the first modern prime minister, came increasingly to be built on basic Enlightenment principles. And then at the end of the eighteenth century, two famous revolutions — the American Revolution and the French Revolution — created governments with Enlightenment ideals built into their most basic structure. Over the two centuries which have followed, those basic understandings of government — the forms developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth century British parliamentary system, the American Revolution and the French Revolution — have been used as the model for new democracies all over the globe.

The American Revolution embodied many of the best Enlightenment principles. Thomas Jefferson, in his introduction and preamble to the Declaration of Independence which sparked off the American Revolution (July 4, 1776), defended the Americans' act of revolt in pure Enlightenment terms. The opening appeal was not made to biblical verses or rules proclaimed by medieval popes, but instead referred only to natural law and the concept of a higher power which could be derived by a thoughtful and intelligent person who looked at the natural world in light of the laws of science, that is, what Jefferson called "the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God."

Jefferson appealed to common sense, to things about the world which any intelligent person could observe, and above all to the kind of plea which Immanuel Kant was going to repeat over in Germany eight years later: it was time for the American colonists to start acting like adults, and start taking responsibility for their own lives, instead of waiting for some all-powerful government or church leader to run their lives for them.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

Spiritual rather than religious: We can easily see how these Enlightenment principles were built into the very basic structure of Alcoholics Anonymous, both at the structural level and at the deepest spiritual level. This was part of what A.A. members meant when they referred to their movement as spiritual rather than religious.

The word “religious,” for these A.A. people, referred to traditional doctrines and dogmas and mechanical lists of moralistic rules, whenever they were simply blindly accepted on the word of some authority. No alcoholics or addicts ever got clean and sober by trying to make themselves believe all these hundreds of authoritarian rules and doctrines, no matter how hard they balled

their fists and clenched their jaws as they attempted to swallow them.

The word “spiritual” on the other hand, in this context, meant allowing my own spirit to freely choose what seemed truly rational and based in my own real life experience.

The Kantian problem and modern western atheism: The aforementioned German philosopher Immanuel Kant published a work in 1781 called the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

To help place all this in history, 1781 was also the year of the American triumph at the battle of Yorktown, the victory which effectively brought the American Revolution to its conclusion. The French Revolution began with the storming of the Bastille just eight years later. This was the great Revolutionary Era in western history.

In this book, Kant argued that our human minds are locked in a box of space and time, and that we cannot genuinely know anything that is not a *phenomenon*, that is, something physical and material which is a sense object inside that box.

Now a phenomenon, no matter how solid and substantial it appeared to be, was nevertheless just a collection of sense impressions. My eyes told me that the phenomenal object appeared to be so long and so tall, and what color it appeared to be. My sense of touch told me whether it seemed hard or soft, and how much it seemed to weigh. My ears told me what it seemed to sound like when I tapped on it. But all of these individual sense impressions, taken individually, were simply thoughts assembled together inside my mind. Where was the tree I was looking at? Strictly speaking, in the form in which I thought and reasoned about that tree, it existed only inside my mind, not “out there.”

The world of phenomena was obviously not something which could create itself. How could the color red, for example, create itself all by itself? It had to be caused by something lying behind it, outside the box of space and time. Kant called that which lay outside the *noumenon*, that is, the infinite and eternal world of the Platonic ideas, including all the laws of nature and natural logical structures which were responsible for all the facts which genuinely existed, such as the fact that all swans were white, and the fact that all gold was shiny and would not dissolve in any acid except aqua regia.⁴¹

And if there was a God, this God would either *be* the noumenon, or exist *within* the noumenal realm. But that was a realm our human minds could know nothing about. So we could not in fact know whether or not God existed, and even if he did exist, we could know absolutely nothing about him.

This may seem like a very abstruse philosophical theory, which could have no effect on what ordinary people believed. But over and over again through the centuries, ideas dreamed up by philosophers living in ivory towers have slowly seeped over into the general population, until countless numbers of ordinary men and women started believing that this philosophical theory was “obvious commonsense.”

So in fact the appearance of Kant’s theory — which quickly began spreading outward from the lecture halls of the German universities — represented the point at which modern atheism began playing its increasingly greater role in the western world. People today who are intelligent atheists, who hold their beliefs on what they regard as totally rational grounds, simply accept Kant’s insistence that the only world we can truly know is one composed of the kind of physical objects which we can perceive by the five

senses: sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell. Since God is not that kind of thing, atheists of that kind of intellectual variety have already excluded — on principle — any kind of belief in God before they even start repeating their carefully laid out arguments against his existence.

Classical Protestant Liberalism was a fierce supporter of basic Enlightenment principles, but set itself to trying to figure out a way past Kant's denial that we could have any kind of real knowledge about God.

Friedrich Schleiermacher, the “Father of Modern Liberal Theology.” Most modern historians trace classical Protestant liberalism back to Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), a German theologian who argued that real spirituality was not about doctrines and dogmas and intellectualizations and rationalizations. Real spirituality was instead based on *Gefühl* (feeling) and *Anschauung* (intuition), the ability to sense the Infinite lying outside the box of space and time in which our minds were normally imprisoned, and an awareness of our absolute dependence upon this Infinite power.

Schleiermacher and German Lutheran pietism: he was brought up as a child in what was called “pietism,” a German Lutheran movement which stressed that real spirituality was about what was inside us — our basic attitudes and perceptions and feelings — and not about external conformity to church doctrines and dogmas and elaborate sets of legalistic rules. And even as a very young man, he began to totally reject many of the traditional Christian dogmatic assertions. In a letter which he wrote to his

father on January 21, 1787, when he was still only eighteen years old, he said “I cannot believe that he who called himself the Son of Man was the true, eternal God; I cannot believe that his death was a vicarious atonement.” But that did not in any way mean that he had turned into an atheist.

As a side note, we must remember that it was not just Classical Protestant Liberal theology that was heavily influenced by eighteenth German Lutheran pietism. Frank Buchman, the founder of the Oxford Group, was a Pennsylvania Lutheran who was brought up in a pietistic German-speaking religious environment. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement (and one of the two co-founders of modern evangelical theology) had his own religious conversion on May 24, 1738, at Aldersgate in London in a chapel where services were being conducted by a German pietist group called the Moravians. So there were similarities between the Oxford Group and the Methodist *Upper Room* in their emphasis upon a spirituality based upon intuition and the deep feelings of the human heart.

In the early Alcoholics Anonymous movement this same emphasis upon the religion of the heart and *the language of the heart*⁴² was therefore coming from all three sources: the Oxford Group, the Methodist *Upper Room*, and Classical Protestant Liberalism. A spirituality based upon the language of the heart could be used to formulate a message which expressed a warm-hearted and all-forgiving compassion and care for the other human beings around us — which of course is exactly what we see in Alcoholics Anonymous and the entire twelve step movement.

Friedrich Schleiermacher wrote two major books: The first one, entitled *On Religion: Speeches to the Cultured among its Despisers*, came out in 1799, the year he turned thirty-one. The

other work, called *The Christian Faith*, first appeared in 1821, when he was in his early fifties, and had a second edition which came out in 1830.

Two oft-quoted phrases from the first book take us straight to the heart of his argument against Kant:

Das Wesen der Religion ist weder Denken noch Handeln, sondern Anschauung und Gefühl.

“Religion’s essence is neither thinking nor acting but intuition and feeling.”

Religion ist Sinn und Geschmack für’s Unendliche.

“Religion is sense and taste for the infinite.”

The word *Gefühl* here, normally translated “feeling,” was the great watchword which lay at the center of so many nineteenth-century German philosophical arguments against Kant. *Gefühl* could have an emotional component — as it was famously put by the English romantic author William Wordsworth (1770-1850), “Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility.”

But in nineteenth and twentieth century German philosophy and theology, I would often rather translate the word *Gefühl* by the English words “awareness” or “experience.” There are things which we can know, things that we can become aware of or directly experience — perfectly real things — which are not necessarily statements about a physical object derived from scientific experimentation.

Schleiermacher defined religious feeling (*Gefühl*) as a consciousness of something which was eternal and infinite, something which lay behind all the universe — an awareness which could not

be produced by any kind of material object within the box of space and time, which in turn meant that it had to refer to something which lay outside that box, that is, the transcendent reality which we call “God.” Those who possessed true spirituality, Schleiermacher said, were the men and women who were aware of

... the immediate consciousness of the universal existence of all finite things, in and through the Infinite, and of all temporal things in and through the Eternal. Religion is to seek this and find it in all that lives and moves, in all growth and change, in all doing and suffering. It is to have life and to know life in immediate feeling, only as such an existence in the Infinite and Eternal Yet religion is not knowledge and science, either of the world or of God. Without being knowledge, it recognizes knowledge and science. In itself it is an affection, a revelation of the Infinite in the finite, God being seen in it and it in God.

True spirituality was therefore an awareness of a union with the Divine, immediate and direct, which all too often melted away as soon as the person became too conscious of it, because it was a subtle kind of God-consciousness, grounded in a feeling of oneness with the Infinite aspect of the universe.

Bill Wilson on experience and feeling: During the period of A.A. history which we are looking at in this book (1938–1942), when the second printing of the Big Book was being readied for press, we can see Bill W. deciding to change the wording of the Twelfth Step on page 72 to eliminate the reference to special religious experiences (the altered wording below is underlined by me):

1st PRINTING (APRIL 1939): Having had a spiritual experience as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

2nd PRINTING (MARCH 2, 1941): Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of those steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Nevertheless, we can see Bill W. spending enormous amounts of time during the years which followed trying to cultivate experiences of God's presence in the manner which Friedrich Schleiermacher was describing — sometimes (in Bill Wilson's case) by controversial means such as taking LSD or using Ouija boards in an attempt to come in contact with the other world, or by studying the writings of Aldous Huxley and Gerald Heard out in California, and going to visit them, and attempting to create similar experiences in himself.

But in all these things, Bill W. was simply attempting to go in the direction pointed out by Schleiermacher, the founder of Classical Protestant Liberalism.

Richmond Walker on experience and feeling: And although A.A.'s second most-published author, the writer of the little black book called *Twenty-Four Hours a Day*, did not publish that work until 1948 down in Daytona Beach (which was after the period that we are especially focusing on in this book) it is fascinating to see how many phrases and ideas from both Kant and Schleiermacher appeared in his book. Over and over he referred explicitly to the problem raised by the fact that we seemed to be imprisoned in “a box of space and time,” but (being well-trained in nineteenth-century German philosophy as a student at Williams College), he

stressed the importance, in meditation, of entering into the Divine Silence where we could be at one with God in language almost identical to Schleiermacher's.

Schleiermacher (and Alcoholics Anonymous) on the feeling of absolute dependence: In his second major book on this subject, entitled *The Christian Faith* (1821 and 1830), Friedrich Schleiermacher said that the truly central religious feeling is ***a feeling of absolute dependence on God***, and that everything else in religion and spirituality is a working out from that central awareness.

In the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous, the third step likewise states that being willing to commit ourselves to absolute dependence on God is the entryway into working the remaining steps that will totally transform our lives.

When we realize that we have no power over so many things in our lives, and become willing to turn these matters over to whatever the Great Reality is, from which the whole world of sense phenomena derives its existence, the only thing which we *feel* or are *aware of* at that point, is the sudden realization that we are absolutely dependent on that reality which lies outside the box of space and time. But then most people in A.A. start to discover that when we take things over which we have no control, and turn them over to that Higher Reality, that the events of our lives start to run far more smoothly, and that sometimes the good things that happen to us seem absolutely miraculous.

The basic starting point therefore of the central Alcoholics Anonymous strategy for managing human life, is the one devised by the founder of Classical Protestant Liberalism, Friedrich Schleiermacher, two hundred years ago.

We in the twelve step movement are the children and heirs, in so many absolutely formative ways, of the great Classical Protestant Liberal tradition.

All religions teach certain common truths: Classical Protestant liberals tended to believe at a deep level that all the major religions of the earth had something worthwhile and valuable about them. They pointed out that all the great religions had something equivalent to the Golden Rule, for example, the requirement that we show the same kind of love or compassion towards other human beings which we would wish them to show towards us. It might not be phrased in the same words, but the same thought would be there. There were a number of fairly universal spiritual truths.

The idea that one did not have to be a Christian in order to be a good and spiritual person was a classical Protestant liberal belief that had a deeply formative effect on early A.A. One effect of these Protestant liberal ideas (as taught, among other places, by the liberal Methodists who published *The Upper Room*) could be seen in the observation that ***there was never a serious question within A.A. about whether Jews or Buddhists could join A.A.*** — if you were a suffering alcoholic, the group would welcome you in, and accept your fundamental right to your own religious beliefs.

Had the early A.A.'s been following only the Oxford Group tenets of that time period, or the beliefs of the frontier revivalists, they would have rejected all non-Christian ideas *and all non-Christian members*. There would have been no Jewish A.A. members like Irwin Meyerson in Cleveland during the 1940's (the man who made the twelfth-step call on a Roman Catholic businessman in Indianapolis named Doherty Sheerin, who in turn took on the task of becoming the sponsor of Father Ralph Pfau, the

first Roman Catholic priest to join A.A. — who then began writing his Golden Books and quickly became the third most-published early A.A. authors).

Had A.A. not moved away from the Oxford Group and the frontier revivalists, the *Akron Manual* would not have recommended in 1942 that beginning A.A. members read James Allen's *As a Man Thinketh*, which began with a quote from the Buddhist scripture called the *Dhammapada* at the beginning of Chapter 1 ("Thought and Character"). And the kind of New Thought ideas which James Allen and Emmet Fox were teaching, were fundamentally based on the concept of karma found in both the Buddhist and Hindu sacred scriptures.

Richmond Walker, early A.A.'s second most published author, put a quotation from a famous Hindu author at the beginning of *Twenty-Four Hours a Day*, to make it clear that the AA idea of "living in the Now" was in fact (in his understanding of it) drawn from Asian religion. Rich took passages from an Oxford Group inspired work entitled *God Calling by Two Listeners*, which was heavy with continual references to Christ, and reworded these passages to eliminate all or most of the Christian and biblical elements, so the message could be put in terms of what he called "universal spiritual truths."

Rich was brought up in the Unitarian Church, and (his son told me) continued to attend that church all the way to the end of his life, which is significant because the Unitarians were the most radical of the Classical Protestant Liberal denominations in the United States. The Unitarians even tolerated atheists *just like Alcoholics Anonymous did*. Richmond Walker's father Joseph Walker was a Unitarian who was one of America's most famous atheists: he was the author of the book called *Humanism as a Way*

of Life (1932) and one of the signers of the original *Humanist Manifesto* in 1933.

To this day, it is perfectly allowable to be a member of Alcoholics Anonymous and be an atheist. In many ways, one could almost regard A.A. as being — how can we say it? — almost like an ultra-radical wing of the Classical Protestant Liberal movement.

CHAPTER 16

Classical Protestant Liberalism

Part Two. Bushnell and Harnack

Horace Bushnell: Many American Protestant liberals were strongly influenced by the theologian Horace Bushnell (1802-1876), a Congregationalist minister who was born in Connecticut and educated at Yale. His book *Christian Nurture* (1847) pointed out that in modern America, more and more people were coming into the spiritual life as the result of a kind of “educational experience,” as opposed to being converted in a single highly emotional religious experience at a revival. The revivalistic conversion experience had been common in the wildly enthusiastic tent revivals out on the American frontier as it spread westward, but the United States was now in the process of turning into something very different from a wild frontier society.

The period of the western frontier was coming to an end: Texas came into the United States in 1845, two years before Bushnell’s book appeared, while what are now the states of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho came under United States control in 1846, a year before the book came out. California was added in 1848.

So in Bushnell's book *Christian Nurture*, he opposed revivalism and insisted that children brought up within the church should be given a kind of Christian education — a kind of *nurturing* — which was formed in such a way that they never doubted in the first place, that God loved them and forgave them their sins and would help them in every way.

In another book called *The Vicarious Sacrifice* (1866), Bushnell attacked the substitutionary doctrine of the atonement. This dogma had been devised by a medieval Catholic theologian named Anselm (c. 1033-1109), who argued in his book *Cur Deus Homo?* (Why the God Man?) that God's infinite honor was so offended by even the tiniest human sin, that the divine justice required that an infinite satisfaction be made for this offense against God's divine honor. It was a kind of medieval knightly idea of personal honor gone wild. According to Anselm's theory, only the death of an infinitely divine man (Jesus) could restore God the Father's wounded honor and allow him to forgive any other human being for his or her sins. Human beings who refused this offer were going to suffer unbearable pain and torment after their death as they burned in eternal hellfire.

Bushnell argued against Anselm, and said that God could forgive whomever he wanted to whenever he wanted to. When Jesus gave his life on the cross, this was to give the ultimate proof to skeptical and wary human beings, that God did in fact love them so much that he would sacrifice anything for them. The gospel message was simply that God loves us and accepts us just as we are. (This is sometimes called the Moral Influence doctrine of the atonement, which I think is a very poor label to put on it.)

The right kind of Sunday School literature and Sunday School classes therefore did NOT attempt to terrify little children with the

idea that God would send them to eternal hellfire if they violated the slightest one of God's hundreds of arbitrary rules and laws. Instead they were taught to sing songs like "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so; little ones to him belong, we are weak but he is strong. Yes, Jesus loves me; yes, Jesus loves me; yes, Jesus loves me, the Bible tells me so." And in every other way we could think of, we must attempt to reassure these little children that God loved them and treasured them, and would love them just as much no matter what they did. When we were in trouble, we told them over and over again, we did not need to run *from God* in fear, but instead run *to God* for comfort and help.

In early Alcoholics Anonymous, this classical American Protestant liberal belief became quickly embedded as one of the core assumptions of the movement. *Nowhere* did early A.A. try to frighten already suffering alcoholics by threatening them with hellfire and damnation. The threat of eternal punishment *never* appeared anywhere in early A.A. literature and preaching. Instead, one heard (and still hears) countless individual A.A. members say in meetings (referring to the other members) "*they loved me until I could love myself.*"

Having a single overwhelming and strongly emotional experience in which men and women were suddenly overcome with the realization that God loved them, and was there for them, and would save them from their alcoholism (and from their unbearable mental torment), has always been a part of some alcoholics' story about the way they were saved from having their lives totally destroyed — beginning famously with Bill Wilson's story of his vision of the Divine Light in Towns Hospital on December 14, 1934 — but by the second printing of the Big Book on March 2, 1941, experience had shown that numerous men and

women had come into the program and gotten sober without having had any single overwhelming Protestant revival type conversion experience.

What most alcoholics had was a long series of smaller insights which nevertheless built on one another so that they were led into deeper and deeper levels of spiritual awareness. Bill W. called this the “educational variety” of religious experience, and credited this phrase to William James in his *Varieties of Religious Experience*. This phrase did not in fact come from that book, but was the term which was being used regularly by the three largest American Methodist denominations,⁴³ which had all come totally under the influence of Horace Bushnell’s book on *Christian Nurture* during the first two decades of the twentieth century.

It is worthwhile looking carefully at what Bill W. actually said in the appendix to the Big Book which was added in the second printing in 1941:

The terms “spiritual experience” and “spiritual awakening” are used many times in this book which, upon careful reading, shows that the personality change sufficient to bring about recovery from alcoholism has manifested itself among us in many different forms.

Yet it is true that our first printing gave many readers the impression that these personality changes, or religious experiences, must lie in the nature of sudden and spectacular upheavals. Happily for everyone, this conclusion is erroneous.

In the first few chapters a number of sudden revolutionary changes are described. Though it was not our intention to create such an impression, many alcoholics have nevertheless concluded that in order to recover they must acquire an immediate and overwhelming “God-

consciousness” followed at once by a vast change in feeling and outlook.

Among our rapidly growing membership of thousands of alcoholics such transformations, though frequent, are by no means the rule. Most of our experiences are what the psychologist William James calls the “educational variety” because they develop slowly over a period of time.

We can see here that Bill Wilson was still in 1941 regarding the spiritual goal as the development of a “God-consciousness” which permeated our entire awareness of our lives and the world. This was simply Schleiermacher’s Classical Liberal Protestant concept of salvation, interpreted here — using Horace Bushnell’s important observations about the problem with relying solely on frontier revivalist type conversion experiences — as being most often based, not on one single overwhelming experience, but on a series of small insights building on one another.

Adolf von Harnack

What was in many ways the greatest manifesto of classical Protestant liberalism appeared at the very beginning of the twentieth century. Written by Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930), it was called *Das Wesen des Christentums* (1900) and immediately began going through printing after printing. The English translation, which appeared the very next year in 1901, was given the title *What Is Christianity?* and likewise went through printing after printing. All over the Protestant world, thousands of people responded to Harnack’s prophetic message.

Now ironically, Harnack was a German theologian who was the greatest scholar of his generation on the history of Christian dogma

(his three-volume *Lehrbuch des Dogmengeschichte*, 1886-9) is still enormously useful to scholars today.

Medieval Christian doctrine was filled with thousands of technical terms and complicated distinctions. These were not Biblical. In terms of the understanding of Christ's person and work, for example, you may look throughout your New Testament, and never find any talk of three *hypostaseis* ("persons," or actually "substrata" in this case) united into one *ousia*, with the second hypostasis, the Logos (the Idea of the ideas up in the realm of the Platonic ideas), being incarnate in a Christ who is *homoousios* to us with respect to his humanity and *homoousios* to God the Father with respect to his divinity, where this Christ-figure has two *physeis* (natures), two wills, and two *energeiai* (energies) united into a single *hypostasis* and a single *prosopon*, "indivisibly, inseparably, unconfusedly, and immutably" (where these last four words are also highly technical philosophical terms — even though they may look like ordinary English, they aren't).

These were pagan Greek philosophical terms, and the message they preached was pagan, not Christian. If we wanted to be real Christians, Harnack proclaimed, we had to toss out all these pagan ideas and return to the true "kernel" of Christianity, which lay in the simple teaching of the historical Jesus, which we can see laid out clearly in places like the Sermon on the Mount. It was about finding a loving and forgiving God, and learning to live with love in our hearts. It meant giving concrete help to our fellow human beings who were in need: the little passage from James, "faith without works is dead," was one which classical Protestant liberals attempted to live by continuously.

This was what Classical Protestant Liberalism was really about. Christianity all over the western world, they believed, had fallen

totally under the dead hand of a traditional orthodoxy. They were frittering away the real faith with endless legalistic rules and philosophical rationalizations, and totally failing to do what God had really asked us to do. It was time to bring Christianity back to preaching the real biblical faith, the faith of Jesus and the first people who heard him preach and responded to his call.

This kind of liberal was an impassioned prophet waving his fists in the air and shouting at you that it was time to start getting serious about the central core of the Bible’s saving message, the central truths that had the power to save our souls.

The rise of Reform Judaism was an exactly parallel contemporaneous movement within the Jewish faith. Beginning in 1810, many Jewish synagogues in Germany and Central Europe (and in Charleston, South Carolina, in the United States) also began rebelling against the restrictive rules and practices and dogmas of traditional Orthodox Judaism.

*The message of Adolf Harnack’s What Is Christianity?*⁴⁴ — let us look in more detail now at this book which came out in 1900, and its central ideas, which dominated so much of American Protestant thought in the early twentieth century.

Harnack points to the gospel of Luke, which began the story of Jesus’ ministry by describing his sermon at the synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4:16–21). Jesus began by reading a passage from the book of Isaiah in the Old Testament (Isaiah 61:1–2).⁴⁵

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty

them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.”

Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

This was Jesus’ central message, the author of the gospel of Luke was saying. “These words dominated Jesus’ whole work and message,” Harnack argued, “they contain the theme of all that he taught and did.” God had sent him out to preach, Jesus believed, because he had taken pity on those who were caught in poverty, or were being held captive as prisoners, or who were ill and suffering. Jesus’ mission was to try to heal all of these struggling men and women, attempting to heal not only their souls but also their bodies. That meant that this was what Jesus’ church was about too: the church was composed of the people who came together to try to help Jesus in his mission.⁴⁶

We can easily see how these words could apply to the early Alcoholics Anonymous movement and their friends and supporters. Alcoholism affected both the soul and the body, and it held people in chains of addiction, bonds from which they could not escape by their own unaided power. Alcohol dragged them down into poverty, living in gutters and alleys, and foraging in trash bins for food.

Jesus came to do all these things, Harnack said, but above all, Jesus came “to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.” He came to proclaim that God loved all of these helpless people, and that he accepted them just as they were, even if they had sunk into sinful ways.

Jesus’ opponents — the people who stood in the back and heckled him when he was giving his sermons — saw God “only in His law, which they had converted into a labyrinth of dark defiles,

blind alleys, and secret passages.” They claimed that God had loaded us human beings down with hundreds of mechanical, unbreakable, legalistic rules, and that God would take anyone who violated even the tiniest of these rules and send that person, at death, screaming in agony into the flames of eternal hellfire.

Jesus’ opponents saw God only in their long written lists of vindictive laws; Jesus on the other hand “saw and felt Him everywhere.” Jesus saw God in the beauty of the tree-covered hills and the wildflowers along the country path. He saw God in the sky and clouds, and the sunshine and the rain. Jesus saw God’s children in the faces of all who hungered and thirsted, or were lying sick in bed or chained up in prisons, or who had no warm coat or place to sleep when the winter snows covered the earth, or who had come as aliens (whether legally or not) into a foreign country looking for work and found themselves hated and despised. Jesus saw God’s image in prostitutes, and in Jews who had gone over to act as tax-collectors for the hated Roman occupying forces, and even in the Samaritans who refused to regard anything but the first five books of the Jewish Bible as holy scripture. Bible deniers! What could be worse! And yet Jesus’ God loved them too. Jesus “proclaimed the living God and the soul’s nobility.”⁴⁷

Jesus’ opponents “were in possession of a thousand of [God’s] commandments, and thought, therefore, that they knew Him; he had one only, and knew Him by it.” That was the Golden Rule, the simplest of all rules and yet the most sweeping and profound: right there in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:12, “Everything that you would want other people to do to you, act the same way back to them.”

So in his book, Harnack attempted to sum up Jesus' message as follows:⁴⁸

If ... we take a general view of Jesus' teaching, we shall see that it may be grouped under three heads

Firstly, the kingdom of God and its coming.

Secondly, God the Father and the infinite value of the human soul.

Thirdly, the higher righteousness and the commandment of love.

(1) The phrase translated into English as "the kingdom of God" would more properly be translated as "the rule of God" or "the reign of God." It began inside the human heart, whenever we individual human beings "made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*," as it says in the Third Step of the twelve step program. But when enough individual human hearts began to accept God's rulership, the world around them would begin to change into a more loving and caring world. This was the central task of God's people, "bringing in the kingdom" by turning the whole world into a more loving place.

(2) God was not a crazed tyrant with hundreds of absurd and totally irrational rules. God was a loving parent. And when dealing with all the human beings around us, we also needed to recognize "the infinite value of the human soul."

(3) The phrase "the higher righteousness" came from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, where he said in Matthew 5:20, "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." The scribes were the professional biblical scholars, who spent so much time arguing over the tiny details of biblical passages that they

totally missed the central points that these passages were actually trying to teach. The first century Palestinian word Pharisees meant “the Separated Ones” — these were little religious sects composed of people who regarded themselves as so terribly holy and strict that they would have nothing to do with ordinary, everyday religious people of their society. It was the rough equivalent to “Puritan” in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and “Fundamentalist” in the twentieth century.

Jesus’ true followers were not careless, lazy people who refused to take the Bible seriously, and who insisted on frivolously tossing aside any of the traditional doctrines and dogmas which seemed inconvenient to them. The people who genuinely followed Jesus were people who set *a far higher standard of righteousness* for themselves.⁴⁹

Classical Liberal Protestantism’s profoundly shaping influence on A.A.

We can see the influence of this kind of Classical Protestant Liberalism everywhere we look in early Alcoholics Anonymous, although people in the A.A. program tended to be a bit cruder than Jesus in the call for a “higher righteousness.” In the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, for example, in Bill W.’s chapter on the Fourth Tradition, he told the story of an A.A. super-promoter in Charleston, West Virginia, who set up a foundation with its own building and sixty-one rules which he had drawn up to govern all the alcoholics who came through its doors. Everything became so tied up in complications that finally everything collapsed. To the surprise of the New York A.A. office, the head promoter realized that it was his fault for setting up too many rules, and he ...⁵⁰

... did something ... that was to become an A.A. classic. It all went on a little card about golf-score size. The cover read: “Middleton Group #1. Rule #62.” Once the card was unfolded, a single pungent sentence leaped to the eye: “Don’t take yourself too damn seriously.”

And instead of referring to the rule-bound legalists in the A.A. fellowship in a more polite way as Pharisees or Fundamentalists, Bill Wilson in scathing terms referred to them as the “bleeding deacons” in his chapter on the Second Tradition in the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*.

As we can see, Bill Wilson was deeply influenced by Classical Liberal Protestant ways of thinking, and so was Dr. Bob too. For an example of the way the latter thought and acted, we can look at the famous account of an event which took place in Akron in 1937. An alcoholic who asked to be join A.A. frankly described himself to the “oldest” member (which meant Dr. Bob of course) as “the victim of another addiction even worse stigmatized than alcoholism.” The addiction was “sex deviate,” that is, he was a homosexual. Dr. Bob finally asked the other A.A. members, “What would the Master do?” This was the Classical Protestant Liberal way to make moral decisions of that sort. We not only had to ask ourselves “What did Jesus *say*” but also “What would Jesus have *done*?” All the members of the Akron A.A. group understood exactly what this question meant, and they admitted the gay man to their fellowship. He in turn not only got sober and stayed sober, but became one of the most successful members of the early Akron group when it came to doing twelfth step work.⁵¹

The Kingdom of God vs. the world of wealth and money. Harnack pointed out that the real historical Jesus “was profoundly conscious of the great antithesis between the kingdom of God and that kingdom of the world in which he saw the reign of evil and the

evil one.” Those who belonged to the kingdom of the world believed that the pursuit of wealth would bring success and happiness, but nothing lasting could be achieved that way. The ultimate outcome was always the same: “the kingdom of the world must perish and be destroyed.”⁵²

Harnack cited one famous saying of the historical Jesus, “The Mission of the Twelve,” which was found in Matthew 10:5–10. This passage had a strong influence on many of the Protestant liberals (and on many of the Fundamentalist churches as well), but the little A.A. groups came far closer than the overwhelming majority of Christian churches when it came to carrying out these commandments literally to their full extent:

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment. Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for laborers deserve their food.

In the first century A.D., there were no towering Gothic churches with stone arches and stained glass windows, like Winchester Cathedral where Bill Wilson had one of his earliest religious experiences. That impressive edifice was both beautiful and incredibly expensive to build. The earliest Christian gatherings were held instead in what were called house churches. The congregation met in one room of a perfectly ordinary dwelling. There were no bishops and cardinals parading around in fancy robes and living in posh mansions, waited on by the church servants.

In fact, all the way down to the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. (I know from my own historical research), priests and bishops received no salaries. There were no complicated church liturgies to recite back in those early centuries⁵³ — priests and bishops gave extemporaneous prayers which they themselves made up, and were famous (if at all) for their moving and compelling sermons, not for performing fancy rituals.

Harnack believed that modern Christianity should start moving back in that direction, if it wanted to be faithful to the historical Jesus' words and example:

It may be asked whether it would not have been an extraordinary gain to Christianity if those who are called to be its ministers, — the missionaries and pastors, had followed the Lord's rules. At the very least, it ought to be a strict principle with them to concern themselves with property and worldly goods only so far as will prevent them being a burden to others, and beyond that to renounce them. I entertain no doubt that the time will come when it will no longer be thought fitting ... for anyone to preach resignation and contentment to the poor, who is well off himself, and zealously concerned for the increase of his property. A healthy man may well offer consolation to the sick; but how shall a man of property convince those who have none that worldly goods are of no value?⁵⁴

Alcoholics Anonymous as a radicalization of Classical Liberal Protestantism, including a return to complete institutional poverty. We can see the impact of Harnack's message on early A.A. in an especially vivid way in this area. Alcoholics Anonymous tries to keep its money and possessions down to the barest minimum. Local A.A. groups usually own little more than a

coffee pot and a few books which are read from during their meetings.

This was what was meant by describing early A.A. as a return to “true first century Christianity.” There was a well-known A.A. historian, who died only recently, who was himself a Protestant Fundamentalist (an Assemblies of God Pentecostalist), who spent years trying to argue that the references to early A.A. as “first century Christianity” meant that A.A.’s founding figures were all Protestant Fundamentalists. But this was not so. It meant that early A.A. had no money or property or salaried workers (except for a few secretaries).

The Northern Baptists and early Alcoholics Anonymous: It is important to note how many of the key outside supporters of the early A.A. movement were members and ministers of the liberal Protestant denomination called the Northern Baptists (now called the American Baptists). The Rockefeller’s for example were liberal Northern Baptists. The extremely liberal University of Chicago was founded in 1890 by the Northern Baptists with money from John D. Rockefeller.

Riverside Church in New York City was built by John D. Rockefeller, Jr., who chose a Northern Baptist minister named Harry Emerson Fosdick to be the church’s first minister. Fosdick, who earned his B.D. degree at the extremely liberal Union Theological Seminary in New York City, was one of the most prominent spokesmen for Classical Protestant Liberalism in the United States. He also, it should be noted, wrote one of the first praiseworthy reviews of the A.A. Big Book after it was published.

Rev. Willard S. Richardson, a Northern Baptist minister who had also received his B.D. from Union Theological Seminary (which, as we have noted, was one of the centers of American

Protestant Liberalism) was a strong supporter of the early Alcoholics Anonymous movement. He was John D. Rockefeller, Jr's spiritual advisor, and handled Rockefeller's private charities.

It was Richardson who helped set up the famous meeting in John D. Rockefeller's private boardroom in December 1937, where Bill Wilson asked for Rockefeller money to help the new A.A. movement.

Another person who was at that meeting was Albert Scott, who was chairman of the trustees for Riverside Church (the church which John D. Rockefeller, Jr., built in New York City). After the alcoholics at the meeting told their stories and explained how the A.A. program worked, it was Scott who exclaimed, "Why this is first-century Christianity!" But after Bill Wilson then gave a list of all the things A.A. wanted money for — hospital chains, paid missionaries, literature, and so on — it was Scott who asked, "Won't money spoil this thing?" And A.A. ended up receiving only a tiny amount of money from Rockefeller.

This was probably one of the most decisive turning points in early A.A. history, where instead of becoming just another group of earnest social activists sitting in big, fancy offices and going around the country asking for large financial donations, A.A. turned into a radicalized version of Classical Protestant Liberalism. The men and women of A.A. turned their backs on money and property, and became real first century Christians to the core.

CHAPTER 17

Classical Protestant Liberalism

Part Three. The Upper Room

The most important source for Classical Protestant Liberal ideas in early A.A. — the most important by far — was *The Upper Room*, a little meditational book which taught all the concepts which we have discussed in the previous two chapters, and put these ideas into simple terms which ordinary people could understand.

From the time A.A. started in 1935, all the way down to 1948, when A.A. member Richmond Walker began publishing and distributing *Twenty-Four Hours a Day* from the basement of his home in Daytona Beach, Florida, most A.A. people carried out their morning meditation by reading from *The Upper Room* every day.

These readings from The Upper Room are referred to numerous times in A.A. literature and in interviews with old-timers:

The book “Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers” records statements about the importance of The Upper Room drawn from several different sources. This important historical work —the official A.A. biography of Alcoholics Anonymous cofounder Dr.

Bob — gives us material gathered from interviews with numerous people who lived back at that time.

Sue Smith Windows (Dr. Bob's daughter) lived down to 2002, and was interviewed by a number of good A.A. historians over the years. She is quoted as follows:

Sue [Dr. Bob's daughter] remembered the quiet time in the mornings — how they sat around reading the Bible. Later, they also used *The Upper Room*, a Methodist publication that provided a daily inspirational message, interdenominational in its approach. "Then somebody said a prayer," she recalled. "After that, we were supposed to say one ourselves. Then we'd be quiet. Finally, everyone would share what they got, or didn't get. This lasted for at least a half hour and sometimes went as long as an hour."⁵⁵

The formal Wednesday evening meeting which the Akron alcoholics attended every week from 1935 to October 1939, was held at the home of *T. Henry Williams*. He remembered those meetings this way:

As T. Henry described it, a typical meeting in 1938–39 went like this "Usually, the person who led the Wednesday meeting took something from *The Upper Room* or some other literature as a subject. Sometimes, they selected a theme such as 'My Utmost Effort' or 'My Highest Goal.' There would be a quiet time. then different people would tell something out of their own experience."⁵⁶

Dorothy Snyder said that Dr. Bob told new people that this meditational book was one of the three most important works for them to study. Dorothy was Clarence Snyder's first wife, married to him from 1926 to 1940.

Clarence Snyder's wife Dorothy S. M., talking about the way Dr. Bob worked with newcomers, mentioned that he would sometimes recommend that they read Drummond's *The Greatest Thing in the World*. "Those were the three main books at that time: that, *The Upper Room*, and [Emmet Fox's] *Sermon on the Mount*."⁵⁷

The Akron Manual regarded The Upper Room as the first choice for the alcoholic's reading during the morning Quiet Time, see A Manual for Alcoholics Anonymous (from A.A. Group No. 1, Akron, Ohio, 1942, Part VI):

Now you are out of the hospital First off, your day will have a new pattern. You will open the day with a quiet period. This will be explained by your sponsor. You will read the *Upper Room*, or whatever you think best for yourself.

Clarence Snyder in Mitchell K.'s book: Clarence Snyder, who got sober in 1938, was for a while one of the major early A.A. leaders. He lived down to 1984, and was extensively interviewed by A.A. historian Mitchell K., who wrote the story of Clarence's life in a book which has become one of the A.A. classics: Mitchell K., *How It Worked: The Story of Clarence H. Snyder and the Early Days of Alcoholics Anonymous in Cleveland, Ohio* (1999). Two different passages in this book talk about *The Upper Room*: the first one is found in chapter 3.8.

Clarence Snyder told Mitchell that "new people were told they had to read the Bible They were instructed to do this on a daily basis. Clarence said that newcomers were also told to read *The Upper Room* daily and to read *The Sermon on the Mount* by Emmet Fox."

Further along, in chapter 5.5, Mitchell K. says that it was not just the recovering alcoholic who was supposed to read *The Upper Room*, but also the other members of that person's family:

Clarence believed that in order for a prospective member to get well, his entire family had to get well also Family members were invited to attend meetings, were given a copy of the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*, and were told to read *The Upper Room*.

James D. "J. D." Holmes, founder of the first A.A. group in Indiana: This man, who got sober in the Akron A.A. group in 1936 (little more than a year after AA was begun), had to leave Akron in 1938 in order to take a job in Evansville, Indiana. After the Big Book was published, he finally managed to get an A.A. group going in Evansville, the first one in Indiana, on April 23, 1940. He and Doherty Sheerin in Indianapolis (who got sober in October of that year with J. D.'s help) combined forces to spread A.A. across many other parts of the state. J. D. wrote a memoir, now in the New York A.A. Archives, before his death in 1961, in which he described how he managed to remain sober on his own before he got that meeting started, by trying as best he could to continue the A.A. program he had been taught in Akron.

Although [his wife] Rhoda was not an alcoholic, she and J. D. held something like an A.A. meeting every Wednesday night in their home in order to help him keep sober Like so many A.A.'s from the very early period, J. D. and Rhoda used an extremely popular devotional manual called *The Upper Room* for their private daily meditation and also to provide a discussion topic for this little Wednesday meeting.⁵⁸

From the researches of Dick Burns. This A.A. historian's books on A.A. history include *The Akron Genesis of Alcoholics Anonymous*, as well as *The Oxford Group & Alcoholics Anonymous: A Design for Living That Works*, along with *New Light on Alcoholism: God, Sam Shoemaker, and A.A.* In one of his articles on the internet Dick says that in early A.A.'s spiritual recovery program, as it was practiced in the 1930's and early 1940's ...

... the growth part of the program had a great deal to do with Quiet Time — a Quiet Time that included Bible study, prayer, receiving revelation from God, and the use of devotional books and periodicals such as *The Upper Room* as ancillary study materials and as a spur to spending substantial time with God each morning.⁵⁹

How the Southern Methodist Church began publishing *The Upper Room*

At Travis Park Methodist church in San Antonio, Texas, some of the women of the church suggested the need for a publication like *The Upper Room* to their former pastor, Grover Carlton Emmons, who had by then gone to hold the post of Secretary of the Department of Home Missions and Hospitals at the Southern Methodist Church's headquarters in Nashville, Tennessee.

Rev. Emmons thought this was an excellent idea, and *The Upper Room* began publication in April 1935, only a month before Bill W. and Dr. Bob met for the first time.

The early copies I have, coming from 1938 and 1939, are little paperback booklets, seven inches high by four and one half inches

wide (17.78 by 11.43 cm). They were coming out on a quarterly basis by that period, three months' worth of daily meditations in each little volume. There in 1938 and 1939, the Rev. Grover Carlton Emmons, who had started *The Upper Room* series, still had his name on the title page as editor. The official publisher was listed as the Board of Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, in Nashville, Tennessee.

The Methodist Episcopal Church, South (the official name of the Southern Methodist Church) had its churches spread all across the southern part of the United States. On the east coast, they had churches as far north as Maryland, West Virginia, and Kentucky. They had numerous churches as far west as Texas, but also had a small number of churches even further west in states like Colorado, New Mexico, and California.⁶⁰ It was one of the four large Wesleyan denominations in the United States which eventually were merged to form the present day United Methodist Church.

The Southern Methodists were more Catholic-oriented than the other Methodist groups. Their monthly communion service was basically just the old medieval Roman Catholic mass translated from Latin into English and sung to medieval chant melodies which had been altered only enough to make it possible to sing them in four part harmony. The hymns of John and Charles Wesley taught that the bread and wine served as the conduits through which the Real Presence of Christ was conducted to the communicants.

Their continuing contact with the ancient Catholic tradition perhaps gave them a deeper understanding of the need for continuous spiritual development through all the years of our lives

as we walked the life of faith — and some kind of decent literature to help us along the way.

The Upper Room taught the Religion of the Heart

Early twentieth-century American Methodists were the children and grandchildren of *the circuit riders*, the young men whom the bishops sent out on horseback alone into the wildest parts of the American frontier. They marveling in their diaries in ecstatic language about the extraordinary beauty of the towering mountains and wild forests and little springs of pure water. And in their diaries they also recorded how they would weep with overflowing joy, tears rolling down their faces, whenever they found three or four who listened to their message, and committed themselves to forming a little group dedicated to God, in the middle of the trackless wilderness.

As the children and grandchildren of these *theophoroi*, these ecstatic God-Bearers, early twentieth-century Methodists above all taught the Religion of the Heart.

This was what *The Upper Room* above all taught early A.A. — true spirituality is not about doctrines and dogmas and creeds and elaborate theological argument. It is about that great depth of meaning which can only be encountered through *feeling* and *intuition*. In other words, as a German philosopher would have put it back then, real religion was not a matter of finding a *Begriff* or a *Vorstellung* (a precisely defined rational concept or intellectualized idea), but had to do with the realm of *Gefühl* and *Anschauung*. Bill Wilson spoke of it in the Big Book as learning how to enter a totally new and different dimension of reality.

Early A.A. was about the Spirituality of the Heart, and learning how to both speak and hear the Language of the Heart. This was what allowed A.A. to transcend every artificial boundary and to spread all over the earth.

Daily reading of *The Upper Room* was one of the ways the early A.A. people employed to teach themselves how to sense and become more aware of that deeper dimension of reality.

The Upper Room taught a highly Personal God: the theology of the Boston Personalists

The late nineteenth and early twentieth century Methodists were the only large group that I know of in the history of Christian theology who went so far in defending the idea of a deeply personal God.

Boston School of Theology, established in the mid-nineteenth century, was the oldest American Methodist seminary. Well into the early twentieth century, it was the most prestigious Methodist graduate school of religion: a large number of Methodist bishops and other influential Methodist church leaders had received their seminary degrees there. Its associated institution, Boston University, offered a Ph.D. in philosophy. These two Methodist institutions became major standard bearers for Classical Protestant Liberalism. The early editions of *The Upper Room* were shaped from one end to the other by what was called Boston Personalism, which was the kind of philosophy and theology taught there.

Boston Personalism: Borden Parker Bowne (1847–1910), who became professor of philosophy at Boston University in 1876, was the theologian who developed Boston Personalism. This system was created as a philosophical defense of Classical Protestant Liberalism, based on the principle that personhood was the

fundamental category for explaining reality. Bowne's masterpiece, *Metaphysics*, appeared in 1882.

His work was continued in the twentieth century by his student Edgar Sheffield Brightman, who taught philosophy at Boston University from 1919 to 1953. Right before Brightman's death in 1953, he taught his most famous student, the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., who eventually completed his Ph.D. in systematic theology at Boston University in 1955.

King's words later on give one of the best descriptions of Boston Personalism I have ever read:⁶¹

I studied philosophy and theology at Boston University under Edgar S. Brightman and L. Harold DeWolf ... It was mainly under these teachers that I studied Personalistic philosophy — the theory that the clue to the meaning of ultimate reality is found in personality. This personal idealism remains today my basic philosophical position. Personalism's insistence that only personality — finite and infinite — is ultimately real strengthened me in two convictions: it gave me metaphysical and philosophical grounding for the idea of a personal God, and it gave me a metaphysical basis for the dignity and worth of all human personality.

Methodist Personalism went well beyond the standard teachings of Classical Liberal Protestantism

Large numbers of early twentieth-century Methodist philosophical theologians were in firm agreement: the idea of a personal God was not just a symbol or metaphor, it was perfectly real. In fact the Personhood of God was the Great Reality upon which everything else in the universe was founded. This was not standard Classical Protestant Liberal teaching — it went well

beyond that — but Alcoholics Anonymous absorbed this kind of belief from reading *The Upper Room*.

The meditations in *The Upper Room* were so steeped in this strongly personalistic philosophy that the A.A. people who read from it every morning absorbed it as much subconsciously as consciously. Not just the most competent ministers, but some of the best Methodist theologians of that era, including the seminary professors and the teachers in Methodist colleges and universities, were the ones who oversaw the material which appeared in *The Upper Room*, and frequently contributed readings themselves. So although these meditations were designed to be read by ordinary laypeople, great pains nevertheless were taken to make sure that they talked continually of a God with whom we could develop the strongest possible ties.

These meditations in *The Upper Room* not only made it clear that God was personal — that this was not just a metaphor or an overdrawn use of symbolic language — *but that our human lives gained their real meaning only from entering into a deep personal relationship with God*, where we became the Friends of God, and walked through the day side by side with the Living God. We talked with him as our best friend. He dried our tears, strengthened our spines, and — the A.A. people discovered — sometimes even laughed at us and with us, with the great rolling laughter of Heaven echoing outward among all the galaxies and stars, and bringing us back to sanity.

A.A. people were absorbing these ideas daily, from the very beginning when Dr. Bob met Bill W. in 1935, long before the Big Book was written. When we walk into an A.A. meeting and hear most of the people who have been in the program for a while talking about their relationship with their Higher Power, it soon becomes clear that the teachings of Methodist Personalism form part of the very deepest core of A.A. teaching.

CHAPTER 18

Emmet Fox: Sermon on the Mount and New Thought

Early A.A. meetings talked about Emmet Fox, one of the most famous of the New Thought authors, almost as much as they did about Oxford Group ideas, not only in New York City (where the A.A. people regularly went to hear Fox’s sermons) but also in Akron (where they could not hear him in person, but could still read his writings).⁶²

The key book of course was Emmet Fox’s *The Sermon on the Mount*, which they strongly recommended to newcomers.⁶³

But two short pieces written by Fox were also regularly read by A.A. people and heavily influenced A.A. spirituality at the deepest level: “Staying on the Beam” and “The Golden Key.”

The first of these little pieces was printed in the most commonly used booklet of early A.A. beginners lessons, called the Detroit Pamphlet or Washington D.C. Pamphlet or Tablemate, which was used by A.A. groups all over the United States:

STAYING ON THE BEAM

by **Emmet Fox**

Today most commercial flying is done on a radio beam. A directional beam is produced to guide the pilot to his

destination, and as long as he keeps on this beam he knows that he is safe, even if he cannot see around him for fog, or get his bearings in any other way.

As soon as he gets off the beam in any direction he is in danger, and he immediately tries to get back on to the beam once more.

Those who believe in the All-ness of God, have a spiritual beam upon which to navigate on the voyage of life. As long as you have peace of mind and some sense of the Presence of God you are on the beam, and you are safe, even if outer things seem to be confused or even very dark; but as soon as you get off the beam you are in danger.

You are off the beam the moment you are angry or resentful or jealous or frightened or depressed; and when such a condition arises you should immediately get back on the beam by turning quietly to God in thought, claiming His Presence, claiming that His Love and Intelligence are with you, and that the promises in the Bible are true today.

If you do this you are back on the beam, even if outer conditions and your own feelings do not change immediately. You are back on the beam and you will reach port in safety.

Keep on the beam and nothing shall by any means hurt you.

The second little piece was easily obtainable as a small printed pamphlet:

THE GOLDEN KEY TO PRAYER

by Emmet Fox

I have compressed this essay into a few pages. Had it been possible I would have reduced it to as many lines. It is not intended to be an instructional treatise, but a practical recipe for getting out of trouble. Study and research are well in

their own time and place, but no amount of either will get you out of a concrete difficulty. Nothing but practical work in your own consciousness will do that. The mistake made by many people, when things go wrong, is to skim through book after book, without getting anywhere. Read *The Golden Key* several times. Do exactly what it says, and if you are persistent enough you will overcome any difficulty.

— Emmet Fox

Prayer will enable you, sooner or later, to get yourself, or anyone else, out of any difficulty on the face of the earth. It is the Golden Key to harmony and happiness. To those who have no acquaintance with the mightiest power in existence, this may appear to be a rash claim, but it needs only a fair trial to prove that, without a shadow of doubt, it is a just one. You need take no one's word for it, and you should not. Simply try it for yourself, and see.

God is omnipotent, and man is His image and likeness, and has dominion over all things. This is the inspired teaching, and it is intended to be taken literally, at its face value. Man means every man, and so the ability to draw on this power is not the special prerogative of the mystic or the saint, as is so often supposed, or even of the highly trained practitioner. Whoever you are, wherever you may be, the Golden Key to harmony is in your hand now. This is because in scientific prayer it is God who works, and not you, and so your particular limitations or weaknesses are of no account in the process. You are only the channel through which the divine action takes place, and your treatment will really be just the getting of yourself out of the way. Beginners often get startling results at the first time of trying, for all that is absolutely essential is to have an open mind, and sufficient faith to try the experiment. Apart from that, you may hold any views on religion, or none.

As for the actual method of working, like all fundamental things, it is simplicity itself. All that you have to do is this: Stop thinking about the difficulty, whatever it is, and think about God instead. This is the complete rule, and if only you will do this, the trouble, whatever it is, will presently disappear. It makes no difference what kind of trouble it is. It may be a big thing or a little thing; it may concern health, finance, a lawsuit, a quarrel, an accident, or anything else conceivable; but whatever it is, just stop thinking about it, and think of God instead — that is all you have to do.

The thing could not be simpler, could it? God Himself could scarcely have made it simpler, and yet it never fails to work when given a fair trial.

Do not try to form a picture of God, which is impossible. Work by rehearsing anything or everything that you know about God. God is Wisdom, Truth, inconceivable Love. God is present everywhere; has infinite power; knows everything; and so on. It matters not how well you may think you understand these things: go over them repeatedly.

But you must stop thinking of the trouble, whatever it is. The rule is to think about God, and if you are thinking about your difficulty you are not thinking about God. To be continually glancing over your shoulder, as it were, in order to see how matters are progressing, is fatal, because that is thinking of the trouble, and you must think of God, and of nothing else. Your object is to drive the thought of the difficulty right out of your consciousness, for a few moments at least, substituting for it the thought of God. This is the crux of the whole thing. If you can become so absorbed in this consideration of the spiritual world that you really forget for a while all about the trouble concerning which you began to pray, you will presently find that you are safely and comfortably out of your difficulty — that your demonstration is made.

In order to “Golden Key” a troublesome person or a difficult situation, think, “Now I am going to ‘Golden Key’ John, or Mary, or that threatened danger”; then proceed to drive all thought of John, or Mary, or the danger right out of your mind, replacing it by the thought of God. By working in this way about a person, you are not seeking to influence his conduct in any way, except that you prevent him from injuring or annoying you, and you do him nothing but good. Thereafter he is certain to be in some degree a better, wiser, and more spiritual person, just because you have “Golden Keyed” him. A pending lawsuit or other difficulty would probably fade out harmlessly without coming to a crisis, justice being done to all parties concerned.

If you find that you can do this very quickly, you may repeat the operation several times a day with intervals between. Be sure, however, each time you have done it, that you drop all thought of the matter until the next time. This is important.

We have said that the Golden Key is simple, and so it is, but, of course, it is not always easy to turn. If you are very frightened or worried it may be difficult, at first, to get your thoughts away from material things. But by constantly repeating some statement of absolute Truth that appeals to you, such as *There is no power but God*, or *I am the child of God, filled and surrounded by the perfect peace of God*, or *God is love*, or *God is guiding me now*, or, perhaps best and simplest of all, just *God is with me* — however mechanical or dead it may seem at first — you will soon find that the treatment has begun to “take,” and that your mind is clearing. Do not struggle violently; be quiet but insistent. Each time that you find your attention wandering, just switch it straight back to God.

Do not try to think out in advance what the solution of your difficulty will probably turn out to be. This is technically called “outlining,” and will only delay the

demonstration. Leave the question of ways and means strictly to God. You want to get out of your difficulty — that is sufficient. You do your half, and God will never fail to do His.

“Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Fox was a major author: his *Sermon on the Mount* has sold 600,000 copies and his *Power Through Constructive Thinking* over 500,000, so just counting these two books alone, over a million copies of his writings have been sold.

We can see his influence on early A.A. in any number of places, including all through the A.A. Big Book. One might look, for example, at the long passage on pages 60-63 of that book, which is classic Emmet Fox: All the world’s a stage, the Big Book said there, but I thought I was the stage director. I must learn to step back every time I find myself doing this, and say something to remind myself that God is totally in charge, and that all I have to do is quit interfering and let him run things.

In addition to Emmet Fox (1886-1951), the list of influential nineteenth and early twentieth-century New Thought preachers, writers, and healers included Phineas Parkhurst Quimby (1802-1866), Emma Curtis Hopkins (1849–1925), Thomas Troward (1847-1916), and James Allen (1864-1912).

One could also include, as part of this tradition, a number of more recent figures such as Louise Hay, born in 1926; Helen Schucman, who lived from 1909 to 1981; and Marianne Williamson, who was born in 1952 (although these three figures of course had no influence on the world of early Alcoholics Anonymous). But Louise Hay’s *You Can Heal Your Life* (1984) has sold 35 million copies to date (as opposed to 30 million copies

for the A.A. Big Book), and even the works of some of the other New Thought authors have sometimes sold quite well. Helen Schucman's famous book *A Course in Miracles* (1975) has sold 2 million copies, and Marianne Williamson's *A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of A Course in Miracles* (1992) has sold 3 million copies.

Spiritual laws and the natural healing process

But let us stick to Emmet Fox's teaching. If I might explain his position in my own words, he argues that just as the physical world has its unbreakable laws of cause and consequence, so too does the spiritual dimension. If we want to lead a good spiritual life, we have to learn how to live in harmony with the laws of that realm, which also are in fact scientific laws — the Christian denomination to which he belonged called itself quite deliberately the *Divine Science Church* — and these laws can be scientifically *demonstrated*, he believed, in the same way as the laws of physics.

Now if I break my arm, the laws of nature provide for the healing of that broken bone as part of a natural healing process. I may need to put a splint or cast on that arm to hold the broken ends together for several weeks, in order to allow for the natural healing process to occur. But it is important to note that physicians do not heal broken arms, they merely help the natural healing process go as smoothly as possible. The same observation applies if I cut my arm. If the cut is extremely deep, it might be helpful to have a physician put stitches in it, but even then, it is the natural healing processes of nature which are going to heal that cut.

In the same way, there is a universal healing power which can heal a wounded spirit. But I have to quit doing things which keep tearing the spiritual wound back open every time it starts to heal even in the slightest. Rehearsing my anger and resentment over

and over in my mind prevents spiritual healing, for example, and has much the same effect as continually wiggling a broken arm so the two halves of the broken bone can never heal back together. Refusal to forgive the other human being who wounded me will also keep the spiritual wound pulled open where it cannot heal properly.

Thinking the right thoughts inside my head will not only promote healing, but can also bring me peace and prosperity. Thinking the wrong kind of thoughts however will bring misery and catastrophe down on my head. If I think continual thoughts of anger towards other people, I will find myself increasingly cast into situations in which more and more things are being done to me which make me angry. If I think continual thoughts of love towards other people, I will find my life increasingly filled with loving people all around me. If I think continual thoughts of being ground down in poverty, I will bring even worse poverty down on my head. If I think thoughts of prosperity and gratitude for all the good things I am going to receive from the universe, I will find my life filled with an overflowing material prosperity.

Looked at one way, there is nothing actually “supernatural” about this law of spiritual cause and consequence in New Thought, not really, because we can see that these effects are not violating natural law, once we realize that spiritual laws are just as real as the kind of laws of nature which physicists study.

There are many other ways also in which we can encourage people to turn to a kind of universal power of grace, which is built into the laws of nature and the very structure of the universe itself. Every good physician whom I have ever asked has given me their observations on the profound effect which their patients’ mental states have on their recovery rates. They tell me how they have

had patients die whom modern medical science could otherwise have healed, because these patients gave up their will to live. And contrariwise, patients who were willing to fight to live could often pull through when all the normal medical odds seemed against them. What are apparently very simple things can sometimes have major effects: important studies, for example, have shown that patients who have just undergone surgery and are put into a recovery room with a window where they can see the world outside the hospital, have a higher survival rate and a more rapid recovery than those who are put in windowless rooms.

Learning how to stop being afraid of God

One of the biggest problems which most newcomers to A.A. have in dealing with the spiritual aspects of the program when they first come in, is that they are absolutely terrified of God. In fact this is the case with most people in the western world: each time they start to come into real contact with the living presence of God, their first instinctive reaction is to shut their eyes, plug their ears, and jerk back in raw fear. This is why effective spiritual teaching has to continually work at reassuring people that God loves them, and is not going to harm them but is going to befriend them and heal them.

Early A.A. switched from Oxford Group literature to Emmet Fox's *Sermon on the Mount* because Fox did such a much better job of calming the newcomers' fears. And he still does: his book still works just as well today. Fox told newcomers point blank that the dire image which scared them so much — the idea of a cruel, vindictive, punishing God — was nothing but an imaginary bogeyman from an ancient and superstitious world:

Glimpsing one tiny corner of the universe, and that with only half-opened eyes, and working from an exclusively anthropocentric and egocentric point of view, men built up absurd and very horrible fables about a limited and man-like God who conducted his universe very much as a rather ignorant and barbarous prince might conduct the affairs of a small Oriental kingdom. All sorts of human weaknesses, such as vanity, fickleness, and spite, were attributed to this being. Then a farfetched and very inconsistent legend was built up concerning original sin, vicarious blood atonement, infinite punishment for finite transgressions; and, in certain cases, an unutterably horrible doctrine of predestination to eternal torment, or eternal bliss, was added. Now, no such theory as this is taught in the Bible. If it were the object of the Bible to teach it, it would be clearly stated in a straightforward manner in some chapter or other; but it is not.⁶⁴

The real Jesus did not go around inventing hundreds of rules and laws, Fox said, and telling us that we would invariably suffer eternal hellfire for breaking a single one of them. In fact he discouraged “hard-and-fast rules and regulations of every kind. What he insisted upon was a certain spirit in one’s conduct, and he was careful to teach principles only, knowing that when the spirit is right, details will take care of themselves.” That is, Jesus certainly never denied that we were supposed to act morally toward our fellow human beings. But it was the spirit of the law rather than the letter of the law that we needed to follow, where the spirit of the law could normally be summed up as a command to treat other human beings with love and compassion.⁶⁵

CHAPTER 19

Emmet Fox: His Life

Emmet Fox, in spite of the radical form into which his ideas eventually grew, was born in 1886 (during the middle of the notoriously straitlaced, moralistic Victorian era) into a pious Roman Catholic family in Ireland, and received his early formative education at a Catholic grammar school run by Jesuits: St. Ignatius' College at Stamford Hill in north London. At a young age however, he began to fall under the influence of the New Thought movement, and eventually came over to America, where in 1931 he was ordained by the Divine Science Church, one of the three largest New Thought denominations in the United States, and was appointed as pastor of the Church of the Healing Christ in New York City.

Fox's most famous book, *The Sermon on the Mount*, first came out in 1934. Another well-known work of his, *Power Through Constructive Thinking*, was not published until 1940 (after the A.A. Big Book came out in 1939), but was constructed from pamphlets and leaflets on a variety of spiritual topics, some of them copyrighted as early as 1932.⁶⁶ So I will occasionally cite this latter book as well: the early A.A.'s were also exposed to those ideas during the years 1935 to 1939, from going to hear Fox's sermons and from picking up pamphlets and leaflets while they

were there, even though this material had not yet been printed up in book form.

Fox accepted all of the major findings of the new historical-critical biblical research, such as (to give one example) the discovery during the 1890's that the Old Testament book of Isaiah actually contained the writings not only of the prophet Isaiah who lived in the eighth century B.C. (in chapters 1-39), but also the writings of other authors who clearly on historical grounds had to have lived in different time periods from that one, including the major sixth century author whose name is unknown, but who is referred to by biblical scholars as Deutero-Isaiah (chapters 40-55).⁶⁷

Although Emmet Fox ended up as pastor of a Protestant church, he was brought up as a child in the Roman Catholic Church, and there were still strongly Catholic elements in his thought. So for example, Fox did not interpret the Bible literally (in the typical Protestant fashion) but in the kind of allegorical fashion which was used by the Catholic and Orthodox authors of the Early Christian period, beginning in the first century A.D. (the New Testament often read the Old Testament in allegorical fashion), and extending through the second and third century and beyond, all the way through to the end of the Middle Ages. By allegorical, I mean in the broadest sense, the kind of interpretive method used in medieval Catholic art and scriptural interpretation, where various items in the biblical text were interpreted as symbols or metaphors of higher realities.

So in biblical phrases like "give us this day our daily bread," the word bread symbolizes not only physical food, Fox teaches, but also things like "spiritual perception, spiritual understanding, and preeminently spiritual realization." The word heart does not refer

to the organ in my chest which pumps blood, but is a symbol for what modern psychology calls the subconscious mind. The word city in the Bible always stands allegorically for my human consciousness, Fox says, and the terms hill or mountain refer metaphorically to prayer or spiritual activity. So when the Bible speaks of the need to become like “a city set upon a hill,” this means allegorically that your proper goal is to build your human consciousness upon a foundation of prayer and turn it into “the Golden City, the City of God” that shines out over all the world. Likewise when the Bible speaks of bringing offerings and placing them upon an altar, the “altar” is our own human consciousness, and the “offerings” which we bring are the prayers we speak. When we are asked in the Bible to make offerings which are described as “burnt sacrifices,” what we are really being asked to do is to take all our erroneous thoughts about life and the world, and destroy or burn away these wrong thoughts upon the divine altar of our human consciousness.⁶⁸

Some of his interpretations were especially profound and led the early A.A.’s straight to the heart of a life truly dedicated to God. They were like the ecstatic cries of the greatest of the medieval Catholic saints and mystics, such as Fox’s deeply moving interpretation of the phrase “poor in spirit”:

To be poor in spirit means to have emptied yourself of all desire to exercise personal self-will, and, what is just as important, to have renounced all preconceived opinions in the wholehearted search for God. It means to be willing to set aside your present habits of thought, your present views and prejudices, your present way of life if necessary; to jettison, in fact, anything and everything that can stand in the way of your finding God.⁶⁹

Early A.A. contact with Emmet Fox

Fox's importance to A.A. history was pointed out at an early date by Jim Burwell, a famous early A.A. member who came into the program in New York City in 1938. At some point prior to the end of 1947, Jim wrote a little history of early A.A. entitled "Memoirs of Jimmy: The Evolution of Alcoholics Anonymous."⁷⁰ Commenting on the way Bill Wilson wrote the Big Book, he said:

Bill probably got most of his ideas from ... James' "Varieties of Religious Experience." I have always felt this was because Bill himself had undergone such a violent spiritual experience. He also gained a fine basic insight of spirituality through Emmet Fox's "Sermon on the Mount," and a good portion of the psychological approach of A.A. from Dick Peabody's "Common Sense of Drinking."

Although one could argue that the claim that these three books supplied most of the ideas in the Big Book was an oversimplification, one should note the way in which one of the major early East Coast A.A.'s emphasized the importance of Emmet Fox for understanding many aspects of the Big Book and early A.A. thought.

A.A. historian Mel Barger, who had his first encounter with A.A. in the late 1940's and got permanently sober in 1950, had the blessing of having frequent contact with Bill W. during one point in his life, when Mel was living in the New York City area and was on the *Grapevine* committee at A.A. headquarters. This gave him an opportunity to ask Bill directly about the sources of many of his ideas. Mel later stated in an article he wrote on Emmet Fox that

I have long believed that some of my best spiritual help has come from reading the books of Emmet Fox, especially *The*

Sermon on the Mount. I also learned in a brief discussion with Bill W. that he and the other pioneer A.A.'s attended Emmet Fox's lectures in New York in the late 1930's and benefitted from them.⁷¹

And Doug B., also a very knowledgeable and reliable A.A. historian, likewise dated the New York A.A. group's devoted following of Emmet Fox back into the 1930's. In Doug's case this information came through his own family: "my mother-in-law used to attend many of Emmet Fox's talks in New York in the 30's and 40's. She said she would see Bill W. at many of them and that Bill always had a group of men with him."⁷²

And many others among the earliest A.A. members were deeply influenced by Emmet Fox's ideas. Igor I. Sikorsky, Jr., in his book *AA's Godparents*, noted that "five of the original stories in the Big Book were by early A.A. members deeply influenced by Emmet Fox."⁷³ In Akron, Dr. Bob would regularly give newcomers a copy of Fox's *Sermon on the Mount* to read.⁷⁴ Mel B., in his book *New Wine*, said that "Mike E., the second A.A. member from Detroit, often mentioned the inspiration he received from Fox's book when he started his recovery in 1938, even before the publication of *Alcoholics Anonymous*."⁷⁵ Later on, Glenn "Tex" Brown, who was a leader in A.A. in the Chicago area for 53 years, said that Emmet Fox's *Sermon on the Mount* was as popular as the Big Book when he first came into A.A. in the Chicago suburb of Skokie, Illinois, on February 6, 1947.⁷⁶ A.A. historian Mel Barger, speaking of his own personal experience in early A.A., said in a message to an A.A. history group that "I am very grateful that I spent my first months in sobriety [in 1950] in Pontiac, Michigan, where the group offered Emmet Fox's *The Sermon on the Mount* and other items that have been very helpful to me over the years."⁷⁷

In March 1944, a special kind of link was established between Emmet Fox and the A.A. movement, when the son of Fox's secretary joined A.A. The son was a man named Harold A. "Al" Steckman. He became very active in A.A. He was the author of the Responsibility Pledge recited at the Toronto International in 1965 ("I am responsible. When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there. And for that I am responsible") and also wrote the Declaration of Unity used at the Miami International in 1970. In his later years, he wrote a book called *Bert D.: Hardhat, Inebriate, Scholar*. He was at various points Director of the New York Intergroup Association, a Trustee, *Grapevine* Director and *Grapevine* Editor.⁷⁸

When Al became the *Grapevine* Editor in 1949, the magazine wasn't too well known around the country. There were many months when he wrote the entire issue by himself, signing each article with a different set of initials and giving a different locality.⁷⁹

As editor of the *Grapevine*, Al also changed the basic nature of the major A.A. periodical when he "shifted editorial emphasis away from drunk stories to You're Not Drinking—Now What."⁸⁰

The shift from Oxford Group ideas to Emmet Fox and New Thought

A profound shift in A.A. took place around the time the Big Book was published in 1939. At the point when the book came off the press, one important segment of the A.A. movement (the part in the Akron-Cleveland area) was still linked to the Oxford Group. But in the A.A. literature written in the decade following, that is, during the 1940's, there were no mentions of books on the Oxford Group, in Akron or anywhere else, and no recommendations —

none at all — that anyone read any of the major books written by prominent Oxford Group members. The Oxford Group connection was dead.

Editorial note: there was one partial exception to this observation, Richmond Walker's use in places in his *Twenty-Four Hours a Day* book (in 1948) of heavily modified passages he had borrowed from a book with Oxford Group linkages: *God Calling by Two Listeners*. But except for the Two Listeners' use of automatic writing, it is difficult to see any real Oxford Group ideas in their work, and Walker revised his borrowed passages anyway to fit into his own spirituality, which was not identifiably Oxford Group teaching. Walker did sometimes mention the importance (to him) of the virtues of honesty, unselfishness, love and purity, but he never called them "Absolutes," which was the really key issue when speaking of the Oxford Group Four Absolutes.

On the other hand, as we have just seen, there was a significant contingent within the A.A. fellowship during the 1940's which was strongly devoted to Emmet Fox and New Thought spirituality, and newcomers *were* very strongly urged to read New Thought books.

As an example of the way that the newer A.A. literature of the 1940's was emphasizing the importance of New Thought ideas, there was a suggested reading list at the end of the first edition of the little pamphlet called the *Akron Manual* (published c. June 1942) which was handed out to alcoholics when they entered St. Thomas Hospital in Akron for detoxing. This pamphlet, which presumably had the approval of both Dr. Bob and Sister Ignatia, strongly recommended that alcoholics who were new to the A.A. program read Emmet Fox's *Sermon on the Mount*, as well as another New Thought classic, James Allen's *As a Man Thinketh* (1902).⁸¹

Influence on Bill Wilson

For Fox, God was conceived (in some respects) in fundamentally the same way as the medieval Catholic tradition had understood him, as a divine *Nous* (the Greek word for Mind) or *Intellectus* (the Latin word for Intelligence) which presided over the universe. Fox therefore characteristically described God as the “Divine Mind,” the “Great Mind,” or “Infinite Mind.”⁸²

But Fox also saw the need, in the modern world, for us to introduce a more dynamic element into the concept of God. Modern science understood causation in a different way from the Middle Ages. We had to talk of God today as a Power or Force, “a source of energy stronger than electricity, more potent than high explosive; unlimited and inexhaustible.” If God was mind or intelligence, this divine reality nevertheless had to be more than a realm of pure, unchanging Platonic ideas. God had to be in some way a *Creative Intelligence*, a Mind which “is ever seeking for more and new expression.” This divine drive for continual creativity and novelty underlies all human life at a profound level: an individual human being is in fact God’s-creativity-in-action, “the dynamic Thinking of that Mind,” an opening through which Infinite Energy is seeking a creative outlet.”⁸³

We can see the strong influence of this kind of teaching on Bill Wilson’s description of God in the Big Book. Even before he began his recovery from alcoholism, Bill said, he was willing to accept the idea of a God who was “Creative Intelligence, Universal Mind or Spirit of Nature,” as long as this was construed in such a way that human beings would still be allowed the freedom to think for themselves and come up with their own creative ideas. But he could never accept the idea, he said, of some kind of authoritarian, all-controlling “Czar of the Heavens.” We human beings had be

allowed to ask questions and raise new issues and think for ourselves at all times, because this was a necessary part of our creativity — if we were not being creative and innovative, we were not imitating the Creator God successfully. Nevertheless, we still needed God, and “as soon as we admitted the possible existence of a Creative Intelligence, a Spirit of the Universe underlying the totality of things, we began to be possessed of a new sense of power and direction.”⁸⁴

Now it is true that one of Bill Wilson’s most important basic convictions about God — that a person did not have to begin with a belief in any kind of completely orthodox traditional doctrine of God and Christ in order to be saved and healed — could well have come in part from Oxford Group leader Dr. Sam Shoemaker. The latter stated in numerous ways that a person could start his spiritual journey by giving “as much of himself as he can, to as much of Christ as he understands.”⁸⁵

But *the specific concept of God* which Bill in fact recommended after he got sober, was based on Emmet Fox and New Thought, not on Oxford Group ideas.

CHAPTER 20

Emmet Fox: Influence of Hinduism and the Doctrine of Karma

The New Thought movement was deeply influenced in its earliest stages by the world of Asian religions: Hindu Vedanta thought⁸⁶ and, especially in James Allen's case, Buddhism as well.⁸⁷

They believed that the material, phenomenal world external to our own minds was only an *illusion*, what the Hindu tradition called *maya*, that is, a screen of false and unreal things which blocked us from knowledge of the transcendent Godhead which lay behind and beyond all other things. And they taught that events within this realm of *maya* followed what Hindu and Buddhist spirituality called the law of *karma*. This meant that all of our actions necessarily created consequences, and not only our actions but also our inner thoughts and feelings. An angry thought or deed on my part, for example, would start a chain of events which eventually circled around until I found myself becoming the victim of someone else's anger. I would always eventually get paid back in kind for anything I did to other people.

New Thought spirituality taught that we captives to the world-illusion could be freed from the chains of karma only by learning how to "see through" the illusions in our picture of the world. We

had to learn how to recognize all the falsities and untruths which we had been using as the guiding principles of our lives. If we were feeling pain and suffering — including deep resentments, continual inner rage, fear, worry, anxiety, shame, and guilt — we could heal these problems simply by learning how to think about them differently.

The more extreme New Thought authors taught that this also included pain and suffering caused by external and material things such as physical illness, money problems, lawsuits, and so on. Emmet Fox believed that even this sort of problem could be healed by developing right thought inside our own heads, but most A.A. people applied this principle only to painful and tormenting inner emotions and feelings.

**James Allen, *As a Man Thinketh*: Buddhist
literature put on the 1942 Akron recommended
reading list for newcomers**

Is this a strange thing to say, that early A.A. incorporated ideas drawn originally from Hindu Vedanta and Buddhist thought? In his book *As a Man Thinketh*, which was put on the Akron Manual's short list of books which every A.A. newcomer should read, the author James Allen quoted from the great Buddhist text called the Dhammapada and devoted his little book to explaining the Buddhist understanding of karma. He also described how to escape from the chains of bad karma — these being endless chains of events, which brought “bad luck” and catastrophe down on our heads over and over again, seemingly by accident, but in fact not. By putting this book on their reading list in 1942, the Akron AA group was telling alcoholics that, if we could learn to break these repeating chains, we would find ourselves no longer being continually driven into trying to escape into drugs and alcohol.

James Allen's book was a work designed above all for the atheists in early AA, but in fact this kind of Buddhist nontheistic interpretation of A.A. spirituality could also be used quite effectively by people who sought God through a New Thought spiritual approach. Through enlightenment, we discovered the powerful negative effect of bad chains of karma in our lives. By learning how to break these karmic chains, we began to find true serenity and peace, and happy, satisfying relationships with other people.

Heng Sure's Song

I believe that one of the best ways of showing modern A.A. members how deeply their ideas and practices are influenced by the Hindu and Buddhist doctrine of karma, would be to have them study the words of a little folk song, written and performed by a Buddhist monk currently residing in California.⁸⁸ The author is the Rev. Heng Sure, the director of the Berkeley Buddhist Monastery on 2304 McKinley Ave., right next to the campus of the University of California at Berkeley. It sounds to most modern A.A. members just like old-time A.A. sponsors explaining the facts of life to the newcomers whom they are sponsoring.

CAUSE & EFFECT, OR HERE COMES KARMA NOW

Wise ones know we plant a seed
With every word and deed,
Once we plant it —
Here comes karma now.

Sometimes good, sometimes bad;
Makes us happy, makes us sad;
Choose it wisely —
Here comes karma now.

Karma is not heaven-sent,
 Karma is not punishment.
 Sweep the garden —
 Here comes karma now.

There's no lawyer you can call,
 The judge and jury left the hall.
 Learn the rules, use good sense:
 This is cause and consequence.

Like the seed, is the fruit;
 Know the leaf, you know the root;
 Can't argue —
 Here comes karma now.

Conscience is a quiet voice;
 Pay your money, take your choice;
 It's your harvest —
 Here comes karma now.

It's not luck, it's not fate;
 No room to negotiate;
 No fooling —
 Here comes karma now.

Plays no favorites, hears no lies;
 Doesn't truck with alibis.
 You can threaten, you can curse;
 You can't re-wire the universe.

Some are careful with the roots,
 They're contented with the fruits,
 Plant and harvest —
 Here comes karma now.

Some are careless at the start,
 At the end a broken heart.
 No excuses —

Here comes karma now.

You can smile till it hurts,
 Help yourself to just desserts,
 Pay the piper —
 Here comes karma now.

Blame the scapegoat, cry and wail;
 Ask the woman with the scales.
 Blind justice tells no tales:
 Who goes home, who goes to jail.

Ain't no lawyer gets away,
 Ain't no judge you can pay,
 Just like magic —
 Here comes karma now.

How New Thought ideas helped shape early A.A. teaching

We can see immediately the enormous impact of these ideas on the A.A. movement across the board. Whenever someone in an A.A. group starts complaining about his or her life and the way other people are behaving, it does not take long for a good old-timer to say words to this effect: “What saved my life was discovering that it was not other people who were the real problem in my life, it was me, and what was going on in my own head. What finally brought me peace of mind was discovering that it was not external circumstances which were destroying me, but the way I was thinking about them. The enemy is not out there; my greatest enemy is inside my own head.” If the beginner says, “But look at what so-and-so did to me,” the good old-timers ask “But what was your role in it? Think hard about it: was it in fact something that you did which actually started everything off?”

A.A. beginners live in a whole world of illusions (*maya*). They believe that they are smarter and more competent and far more *important* than they really are. Or they believe that they have committed some sin or offense far worse than anyone else in the world ever committed. They believe that their worst enemies are their best friends, and vice versa. They are convinced that if they just try hard enough they can change the way all the other people around them think and act. So in the twelve step program, they are asked to write out a Fourth Step in which they begin dismantling all these illusions. They are asked to finally leave the world of *maya* behind, and start looking at reality.

All these absolutely central A.A. beliefs, and the enormous emphasis placed upon them, came from New Thought. They did not come from the Oxford Group or the Protestant fundamentalists, nor did they come from the liberal Protestants or from the huge wave of Roman Catholics who began joining A.A. in the Spring of 1939. And these particular New Thought ideas came ultimately from the Hindu and Buddhist religious teachers of Asia.

James' Varieties of Religious Experience

New Thought was a very important part of the American and British religious scene at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. We see William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience* devoting a whole chapter to it. James called New Thought "The Religion of Healthy-Mindedness." and sometimes also referred to it as the "mind-cure" movement. As a good psychologist, James believed strongly that different personality types needed different kinds of religion — there was no such thing as one sort of religion which could fit all. But New Thought could give enormous help to one particular type of alcoholic personality.

Some of the more radical aspects of Emmet Fox's thought

Emmet Fox states that God comes to consciousness within us, in such a way that God sees the universe through our eyes, as we begin to become conscious of God in ourselves. This sounds radical indeed, and yet it is especially here that we hear echoes of a number of medieval Catholic and Orthodox authors — John Scotus Eriugena (an Irishman just like Emmet Fox) and Meister Eckhart, for example — along with the great fourth century Cappadocian theologians who spoke of each individual human spirit as an individual *hypostasis* (personification) of God, and who spoke of the created universe (taken as a totality) as a temporal *energeia* (operation, energy, or act) of God's eternal divine *ousia* (being or substance).

Or to put it another way, the great Cappadocian theologians like St. Gregory of Nyssa regarded this material universe as a vast flowing river of energy, arising out of God as its fountainhead, in which each of us individual human beings was a tiny rivulet that had been given personhood within this vast ocean of energy.

Emmet Fox expressed his version of this idea as follows:

Man being manifestation or expression of God has a limitless destiny before him. His work is to express, in concrete, definite form, the abstract ideas with which God furnishes him, and in order to do this, he must have creative power. If he did not have creative power, he would be merely a machine through which God worked — an automaton. But man is not an automaton; he is an individualized consciousness. God individualizes Himself in an infinite number of distinct focal points of consciousness, each one quite different; and therefore each one is a distinct way of knowing the universe, each a distinct experience The

consciousness of each one is distinct from God and from all others, and yet none are separated. How can this be? How can two things be one, and yet not one and the same? The answer is that in matter, which is finite, they cannot; but in Spirit, which is infinite, they can. With our present limited, three-dimensional consciousness, we cannot see this; but intuitively we can understand it through prayer. If God did not individualize Himself, there would be only one experience; as it is, there are as many universes as there are individuals to form them through thinking.⁸⁹

Fox's God was in fact at the basic level an essentially impersonal absolute which imposed laws on the universe. What was important however, was that these laws included not only the physical laws which physicists, chemists, and biologists studied, *but also spiritual laws*.⁹⁰ The most important of these spiritual laws, was that the way I thought about the universe would determine the way my own universe would become. If I thought angry thoughts, I would eventually find myself surrounded by anger and anger-producing circumstances on all sides. If I thought loving thoughts, I would eventually find myself encompassed by love on all sides. If I thought healing thoughts, I would find not only my soul and body being healed, but also the torn relationships around me.

God was Mind, but only in the sense that God was a being which "thought" a set of abstract ideas, general concepts, and universal laws which governed all of the universe. The basic argument here was that if we had a coherent and well-organized set of universal ideas ruling everything, then there had to be something which was in some sense "thinking" these ideas, that is, holding them in existence. Even if one rejected the idea of calling this a "Mind" which was "thinking ideas," it was nevertheless obvious

that the laws of nature were ideas (not material things) which subsisted over and above the material universe to which they gave direction. The important thing here, however, was that in Emmet Fox's version of New Thought spirituality, even if he referred to God as *Mind* or *Spirit*, he meant this only in the almost completely impersonal, intellectual sense found in Aristotle's God, in later pagan Greek Neo-Platonic philosophy, and in some forms of nineteenth-century German philosophical Idealism (where *Geist*, the German word for Spirit, meant a set of what an English-speaker would normally call intellectualized ideas).

The Wonder Child

Fox talked about the above ideas in even greater detail in the chapter on "The Wonder Child" which was placed at the beginning of his book *Power Through Constructive Thinking*. The divine power which ran through each of us, Fox said, was the power of *Being Itself*:

This extraordinary Power, mystic though I have rightly called it, is nevertheless very real, no mere imaginary abstraction, but actually the most practical thing there is. The existence of this Power is already well known to thousands of people in the world today, and has been known to certain enlightened souls for tens of thousands of years. This Power is really no less than the primal Power of Being, and to discover that Power is the Divine birthright of all men. It is your right and your privilege to make your contact with this Power, and to allow it to work through your body, mind, and estate, so that you need no longer grovel upon the ground amid limitations and difficulties, but can soar up on wings like an eagle to the realm of dominion and joy.

But where, it will naturally be asked, is the wonderful, mystic Power to be contacted? Where may we find it? and

how is it brought into action? The answer is perfectly simple — this Power is to be found within your own consciousness, the last place that most people would look for it. Right within your own mentality.⁹¹

Transmigration of souls

There were one or two quite surprising teachings in Emmet Fox's works — for example, in his book *Power Through Constructive Thinking*, there was a major section on the doctrine of reincarnation,⁹² showing yet another influence of Vedic Hindu thought on his ideas. The doctrine of transmigration and reincarnation, Fox said, explained why some babies were born deformed or blind while others were born physically healthy, and why some were born into successful and well-to-do families while others were born into rags, poverty, and even the chains of slavery. It explained why some people were born into families with good and loving parents while others were born into dysfunctional families where they suffered continuous physical, sexual, and psychological abuse. It explained why some babies died just a few days or weeks after they were born, and had no chance at any kind of real life.

The way I think not only has powerful consequences on my present life, but as was taught in the writings of ancient India, but will also affect many of the future lives that I will lead. If I am thinking in this present life about myself and the world in ways that are bringing continual pain and suffering down upon me, Fox said, and I die without ever having changed the way I think, then the next life I will be born into will obviously be filled, from the beginning, with the same kind of pain and suffering.⁹³

In his discussion of birth, death, and reincarnation, Fox said that death was the final separation of the etheric body from the physical

body in which I was now living here on earth, when the Silver Cord which linked them (a standard motif in discussions of out-of-body soul travel) was permanently broken, and the etheric body (the bearer of personal consciousness) went to live in a four-dimensional heaven.

He believed that it was on rare occasions possible to communicate with the spirits of the dead, although he advised against it as being usually an escape mechanism for unhappy people who ought instead to be concentrating on their own spiritual development.⁹⁴

Bill Wilson: transmigration and speaking with the spirits of the dead

Now Bill W. (and some of the other early A.A.'s and their spouses, including Bill's wife Lois and Dr. Bob and Anne Smith) ignored Emmet Fox's last warning, and attempted to speak with the spirits of the dead by going into trances, using ouija boards, and through other similar kinds of methods,⁹⁵ which means that they too believed that the spirits of those who had left this life continued to exist in some other realm somewhere.

Bill never attempted (to the best of my knowledge) to use a doctrine of reincarnation to provide an explanation for any kind of pain and suffering that we were undergoing in this life. On the other hand, we know from *Pass It On* page 265 that Bill and Lois recited a prayer together every morning which said:

Oh Lord, we thank Thee that Thou art, that we are from everlasting to everlasting Oh Lord ... Thou art everlasting love. Accordingly, Thou has fashioned for us a destiny passing through Thy many mansions, ever in more discovery of Thee and in no separation between ourselves.

The line that says “we are from everlasting to everlasting” seems unmistakably to be laying out a doctrine of *preexistence*, asserting that our souls have always existed from infinite times past, going back to long before their incarnation in this present life.

But the line that talks about “passing through Thy many mansions, ever in more discovery of Thee” is a bit more ambiguous, and could be interpreted in several different ways. The prayer may have implied a belief that our spirits would be reincarnated in future lives on this planet earth. But it could also have been expressing the belief that our spirits would be reincarnated in material existences on other planets, perhaps even in other universes (as in the parallel multiverse system that C. S. Lewis described in his *Chronicles of Narnia*).

And remembering that Lois Wilson and her family were all Swedenborgians, and that even at the end of her life, she still described her own religion as Swedenborgianism⁹⁶ — it is possible that this part of the prayer assumed that after our deaths, we would pass through a series of different heavenly realms (the “house of many mansions” in John 14:2), in each one of which we would learn additional new and different things about God. Or in other words, even if Bill and Lois’s prayer was not speaking of reincarnation into additional lives on this earth (or on other planets or in parallel universes elsewhere), it was at least implying an eternal spiritual journey in the world to come, through ever new dimensions and spheres of existence.

But we must be sure to note that Bill and Lois’s prayer clearly says not only that all of our individual human spirits had always existed in some realm or other, but that they would always continue to exist for all eternity, and would continue to have fresh experiences and adventures forever.

Conclusion

The important thing was that A.A. taught about not only a world of material things, but also about a separate spiritual dimension of reality. We could learn to see that spiritual dimension shining through in all the physical universe, no matter whether we were standing in awe before the wonder of a starry heaven at night, or bowing our heads in reverence while standing under the towering gothic arches of a medieval cathedral, or looking down at a single tiny flower in the grass, or feeling (while sitting in an A.A. meeting) not only the spiritual presence of the other people sitting around the table, but also feeling down underneath that level, the underlying spiritual presence of all the generations of A.A. people who came before us — loving us, accepting us, and caring about what happened to us.

It did not ultimately matter whether we got down on our knees in old-fashioned highly emotional frontier revivalist fashion, or sought after a subtle feeling or intuition or awareness of God's presence down in our hearts in Classic Liberal Protestant style, or confessed our own deepest failings and faults in the Oxford Group manner to another suffering alcoholic or addict (to gain that person's confidence and allow the other person to relax and start looking at himself or herself more clearly), or practiced "letting go and letting God" in the way Emmet Fox taught.

God was real, and the early A.A. meetings were structured as carefully as these early members knew how, to put us in vital contact with the living healing power of this good and gracious heavenly power.

NOTES

¹ A copy of it is available online at <http://hindsfoot.org/AkrMan1.html> and <http://hindsfoot.org/AkrMan2.html> (as of July 11, 2017).

² See Mary C. Darrah, *Sister Ignatia: Angel of Alcoholics Anonymous* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1992) 85-87. Note particularly Sister Ignatia's words, contained in a transcript of Bill Wilson interviewing her, as found at the Alcoholics Anonymous Archives in New York, and cited and quoted on Darrah page 86.

³ For more on J. D. Holmes, see the articles by Glenn F. Chesnut at <http://hindsfoot.org/nfirst.html> and <http://hindsfoot.org/nevans1.html> (as of July 12, 2017), based on the talk he gave at the A.A. archives workshop held at the Courthouse Annex in Peru, Indiana on March 25, 2000.

⁴ *Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1980), pp. 112-113.

⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 114-115.

⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 147-148.

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 140.

⁸ *Ibid.* Bob p. 140.

⁹ Message from Arthur S. (Arlington, Texas), writing as arthur.s@live.com, on AAHistoryLovers2@yahoo.groups.com (July 11, 2017).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² See the National Clergy Conference on Alcoholism's *Blue Book*, Vol. 12 (1960) 179-210, at http://www.silkworth.net/religion_clergy/01052.html (as of July 13, 2013). A shorter excerpt from this same speech may be found in AAHistoryLovers message 37 from Jim Blair, April 5, 2002, "'Let's Ask Bill' No. 19 — What did A.A. learn from the Oxford Group ...?" at <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/aahistorylovers/conversations/messages/37> (as of July 13, 2017).

¹³ Carl Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., 1933).

¹⁴ A copy of the original first printing of the pamphlet is available online at <http://hindsfoot.org/akrman1.html> and <http://hindsfoot.org/akrman2.html> (originally posted on February 28, 2005, this version was still online as of July 23, 2017). Warning: the date given on this online version is wrong: “first published in 1939 or 1940.” This incorrect date was taken from the version on the Barefootsworld website at <http://www.barefootsworld.net/aamanual.html> (originally posted on May 15, 1997, this version was still online as of July 23, 2017).

¹⁵ See AAHistoryLovers Message No. 7516.

¹⁶ Dick B[urns] (Kihei, Maui, Hawaii), *The Akron Genesis of Alcoholics Anonymous*, p. 209, n. 72.

¹⁷ AAHistoryLovers Message 7434, dated 20 Jun 2011, from Gary Neidhardt.

¹⁸ Either this folder is simply wrong about the date of the Manual — it could not give E. Stanley Jones’ *Abundant Living*, which has the copyright date of 1942 as one of its recommended readings if it was published before that date — or Evan Williams may have written the basic pamphlet in 1941 even though it was not actually published until the next year, at which point an additional title could have been added to the reading list.

¹⁹ J. Lobdell in AAHL message 7536.

²⁰ See <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Dwight-L-Moody> (as of July 26, 2017).

²¹ Dwight L. Moody’s introduction to Henry Drummond, *The Greatest Thing In the World And Other Addresses* (New York and Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1891 and 1898). The text of this book may be found at <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/16739/16739-h/16739-h.htm> (as of July 26, 2017).

²² Mary Baker Eddy’s Christian Science Church (1879) was linked back originally to the work she did with Phineas Quimby from 1862 to 1865. The Christian Scientists however regarded their movement as

having a powerful religious dimension (including grounding in various parts of the Christian Bible), which was seriously lacking in Quimby's belief system, and they also regarded themselves on various grounds as quite different from the groups which were commonly described as New Thought religious denominations. Bill Wilson had read deeply in the Christian Science literature, but A.A. as a whole did not.

²³ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, Gifford Lectures for 1901–1902 (New York: Modern Library, orig. published 1902), “The Religion of Healthy-Mindedness,” p. 93.

²⁴ Emmet Fox, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Key to Success in Life* and *The Lord's Prayer: An Interpretation* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, copyright 1934, 1935, 1938).

²⁵ For some of the details on the Hindu contribution see Philip Goldberg, *American Veda: From Emerson and the Beatles to Yoga and Meditation — How Indian Spirituality Changed the West* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2010), Chapt. 3, “New Thought in Old Wineskins,” pp. 47-66.

²⁶ See Glenn Chesnut in AAHistoryLovers message 9505, posted on Sept. 22, 2013, at <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/aahistorylovers/conversations/messages/9505>. The full passage in the Dhammapada reads as follows (Chapter 1):

1. All that we are is the result of what we have thought: it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain follows him, as the wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the carriage.
2. All that we are is the result of what we have thought: it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness follows him, like a shadow that never leaves him.
3. “He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me,” — in those who harbor such thoughts hatred will NEVER cease.

4. “He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me,” — in those who do NOT harbor such thoughts hatred will cease.

5. For hatred does not cease by hatred at any time: hatred ceases by love, this is an old rule

²⁷ Bruce Barton, *The Man Nobody Knows: A Discovery of the Real Jesus* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1924, 1925).

²⁸ Ernest M. Ligon, *The Psychology of Christian Personality* (New York: Macmillan, 1935).

²⁹ A good deal of the following information comes from the brief biography found in his entry in Find A Grave, see <https://www.findagrave.com/> (as of July 29, 2017).

³⁰ See <https://www.asbury.edu/offices/library/archives/biographies/e-stanley-jones> (as of July 30, 2017).

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Bill Wilson, 30 October 1940 letter to a member in Richmond, Virginia, as quoted in *Pass It On—the Story of Bill Wilson and How the A.A. Message Reached the World* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1984) 171-173, see espec. 173.

³³ For more on the Oxford Group background to A.A. see Glenn F. Chesnut, *Changed by Grace: V. C. Kitchen, the Oxford Group, and A.A.*, Hindsfoot Foundation Series on Spirituality and Theology (New York: iUniverse, September 2006), pp. 35–36.

³⁴ H[oward] A[rnold] Walter, *Soul-Surgery: Some Thoughts on Incisive Personal Work*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932; 1st ed. pub. 1919).

³⁵ A[rthur] J[ames] Russell, *For Sinners Only* (Tucson, Arizona: Hats Off Books, 2003; orig. pub. 1932), pp. 247, 283, 285. Even after the Oxford Group had thoroughly established itself among a number of the students and faculty at Oxford University in England, which was the time when A. J. Russell first became interested in them, the group still

remained closely tied to Christian missionary work in non-Christian lands, including activity in Egypt, India, China, and Iran.

³⁶ See <https://www.aacleve.org/product/four-absolutes/> (as of August 16, 2017).

³⁷ The text of this work which I am using can be found at <https://archive.org/details/willofgodandman00wrig> (as of August 16, 2017).

³⁸ See <https://www.aacleve.org/product/four-absolutes/> (as of August 16, 2017). They added the Four Questions to the Four Absolutes, which made them a bit more workable: Absolute Honesty — “Is it true or is it false?” Absolute Unselfishness — “How will this affect the other fellow?” Absolute Love — “Is this ugly or is it beautiful?” Absolute Purity — “Is it right, or is it wrong?”

A few years ago, the famous A.A. historian Mel Barger also wrote a defense of the doctrine of the Four Absolutes — “Can We Still Use the Four Absolutes” — see <http://silkworth.net/melb/4absolutes.html> (as of August 16, 2017).

³⁹ See <http://hindsfoot.org/Detr3.html> (as of August 16, 2017).

⁴⁰ The Latin phrase *sapere aude* was a quote from the ancient Roman author Horace (65-8 B.C.), and literally meant “dare to be wise,” “dare to know.” Kant probably intended the Latin phrase *naturaliter maiorennis* to mean “having attained the natural age of majority.” Under the current laws of the United States and the United Kingdom, this would usually mean having reached eighteen years old or twenty-one years old (depending on the locality and the legal issue), at which age young men and women became legally able to take on various full adult responsibilities.

⁴¹ I am borrowing the specific references to swans and gold from John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), where he insisted that the human mind could never know the “real essences” of things. That was where Kant got the basic idea of his philosophy, simply taking what Locke called the “real essences” and referring to them as the noumenon. Why did philosophers of that period take Locke and Kant so seriously? Because the nature of scientific knowledge at that time was

still so primitive, that no one could even remotely imagine that techniques could ever be worked out for understanding why swans were white or why gold was bright and shiny. See Glenn F. Chesnut, *God and Spirituality: Philosophical Essays* (Bloomington, Indiana: iUniverse, 2010), Chapter 14, in the subsection entitled “Locke and Kant deny our ability to know the Nomos,” pp. 266-268.

⁴² See for example Bill Wilson, *The Language of the Heart: Bill W’s Grapevine Writings* (New York: The A.A. Grapevine, Inc., 1988) and the important historical study by Trysh Travis, *The Language of the Heart: A Cultural History of the Recovery Movement from Alcoholics Anonymous to Oprah Winfrey* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

⁴³ The Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Protestant Church, and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. These three groups united into a single denomination in 1939, which later merged in 1968 with the Evangelical United Brethren (a group which had begun as German-speaking American Methodists) to form the present-day United Methodist Church.

⁴⁴ The text I am working from in this section is *What is Christianity? Lectures Delivered in the University of Berlin during the Winter Term 1899-1900* by Adolf Harnack, trans. Thomas Bailey Saunders, 2nd rev. edit. (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1901), as found in <https://archive.org/details/whatischristian01saungooq> (as of August 7, 2017).

⁴⁵ Harnack, *What is Christianity?*, pp. 54–55.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 77 ff.

⁵⁰ See AAHistoryLovers message 9620, ‘RE: Who was the “promoter” in the Rule 62 story?’ from John B. (November 23, 2013), see <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/aahistorylovers/conversations/messages/9620> (as of August 8, 2017).

⁵¹ *Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers* pp. 240-241, see also *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* pp. 141-142.

⁵² Harnack p. 57.

⁵³ In the fourth century A.D., St. Basil the Great in Cappadocia (in what is now central Turkey) wrote out a liturgical text for the Anaphora, the prayer for the consecration of the bread and wine, which is still used today in the Coptic Liturgy and on certain occasions in the Greek Orthodox Church, but it took a long while for the practice of reading from a written text to spread and catch on.

⁵⁴ Harnack pp. 104–105.

⁵⁵ *Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers* (1980), pp. 71–72.

⁵⁶ *Dr. Bob*, pp. 137-139.

⁵⁷ *Dr. Bob*, pp. 310-311.

⁵⁸ Quoting from Glenn Chesnut (South Bend, Indiana), *The St. Louis Gambler & the Railroad Man: Lives and Teachings of the A.A. Oldtimers* (2005), page 246.

⁵⁹ At <http://www.dickb.com/goodmorn.shtml> (as of August 10, 2017).

⁶⁰ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Methodist_Episcopal_Church,_South#/media/File:Fifteenthannualr1901meth_0006.jpg (as of August 18, 2017).

⁶¹ *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.v. Personalism <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/personalism/#AmePer> (as of August 11, 2017).

⁶² I have already written about Emmet Fox at length in my book on *Father Ed Dowling: Bill Wilson's Sponsor* (Bloomington, Indiana: iUniverse, 2015), Chapt. 6 “Pain and Suffering: (1) Emmet Fox.” And I have given shorter accounts in Chapt. 4 of my book on *Father Ralph Pfau and the Golden Books* (Bloomington, Indiana: iUniverse, 2017), and also in my book on *God and Spirituality* (Bloomington, Indiana: iUniverse, 2010), see Chapt. 12 “The God-Bearers and the Analogy of Being” (in the section on “Emmet Fox and New Thought”) and in Chapt. 19 “The Nature of Grace” (in the section entitled “Emmet Fox and New Thought: a universal power of grace”).

⁶³ Emmet Fox, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Key to Success in Life and The Lord's Prayer: An Interpretation* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1938; orig. pub. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1934).

⁶⁴ Ibid. 8.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 10.

⁶⁶ Emmet Fox, *The Sermon on the Mount*. Emmet Fox, *Power Through Constructive Thinking* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1940; but the individual articles which make up the volume were copyrighted from 1932 to 1940).

⁶⁷ Fox, *Power Through Constructive Thinking*, 111.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 21, 37, 44-45, and 50-51.

⁶⁹ Ibid. 22.

⁷⁰ Available online as AAHistoryLovers message 1705 from Nancy Olson (Mar 13, 2004). Bill W. spoke of receiving a copy of Jim's historical narrative in a letter he wrote back to Jim on December 11, 1947, so the account was necessarily written before that date: "From what I can remember, Bill's only special preparation for [writing the Big Book] was confined to the reading of four very well known books, the influence of which can clearly be seen in the A.A. Book. Bill probably got most of his ideas from one of these books, namely James' 'Varieties of Religious Experience.' I have always felt this was because Bill himself had undergone such a violent spiritual experience. He also gained a fine basic insight of spirituality through Emmet Fox's 'Sermon on the Mount,' and a good portion of the psychological approach of A.A. from Dick Peabody's 'Common Sense of Drinking.' It is my opinion that a great deal of Bill's traditions [which he first wrote about in the *Grapevine* in 1945-6] came from the fourth book. Lewis Browne's 'This Believing World.' From this book, I believe Bill attained a remarkable perception of possible future pitfalls for groups of our kind for it clearly shows that the major failures of religions and cults in the past have been due to one of three things: Too much organization, too much politics, and too much money or power."

⁷¹ Mel B[arger], commentary on Emmet Fox’s “Making Your Life Worthwhile,” available online at <http://hindsfoot.org/fox1.html>. See also Mel B[arger], *New Wine* 105.

⁷² Doug B. (Riverside, California), AAHistoryLovers message 4003 (January 7, 2007), “Re: Emmet Fox’s secretary and Al S.” available online at <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/aahistorylovers/conversations/messages/4003>.

⁷³ Igor I. Sikorsky, Jr., *AA’s Godparents: Carl Jung, Emmet Fox, Jack Alexander* (Minneapolis: CompCare Publishers, 1990) 23, as cited in Mel Barger, AAHistoryLovers message 4001 (January 5, 2007), “Emmet Fox’s secretary and Al Steckman (correct spelling),” available online at <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/aahistorylovers/conversations/messages/4001>.

⁷⁴ *Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers: Error! Main Document Only. A Biography, with Recollections of Early A.A. in the Midwest* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1980), 310.

⁷⁵ Mel B[arger], *New Wine*, p. 105.

⁷⁶ William (Barefoot Bill) Lash, “Tex B. (Sober 2/6/47),” describing early A.A. in the Chicago area, AAHistoryLovers no. message 1881 (June 22, 2004), at <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/aahistorylovers/conversations/messages/1881>.

⁷⁷ Mel B., “Re: Conference Approved Literature,” his gratitude for Emmet Fox’s book on *The Sermon on the Mount*, AAHistoryLovers message no. 1861 (June 15, 2004), at <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/aahistorylovers/conversations/messages/1861>.

⁷⁸ Harold A. “Al” Steckman (December 9, 1903–February 1978), worked in advertising and film, came into A.A. in March 1944. Al Steckman, *Bert D.: Hardhat, Inebriate, Scholar* (Memphis: Harbor House, 1976). See Jared Lobdell, “Re: Emmet Fox’s secretary,” AAHistoryLovers message no. 7249 (March 19, 2011) at <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/aahistorylovers/conversations/messages/7249> and “Re: Can anyone tell me a little more history about Al S.,” AAHistoryLovers message no. 6761 (Jul 29, 2010) at <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/aahistorylovers/conversations/messages/6761>; and Arthur S.

(Arlington, Texas), “Re: Responsibility Declaration,” AAHistoryLovers message no. 2485 (June 12, 2005) at <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/aahistorylovers/conversations/messages/2485>. His sobriety date of 1944 is also given in Arthur S. (Arlington, Texas), *Timelines in A.A.’s History* (the earliest version of his timeline) at <http://silkworth.net/timelines/timelines.html>. See also Nell Wing, *Grateful to Have Been There: My 42 Years with Bill and Lois, and the Evolution of Alcoholics Anonymous*, 1st ed. (Park Ridge, Illinois: Parkside Publishing, 1993), page 87. The Declaration of Unity which was recited in Miami in 1970 was “This we owe to A.A.’s future; to place our common welfare first; to keep our fellowship united. For on A.A. unity depend our lives and the lives of those to come,” see “A Declaration of Unity,” AAHistoryLovers message no. 278 (June 11, 2002) at <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/aahistorylovers/conversations/messages/278>.

⁷⁹ Arthur S., “Re: Responsibility Declaration,” AAHistoryLovers no. 2485.

⁸⁰ See under Al S. in the A.A. People section at <http://www.barefootsworld.net/aapeople.html>.

⁸¹ *A Manual for Alcoholics Anonymous*, commonly referred to as *The Akron Manual* — the earliest known version of this booklet can be read online at <http://hindsfoot.org/akrman1.html> and <http://hindsfoot.org/akrman2.html>. This, the first surviving edition of the *Akron Manual*, came out circa June 1942, see Glenn Chesnut, “Re: More than one edition of the Akron Manual?” AAHistoryLovers message 7516 (July 26, 2011) at <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/aahistorylovers/conversations/messages/7516>. The cover of the pamphlet talks about members with five, six and seven years of sobriety and on page 15 it states that the Akron Group has been in existence for seven years. Dr. Bob and Bill Dotson both got sober in June 1935, which meant that they would have had seven years of sobriety in June of 1942, and the Akron Group would likewise have been in existence for seven years in June 1942. The printed version which is currently available for sale at Dr. Bob’s house in Akron, on the other hand, is a later revised edition with some material removed, including the reading list.

⁸² Ibid. 35, 109; Fox, *Constructive Thinking* 165. Glenn F. Chesnut, *God and Spirituality: Philosophical Essays*, Hindsfoot Foundation Series on Spirituality and Theology (New York: iUniverse, 2010), see Ch. 14 (pp. 258-281) on “The Three Primal Hypostases,” especially the second hypostasis, which I here termed the *Logos*, but is the same as what is called *Nous* or *Intellectus* in other ancient and medieval philosophical systems.

⁸³ Fox, *Constructive Thinking* 3, 165, 136, 166. Chesnut, *God and Spirituality*, see Ch. 13 (pp. 238-257) on the new dynamic concept of God found in the Boston Personalist philosophers and the philosophers Rudolf Herman Lotze, Alfred North Whitehead, and Charles Hartshorne; and Ch. 14 (pp. 258-281) on “The Three Primal Hypostases,” especially the *Energetikos* (the third hypostasis). The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle famously talked about what he called the “four causes,” using the example of a carpenter building a bed. In Aristotelian terminology, medieval Christian philosophers and theologians were mainly concerned with the “final cause” or “teleological explanation,” that is, the goal the carpenter had when he decided to build the bed. Modern science confines itself instead to investigating the “efficient cause” or “moving cause,” which in this case is the carpenter, who supplies the source of energy and furnishes the agency through which the bed is built. (The material cause is the wood out of which the bed is constructed, and the formal cause is the idea or plan for what the bed should be which the carpenter had in his head before he began building.)

⁸⁴ *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 4th ed. (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 2001; orig. pub. 1939) pp, 12 and 46, also see p. 10.

⁸⁵ See Dick B[urns], “‘God as We Understood Him’—The A.A. Story,” at <http://www.dickb.com/aaarticles/AA-Story.shtml>, who cites Samuel Shoemaker, *Extraordinary Living for Ordinary Men: Excerpts Selected from the Writings of Sam Shoemaker* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1965), p. 76; also Samuel Moor Shoemaker, Jr., *Children of the Second Birth: Being a Narrative of Spiritual Miracles in a City Parish*, (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1927), pp. 25 and 47. Dick B. also cites Oxford Group author Stephen Foot, *Life Began Yesterday* (London: William Heinemann, 1935), pp. 12-13 (cf. 175), “Life began

for me with a surrender of all that I know of self to all that I knew of God.”

⁸⁶ For some of the details on the Hindu contribution see Philip Goldberg, *American Veda: From Emerson and the Beatles to Yoga and Meditation — How Indian Spirituality Changed the West* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2010), Chapt. 3, “New Thought in Old Wineskins,” pp. 47-66.

⁸⁷ See AAHL Message 9505 from Glenn Chesnut, “Buddhist quote on karma in James Allen,” at <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/aahistorylovers/conversations/messages/9505>. The message notes that in James Allen, *As a Man Thinketh*, there is an extended quote from the Buddhist scripture called the Dhammapada at the beginning of Chapter 1, “Thought and Character”:

Thought in the mind hath made us. What we are
By thought was wrought and built. If a man’s mind
Hath evil thoughts, pain comes on him as comes
The wheel the ox behind If one endure in purity
Of thought, joy follows him as his own shadow — sure.

This is the classic Buddhist description of karma. A translation of the original Buddhist work may be read at: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/sbe10/sbe1003.htm>

⁸⁸ It may be listened to on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=THutU2b5e3E> (as of July 19, 2017).

⁸⁹ Fox, in his commentary on the Lord’s Prayer in *The Sermon on the Mount* 129 and *Power Through Constructive Thinking* 165.

⁹⁰ Fox, who was Irish, eventually came over to the United States and became a minister in what was called the Divine Science Church, serving as pastor of the Church of the Healing Christ in New York City. The name of the denomination stressed the idea of an orderly set of scientific laws governing spirituality, which could be “demonstrated” in experiments which we performed during the course of our everyday lives.

⁹¹ Fox, *Constructive Thinking* 2.

⁹² Fox, *Constructive Thinking*, see both the chapters on “Life After Death” (pp. 195-223) and “Reincarnation” (pp. 227-256).

⁹³ Fox, *Constructive Thinking* 227-229.

⁹⁴ Fox, *Power Through Constructive Thinking*, the chapters on “Life after Death” and “Reincarnation.”

⁹⁵ *Pass It On* 276-280.

⁹⁶ Lois Wilson, as we all know, came from a Swedenborgian background, and Emanuel Swedenborg had certainly believed that he had been in regular contact with the spirits of the dead, but the idea that we had valid memories of past lives or that our souls would be reincarnated into other lives here on earth were not part of Swedenborgian belief. He held that human souls were immortal in the sense that they survived death and would continue to live for all times to come. But based on my own reading of Swedenborgian sources, he also seems to have believed that souls, when they appeared, were created out of nothing, and had not always existed from infinite times past.

