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The First Roman Catholics in Alcoholics Anonymous

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Alcoholics Anonymous was founded in 1935 by two men, Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob Smith, who had been brought up as Protestants, and specifically, as New England Congregationalists. In spite of the fact that Congregationalism's roots had lain in seventeenth and eighteenth-century Puritanism (the world of Jonathan Edwards' "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*) this was a denomination which had developed and changed to the point where they very strongly took *the liberal side*—not the fundamentalist side—in the great fundamentalist-liberal debate which arose within early twentieth-century American Protestantism. In 1957 (two years after AA's "coming of age" at its St. Louis convention) the Congregationalists united with another modernist mainline American denomination to form the extremely liberal United Church of Christ.

At the time they first met, in 1935, Bill W. and Dr. Bob had both recently become involved with a controversial Protestant evangelical association called the Oxford Group, and initially worked with alcoholics under its umbrella. Nevertheless, both of them (as well as the majority of the alcoholics whom they sobered up during the first few years) came from liberal Protestant backgrounds, so a kind of generalized liberal Protestant influence rapidly became just as important as that of the Oxford Group. And contact with the New Thought movement (especially Emmet Fox) introduced an even more radical form of liberal Protestantism which was also a force in early AA.

As was noted, American Protestants during the early twentieth century were deeply split by the liberal-fundamentalist dispute. One needs to understand the nature of that debate in order to grasp some of the issues which Catholics faced when they joined AA.

On the one side, the fundamentalists were implacable enemies of Catholicism, and would have created an unbreachable barrier to Catholics coming into AA, but fortunately neither they nor the surviving representatives of the revival-preaching frontier Protestant

evangelists of the nineteenth century played any major role in AA in the 1930's or 1940's.

On the other side, the Protestant liberals and the New Thought people were committed to a position of basic religious tolerance, which made it easier for Catholics to come into AA. They had also given up preaching revivals and were no longer insisting that all their members had to have fallen down on their knees, at least once in their lives, in some sort of highly emotional conversion experience where they accepted Jesus Christ as their personal savior, before they could be regarded as “being saved.” But it was also the case that many of the liberals and all of the New Thought authors rejected most of the traditional theological doctrines which the Roman Catholic Church held dear: the Virgin Birth, belief in the Real Presence of Christ's body and blood in fully substantial fashion in the bread and wine of the eucharist, belief in a Christ who was divine in the full sense of being consubstantial with God the Father, and so on. So when Roman Catholics, liberal Protestants, and followers of New Thought became joined together in A.A., they made strange bedfellows, or so it would have appeared at first glance.

This was not a great issue when A.A. first began. For the first four years, Roman Catholics formed an almost negligible presence in Alcoholics Anonymous. Joe Doppler (or Doeppler), “The European Drinker,” became in April 1936 the first Roman Catholic to get sober in Alcoholics Anonymous. No more Roman Catholics joined until Morgan Ryan came into the program in January 1939. But by April of that year, the majority of the fourteen alcoholics in the Cleveland group were Roman Catholics, and they forced the AA leaders in Akron to make a choice: were they willing to make room for Catholics in Alcoholics Anonymous?

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 across the board. There would now be an officially sanctioned AA-based alcoholism treatment program in place at St. Thomas Hospital. But Sister Ignatia was quite clear about one central requirement: Although it was run by a Catholic religious order, St. Thomas Hospital 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.¹

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. Fundamentalists would be allowed to join AA, 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.

The floodgates were opened, and by the Fall of 1940, it was estimated that Alcoholics Anonymous had become 25% Catholic.² It was still an odd pairing. Many of the ideas in the Big Book reflected Protestant liberal or New Thought beliefs, as well as adaptations of Oxford Group ideas. For this reason, it will be wise to discuss some of the areas where Catholic leaders in AA were going to have to work out ways of dealing with ideas which were sometimes quite new to them.

The influence of the Oxford Group on early Alcoholics Anonymous

The Alcoholics Anonymous movement was begun after Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob Smith met in Akron, Ohio, on Sunday, May 12, 1935 (Mother's Day) to discuss their mutual battle with alcoholism, and decided to work together to devise a method of healing alcoholism which would be medically, psychologically, and spiritually sound. Five months earlier, on December 14, 1935, Bill W. had had a profound spiritual experience at Towns Hospital in New York City as a result of coming in contact with a Protestant evangelical association called the Oxford Group,³ and had not had a drink since that point. As he described his experience on page fourteen of the Big Book, he came to the realization, while he lay on his hospital bed, that

I must turn in all things to the Father of Light who presides over us all. These were revolutionary and drastic proposals, but the moment I fully accepted them, the effect was electric. There was a sense of victory, followed by such a peace and serenity as I had never know. There was utter confidence. I felt lifted up, as though the great clean wind of a mountain top blew through and

through. God comes to most men gradually, but His impact on me was sudden and profound.

As he described the experience while speaking to the AA International in St. Louis in 1955, there was also a vision of light involved, similar to what was described in a number of medieval Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox spiritual writings (ranging from the experience of the Light of the Transfiguration in the spiritual memoirs of the Hesychast monks of Mount Athos to the vision of light at the end of Dante's *Divine Comedy*):⁴

... It seemed to be as though I were at the very bottom of the pit All at once I found myself crying out, "If there is a God, let Him show Himself! I am ready to do anything, anything!" Suddenly the room lit up with a great white light. I was caught up into an ecstasy which there are no words to describe. It seemed to me, in the mind's eye, that I was on a mountain and that a wind not of air but of spirit was blowing Slowly the ecstasy subsided. I lay on the bed, but now for a time I was in another world, a new world of consciousness. All about me and through me there was a wonderful feeling of Presence⁵

As a result of this experience, when Bill Wilson met Dr. Bob on Mother's Day of 1935, Bill had been sober and attending Oxford Group meetings in New York City for five months. Dr. Bob, on the other hand, had been attending Oxford Group meetings in Akron, Ohio, for two and half years prior to that point, but had not been able to get sober at all.⁶

The two of them, however, began working together to try to revise and improve the Oxford Group program, and by June, Dr. Bob had gotten continuously sober and never drank again. As they tried this new method out on other alcoholics, they were soon achieving a far higher success rate than the Oxford Group had ever managed. Nevertheless, they and their earliest followers incorporated a certain number of that group's beliefs and practices into their new alcoholic recovery program, and they continued to attend Oxford Group meetings for quite some time after this—down to 1937 in New York and down to 1939 in Akron and Cleveland.

The Protestant quarrel between fundamentalists and liberals:

(1) the fundamentalists

Even among the New York contingent, nearly all the members of Alcoholics Anonymous were Protestants until the Spring of 1939. But they seem to have all been Protestants of a particular sort. During that period, American Protestant denominations and congregations were being torn in two by the fundamentalist-liberal controversy. The Protestants in AA came down on the liberal side of that division, and seem to have fairly much all of them rejected the extreme fundamentalist position.

The term “fundamentalism” came from a work called *The Fundamentals: A Testimony To The Truth*, a set of ninety essays written by a number of authors and published in twelve volumes over the years 1910 to 1915.⁷ The authors of these essays maintained that every word of the Bible was inerrant and literally true, and so took up combat not only against the Darwinian doctrine of evolution, but also against modern historical and literary criticism of the Bible in general. They attacked anyone who denied that the first five books of the Old Testament had been written by Moses, along with anyone who denied the Virgin Birth, the deity of Christ, or his resurrection from the dead. They believed that the Garden of Eden and special creation of Adam and Eve, Noah’s flood, the parting of the Red Sea, and the Hebrew children surviving in the fiery furnace were all historical facts, along with all of the biblical stories of talking donkeys, men walking on water, epilepsy being caused by demons, and so on. In these ninety tracts, the fundamentalists also attacked the Mormons, the Christian Scientists, the forerunners of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, Spiritualism (talking with the spirits of the dead), and the Roman Catholic Church.

The fundamentalist movement was militant to an extreme. Many conservative church leaders who might otherwise have agreed with some of their theological beliefs were nevertheless completely repelled by the anger, personal animosity, and unrelenting aggressiveness of their attacks, where they would allow no peace until they had taken over a congregation or a denomination. When they were few in number they would cry out for freedom of speech, but once they had achieved a majority, they would silence all other voices and run out any remaining church leaders who dared to disagree with them. Or in other words, the militant fundamentalists of that time were not going to be suitable partners for a nonsectarian movement based on religious tolerance and cooperation between people of different religious backgrounds.

The controversy was raised to national prominence in the Scopes Monkey Trial of 1925, with the central focus at that point on the doctrine of evolution derived from Charles Darwin's books *The Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man*. In that year, the World's Christian Fundamentals Association talked the Tennessee state legislature into passing a law which prohibited public school teachers from denying the Biblical account of man's origin. A test case was set up when John Scopes, a Tennessee high school teacher, intentionally violated the Act. The trial which followed was broadcast over the radio throughout America.

For the fundamentalists, the path to salvation was a narrow one indeed, with them standing rigid guard over the entrance. Most of them taught that the only way that people could be saved from everlasting hell and damnation was to have an emotional conversion experience in which they took Jesus Christ as their personal savior. There was little or no emphasis on programs of continual moral and spiritual growth, other than fire and brimstone sermons condemning sins such as gambling, drinking, associating with loose women, refusing to take Jesus Christ as your personal savior, and so on. They believed devoutly that alcoholics who had had a conversion experience would immediately be able to stop drinking for the rest of their lives. Otherwise, their approach toward alcoholism was punitive and condemnatory.

Were a small percentage of alcoholics sometimes able to stop drinking by committing themselves totally to the fundamentalist mindset? If you frighten people deeply enough with hideous images of pain and torture, designed to lodge themselves down into the darkness at the bottom of the human subconscious, you can sometimes change behavior to a degree. But it is a kind of "psychological rape," where one obtains surface obedience based on a kind of nightmarish fear which is consequently deeply intermixed with subconscious anger and resentment. In fact, a human mind so conditioned will not be able to distinguish clearly between God and Hell, with the consequence that any thought of directly entering God's presence will bring up the most frightening possible images of condemnation and personal annihilation.

But even more important for our purposes here, the fundamentalist movement was totally hostile to the Roman Catholic Church. For most of them, the image of the Whore of Babylon in Revelation 17:4-18, sitting on the Seven Hills and drunk on the blood of the martyrs, referred to the city of Rome and the Pope. They taught their children that the Roman Catholics worshiped idols. Early twentieth century fundamentalists believed that if a Roman Catholic were ever elected president of the United States, he would

immediately turn over control of the U.S. government to the Pope and the Italians who ran the Vatican offices.

If there had been any large number of fundamentalists in the early Alcoholics Anonymous movement, Roman Catholics who tried to come into AA would have been relentlessly badgered and harassed until they were either driven out or forced to compromise their most basic religious principles. The flood of Catholics into AA which began in 1939-1940 could never have occurred.

(2) the Protestant liberals:

Harry Emerson Fosdick

But fortunately it was not the Protestant fundamentalists who dominated AA. The overwhelming majority of early AA members were instead the kind of Protestants who were called “liberals” or “modernists.” And one of the liberal Protestant leaders who was especially well-known to the American public during the early twentieth century was Harry Emerson Fosdick. In 1927-1930 John D. Rockefeller, Jr. (one of the AA movement’s early admirers) built a church for Fosdick to preach in, Riverside Church in New York City, a huge building, the tallest church in the United States. It was set up as an interdenominational church where people could be freed from having to conform with the doctrines and dogmas of any particular denomination. And during the same period, from 1921 to 1948, Harry Emerson Fosdick’s brother, Raymond B. Fosdick, played a key role in administering many of John D. Rockefeller, Jr.’s philanthropies. Rockefeller and the Fosdick brothers liked the Alcoholics Anonymous movement because it embodied so well some of the best ideas of liberal Protestantism.

We can get an excellent view of the beliefs and style of early twentieth century Protestant liberalism by looking at Harry Emerson Fosdick’s famous sermon “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?” preached on May 21, 1922 in New York City.⁸

Although many fine Christians over the centuries have believed in the biological miracle called the virgin birth of Jesus, Fosdick said in that sermon, many good Christians in the modern period not only cannot accept that this could have been a historical fact, they point out that even in New Testament times there was no unanimity of Christian belief on that issue. The gospels of Matthew and Luke told that story, for example, but neither the Apostle Paul nor the author of the gospel of John seem to have known anything about it.⁹

The fundamentalists, he went on to say, wanted to believe that the original biblical documents were dictated by God to their human scribes in the same way that a business person would dictate a letter to a secretary. They wanted to believe that every word was infallible, not just at the level of spiritual insight but even when the biblical text was talking about scientific theories, medical treatments, or matters of historical fact. Liberal Protestants, on the other hand, pointed to the way in which the Bible had to be reinterpreted time after time over the centuries as human knowledge about the world grew. New scientific discoveries and new historical knowledge had forced people over and over again to discard biblical statements, Fosdick said, which simply could no longer be regarded as correct.¹⁰

We can see his point easily. If we stop and think about it, regardless of what the early parts of the Bible assumed, the world was not flat. The biblical literalists at the time of the great scientist Galileo got him condemned for teaching that the earth circled in an orbit around the sun, and not vice versa. But today, even in the most religiously oppressive parts of the United States, all the schools and universities teach all their students that the earth is round (not flat), and that it circles the sun in its orbit. Regardless of what the New Testament authors believed, neither epilepsy nor leprosy is caused by demons, and there is no part of the United States today which is going to pass a law ordering medical schools to teach their students to treat epilepsy and leprosy by carrying out magical rituals to drive out the evil spirits, or ordering medical schools to teach about magic spells against demons as “an equally valid alternate theory.”

The fundamentalists believed that Christ was coming in a cataclysmic event, Fosdick pointed out, in which this earth would be destroyed, along with the sun, moon, and stars, after a series of great apocalyptic battles. The liberals however believed that Christ was coming in a very different manner, in such a way that “slowly it may be, but surely, His will and principles will be worked out by God’s grace in human life and institutions,” until the whole earth was ruled by Christian principles of love, forgiveness, and tolerance.¹¹

The spirit of the Enlightenment: freedom of thought, religious tolerance, and the pursuit of ever-greater moral and intellectual progress

But there was more at stake than these specific quarrels. If we look at the basic principles which Fosdick was laying out in that sermon, we can see that he and his fellow liberals were simply acting as the modern day defenders of the spirit of the Eighteenth-century Enlightenment.¹² Human beings had to be allowed to ask questions, Fosdick said, engage in scientific inquiry, and speak the truth as they had discovered it:

Science treats a young man's mind as though it were really important. A scientist says to a young man, "Here is the universe challenging our investigation. Here are the truths which we have seen, so far. Come, study with us! See what we already have seen and then look further to see more, for science is an intellectual adventure for the truth." Can you imagine any man who is worthwhile turning from that call to the church if the church seems to him to say, "Come, and we will feed you opinions from a spoon. No thinking is allowed here except such as brings you to certain specified, predetermined conclusions."¹³

Throughout the course of time, human knowledge has grown progressively. First human beings only knew how to wield clubs and throw spears, but then they invented the bow and arrow. At first they only gathered wild plants, and then they learned how to plant crops. The oldest parts of the Old Testament taught religious ideas that were often barbaric in their cruelty and pagan in their blind credulity. It took a thousand years of moral and religious progress to move from those primitive ideas to the most enlightened parts of the New Testament. And real revelation, Fosdick says in this sermon, has to continue to make progress even today.

[All real] revelation is progressive. The thought of God moves out from Oriental kingship to compassionate fatherhood; treatment of unbelievers moves out from the use of force to the appeals of love; polygamy gives way to monogamy; slavery, never explicitly condemned before the New Testament closes, is nevertheless being undermined by ideas that in the end, like dynamite, will blast its foundations to pieces over the doorway of the New Testament into the Christian world stand the words of Jesus: "When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth." That is to say, ... finality in the Bible is ahead. We have not reached it. We cannot yet compass all of it. God is leading us out toward it. There are multitudes of Christians, then, who think, and rejoice as they think, of the Bible as the record of the progressive unfolding of the character of God to his people¹⁴

The great Enlightenment thinkers were appalled by the religious wars and persecutions which the European world was going through in their era. They had witnessed Protestants and Catholics butchering and torturing one another to death in nightmarish fashion, all over the European continent and the British Isles. They sought a new kind of religion, a rational religion, which set aside medieval superstition and philosophical nit-picking: a religion built upon the idea of one God, the author and architect of the universe, a God whose simple moral laws could be seen in the workings of nature itself. Thomas Jefferson, in the Declaration of Independence, referred to these as “the laws of Nature and of Nature’s God.” We all knew what these rules were: they were simple things like tell the truth, keep your word, do not steal from other people or kill them, allow other people to worship God in whatever way they believe best, and in general treat other people as you would want them to treat you.

And among these great natural laws, *tolerance for other people’s religious beliefs* was one of the most important principles of all, if you wanted a world where people could live at peace with one another. The leaders of the American Revolution and the French Revolution had shared that conviction. In early American history, one saw total commitment to the principles of the Enlightenment not only in Thomas Jefferson but also in a host of other foundational figures, including Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, Thomas Paine, John Adams, and James Madison. They laid out the basic principles of the United States Constitution and Bill of Rights to conform to Enlightenment ideals. In seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe, a list of the great Enlightenment figures read almost like a who’s who of the great thinkers of that era: Voltaire, Immanuel Kant, John Locke, Pierre Bayle, Isaac Newton, Montesquieu, Baruch Spinoza, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and so on.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, William James’ *Varieties of Religious Experience* had likewise been shaped by the belief that all religions were worthy of respectful study if we wanted to find spiritual tools which could make our own lives better. *The kind of blind intolerance which rejected other people’s religious beliefs out of hand would inevitably weaken our own understanding of the spiritual dimension of reality.* And this fundamental Enlightenment principle was equally central to Fostick’s moral position, and to the early A.A. position as it was established in 1939-40.

Fostick on why AA was so successful:

nonsectarian and tolerant of all religions

Harry Emerson Fosdick was important all over America as an influential Protestant liberal leader during the early twentieth century, but he was even more important in early Alcoholics Anonymous history as one of its most famous outside supporters of the new AA movement, and one of the first major public figures to write admiringly about it. He wrote one of the first reviews of the Big Book after it came out, a piece which appeared in *The Religious Digest* and elsewhere, and was oft reprinted. In this review he pointed especially to what he regarded as the most important thing about AA: it was a completely *nonsectarian and tolerant organization* in which people of all religious backgrounds (or none at all) could join in the service of a great Healing Power in the universe—something far greater than any individual human being—which could rescue hopeless alcoholics from doom:

They are convinced that for the hopeless alcoholic there is only one way out—the expulsion of his obsession by a Power Greater Than Himself. Let it be said at once that there is nothing partisan or sectarian about this religious experience. Agnostics and atheists, along with Catholics, Jews and Protestants, tell their story of discovering the Power Greater Than Themselves By religion they mean an experience which they personally know and which has saved them from their slavery, when psychiatry and medicine had failed. They agree that each man must have his own way of conceiving God, but of God Himself they are utterly sure, and their stories of victory in consequence are a notable addition to William James' "Varieties of Religious Experience."¹⁵

Adolf von Harnack and Horace Bushnell

Another well-known Protestant liberal was the German church historian and theologian, Adolf von Harnack, who wrote one of the greatest of the nineteenth century histories of Christian theology, the multi-volume *History of Dogma*,¹⁶ where he showed his mastery of all the technical terminology and philosophical distinctions of the Christian debates over the doctrine of the Trinity and numerous other such issues. Catholics Christians, for example, after centuries of bitter debate from the fourth to seventh centuries A.D., came to proclaim that there were three *hypostaseis* (substrata,

hypostatizations, roles or personifications) and one *ousia* (essence or substance) in the Holy Trinity, and that Jesus Christ was *homoousios* to God (of the same essence, jointly sharing a common substance), as opposed to the heretical teaching of the Arians, who said that he was only *homoiousios* or *homoios* to God (that is, that he only had a similar essence or was like God). Jesus Christ, the ancient fathers of the Church went on to say, had two *physeis* or natures (one divine and the other human) along with two *thelêmata* (wills) and two *energeiai* (operations, energies)—united upon a single *hypostasis* (foundation) and maintaining a single external *prosôpon* (face, façade, role).¹⁷

But then in 1900, Harnack published his best-selling popular book, *What Is Christianity?*¹⁸ and spoke out with prophetic fervor against this whole way of trying to present Christianity. All of this technical Greek terminology came from pagan Greek philosophy, he said, not from the Bible, and had nothing at all to do with the simple teaching of the historical Jesus. Christianity's proper task was not to become involved in endless controversies about nit-picking philosophical issues, but to preach the message of God's love and forgiveness, and teach human beings to act with love, compassion, and tolerance, and devote themselves to carrying out concrete deeds of loving kindness to the human beings around them.

We must be clear about two things here. First, the Protestant liberals of the early twentieth century were not ignorant scoffers attacking something they did not understand—Harnack for example was one of the world's experts on the history of Catholic theology. Second, the Protestant liberals were not attacking traditional Christianity because they were dilettantish over-educated playboys and playgirls who did not take religion seriously. On the contrary, the Protestant liberals were on a *prophetic mission*. We were not Christians at all, they proclaimed, unless we were dedicated above all else to healing the sick, feeding the hungry, aiding the downtrodden and despised, and teaching everyone around us that God loves us human beings just as we are. The true Christian life is to love and show tolerance to everyone around us, acting towards them in the same way that we would want them to act towards us.

Horace Bushnell was another influential figure in the development of Protestant liberalism. In his book *Christian Nurture* (1847), he chopped away decisively at the foundations of the revivalist movement. The kind of conversion experiences which were at the heart of American frontier revivalism and camp meetings were major spiritual breakthroughs, he said, for those who had never before known a truly loving God. But a child brought up in the church, if the church was doing its job, should never doubt God's

full acceptance and overwhelming love. Good spiritual training for children of the church would involve a series of gradual educational experiences.

We can see how Bushnell's ideas were adapted in the AA Big Book, where the appendix on spiritual experience explained how most alcoholics would find themselves undergoing a gradual educational process rather than a few "sudden and spectacular upheavals." And we can see how the AA Big Book was likewise borrowing from Bushnell and Fosdick and the rest of the Protestant liberal tradition when it said that the goal was "spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection."¹⁹

The Southern Methodists and the Upper Room

By the early twentieth century, the Southern Methodist Church, which had become one of the key liberal denominations, was teaching its little children 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" and "Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world, / Red and yellow, black and white, all are precious in his sight, / Jesus loves the little children of the world."²⁰ On the surface these might have sounded like simple-minded little ditties, but the greatest truths are often quite simple. The gospel message to these Methodists was that God first loved us when we were still lost in fear and anger, and would, through the power of his all-accepting love, teach us to love again. The greatest barrier to hearing the gospel was to be so afraid of God, because of nightmarish images of a punishing, condemning, rejecting God which had been foisted on us by fear-based religious systems, that we ran away from God instead of throwing ourselves gratefully into the arms of his love and healing grace. And the true measure of salvation lay not in how many doctrines and dogmas we believed, but in how open and loving our hearts were. Methodism regularly described itself as "the religion of the heart," and taught that the mark of a good Methodist was above all a warm heart. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, had been brought up as a child in a deeply religious Anglo-Catholic family which read together, as part of their family's morning prayer and meditation, from Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ*, a medieval Catholic book which taught a similar glorification of the simple life of love and kindness as the way to bring the true Christ spirit into our lives.

The *Imitation of Christ* was one of the books, we remember, which Sister Ignatia used to give to alcoholics when they finished her treatment program at St. Thomas

Hospital in Akron. And the chapel at the hospital had at the altar end the image of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37), and stained glass windows along the right wall depicting the Seven Corporal Works of Mercy (Matthew 25:35): feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, befriending the immigrant worker, taking care of the sick, ministering to prisoners, and burying the dead. Good Methodists knew instantly, upon entering that chapel, that the Catholics who ran this hospital were people whom they must regard with the greatest respect, and that Sister Ignatia was someone who believed in the same goals they did.

A little booklet called *The Upper Room*, published by the old Southern Methodist Church in Nashville, Tennessee, was the most commonly used meditational book in the AA program from 1935 down to 1948 (when it began being replaced in AA circles by Richmond Walker's *Twenty-four Hours a Day*). In Dr. Bob's house, his wife Anne read from *The Upper Room* every morning. All the recovering alcoholics who had come to their house for morning coffee before going to work, prayed the prayers and discussed the readings.

The Southern Methodists had started off as an odd mixture of revivalist fervor and Anglo-Catholic piety. The Methodists had always been (as they are now) staunchly anti-Calvinist and anti-predestinarian. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they had believed that accepting God's free gift of grace in a conversion experience at a revival was the most common entry into the life of faith, but they also believed that human beings always had free will, and could reject God and turn against God's grace. In fact their understanding of the relationship between faith and works differed only verbally from the position which St. Thomas Aquinas had taught in the *Summa Theologica*.²¹ Continuance in the life of faith meant using our freedom of will to devote ourselves to a "methodical" use (hence the nickname "Methodists") of prayer, the sacraments, and all the other means of grace so that we could grow continually in love, compassion, emotional warmth, and understanding towards other people.

One major change came however, at the beginning of the twentieth century, when the majority of Methodists began to feel more comfortable discarding or at least strongly de-emphasizing preaching frontier type revivals in which preachers attempted to produce highly emotional conversion experiences as the doorway to the Christian life. In part they compensated by putting even greater emphasis upon reaching out to the poor and helpless (the Methodist Social Creed which was placed in the *Methodist Discipline* in 1908 was closely similar in spirit and principle to the teachings of Dorothy Day's Catholic Worker

movement). They also fell back onto their eighteenth century roots (where their founder John Wesley had been deeply read in the Spanish and French Catholic spiritual literature of his time, including the writings of St. Ignatius Loyola and other Jesuit authors) and taught a spirituality of “going on to perfection” (as they called it) which was understood as a continuous growth in greater love and inner peace—carried out over our whole lives—which was based upon prayer, hymn-singing, active participation in the life of the church, reading good spiritual literature, developing greater and greater God-consciousness, and learning the proper exercise of our human wills. Like Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises*, Methodist theology put a strong emphasis upon the necessity for mobilizing the deepest levels of our human feelings and emotions, in order to provide the motive power for the Christian spiritual life. The Methodists called it developing “a warm heart.”

So this was what *The Upper Room* taught the early AA people between 1935 and 1948: how to carry out *methodical spiritual exercises* in order to encounter progressively more and more transformative religious experiences, which are basically of “*the ‘educational variety’ because they develop slowly over a period of time.*” I have deliberately italicized the words “methodical” and “spiritual exercises” here, along with the quotation from page 567 of the Big Book, to emphasize the way that Methodist theology, St. Ignatius Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises*, and the spirituality of the Big Book often converged quite markedly.

Early Roman Catholic members in Alcoholics Anonymous

According to Bill Wilson’s memory, at the time when the final drafts of the Big Book were being written (Spring 1938-December 1938), there were no Roman Catholic members in the New York AA group. There was one Catholic member in Ohio, he said, who “had written his story” for the Big Book, “but had volunteered no further opinion.”²²

This was Joe Doppler (or Doeppler), whose story appeared in the first, second, and third editions of the Big Book as “The European Drinker.” Born in Germany, his drink of choice during his youth was good Rhine wine. His devout Catholic parents wanted him to become a priest, but after attending a Franciscan school he decided he did not have the vocation, and became a harness maker and upholsterer by trade. He came to America when he was twenty-four and settled in Cleveland, Ohio, where his drinking became

worse and worse, until Dr. Bob and three or four other AAs visited him and got him sober in April 1936. Joe in this way became the first Roman Catholic in AA.²³

Morgan Ryan, an Irish Catholic who came in almost three years later, was the second. It was by then a crucial time in the development of AA. In January of 1939, four hundred multilith copies of the draft of the Big Book were produced and distributed to a variety of people for review. Morgan, formerly a \$20,000-a-year advertising man from Glen Ridge, New Jersey, had just gotten out of Rockland Asylum and joined the New York AA group. The New Yorkers agreed that he should convey one of the multilithed manuscript copies to the Catholic Committee on Publications of the Archdiocese of New York. Bill Wilson was delighted when the Catholic authorities responded positively:

The Committee, [Morgan] said, had nothing but the best to say of our efforts. From their point of view the book was perfectly all right as far as it went. After reading the section on meditation and prayer, the Committee had made certain suggestions for improvement [which] looked so good that we adopted them on the spot. In only one sentence of the entire book had they found it necessary to suggest a real change. At the conclusion of my own story, Chapter 1 of the original draft, I had made a rhetorical flourish to the effect that “we had found Heaven right here on this good old earth.” Morgan’s friend on the Committee pointed this out to him with a smile and said, “Don’t you think that Bill W. could change that word ‘Heaven’ to ‘Utopia’? After all, we Catholics are promising folks something much better later on!”²⁴

As a side note, Morgan R. later appeared on Gabriel Heatter’s 9:00 p.m. radio program “We the People” on April 29, 1939 and told his life story, and how he had regained his sobriety in the new AA program. A full transcript of his talk has survived.²⁵

The important thing about the embassy which Morgan was sent on to the Catholic Committee on Publications was that, even in January of 1939, with as yet only those two Catholic members in the program—Joe Doppler and Morgan Ryan—the new AA movement was already committed to gaining approval from the Catholic Church, and to making their material as acceptable as possible to good believing Catholics. In the 1930s this was quite an extraordinary admission for a group of American Protestants to make: the acknowledgment that their group was going to have to make its teachings compatible with traditional Catholic belief and that—should it become necessary—they might have

to incorporate important Catholic spiritual principles into the heart of their system of faith, or otherwise modify what they had been doing.

Alcoholics Anonymous and the Oxford Group

The place where the new AA movement was quickly forced to make that decision— are we willing to part with something truly near and dear to us in order to allow Roman Catholics to join us?—lay in AA’s linkage to the Oxford Group. This was an early twentieth-century Protestant movement begun by an American Lutheran pastor named Frank Buchman. In spite of the group’s name, the connection with Oxford University in England was only tangential (the university later sued them for using its name), and they also had nothing at all to do with the nineteenth century English renewal of interest in traditional Catholicism (involving Cardinal John Henry Newman *et al.*) called the Oxford Movement.

Buchman was part of the American and European Protestant missionary movement working in the Far and Middle East during the early twentieth century, and many of his ideas came from sources within that movement. On the positive side, he helped revitalize the central theme of the modern Protestant evangelical movement: the rediscovery (in the early eighteenth century) by people like the Puritan theologian Jonathan Edwards in colonial Massachusetts and the Anglo-Catholic theologian John Wesley in England, of the ancient Catholic principle that divine grace could actually change human character itself. One could take a man or woman whose life was inexorably heading towards a tragic doom, and by the power of God’s grace, totally change the way that person’s life story ended, turning it into a tale of blessing and triumph. Buchman referred to this transformation as “life changing,” and made it the goal of his preaching and teaching.²⁶

But some of his other concerns could disturb people, especially what some saw as an unhealthy preoccupation with what he regarded as grave sexual sins, including homosexuality, transvestism, and masturbation. He became involved in missionary work in China from 1916 to 1918, but his claim that many of the other Protestant missionaries in China were ineffective due to their own sinfulness, with the implication that one of their major problems was homosexuality, caused Bishop Logan Roots to receive so many complaints that he finally demanded that Buchman leave China.²⁷

Buchman decided to go to England to try out some of the foreign mission’s newly-devised one-on-one missionary methods to create Christian youth groups among

Cambridge and Oxford University students who were no longer attending church or trying to live by strict traditional Christian moral principles. Older people—university professors, newspaper editors, prominent businessmen, major government officials, and the like—also began attending these group meetings, and the Oxford Group was formed.²⁸

By the mid-1930s, the Oxford Group had established regular meetings in the United States both in New York City and in Akron. Ebby Thacher, the man who showed Bill Wilson how to use the power of God’s grace to conquer his compulsion to drink, had gotten sober in the Oxford Group, and Bill likewise began attending Oxford Group meetings in New York City in December 1934 as part of his sobering up process.

For two and a half years, Bill W. and his wife Lois attended two Oxford Group meetings a week and took the alcoholics on whom they were working to the group’s meetings. But in late Spring of 1937, leaders at the Oxford Group’s Calvary Mission in New York ordered alcoholics staying there to stop attending the “drunks only” meetings which Bill and Lois were holding at their Clinton Street apartment. In August 1937, Bill and Lois quit attending Oxford Group meetings, and their new alcoholic recovery program in New York was permanently split off from the Oxford Group.²⁹

In Akron, Ohio, the connection between the alcoholics and the Oxford Groupers ran far deeper and lasted much longer. In 1933, rubber baron Harvey Firestone, Sr. (president of the Firestone Rubber and Tire Company) brought a large contingent of Oxford Group members to Akron so that they could get the first group started in that city. Dr. Bob’s wife Anne persuaded him to start attending these new Oxford Group meetings early in 1933 shortly after they were begun, where he and his wife became close to Henrietta Seiberling, the daughter-in-law of the founder of the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company and a devoted group member. In March or April 1935, Henrietta found out that Dr. Bob’s compulsive drinking was on the point of totally destroying his medical career, and received guidance that she and some of the other Oxford Group members should begin using Oxford Group methods to try to get him sober.³⁰

Nothing they tried worked, until Bill Wilson arrived in Akron in May, and—via their common Oxford Group connection—made contact with the doctor and began explaining how he had been using group principles to stay sober back in New York.³¹ Dr. Bob had his last drink in June of that year, and he and his wife Anne set up an alcoholic recovery program in Akron based on the further adaptation of Oxford Group principles which he and Bill Wilson had worked out that summer.

The Akron alcoholics went to a weekly meeting of the Oxford Group on Wednesday nights at T. Henry and Clarace Williams's home, where there were also non-alcoholics present (including Henrietta Seiberling and the Williams's themselves). But most of the alcoholics also went to Dr. Bob and Anne's house on the other six days a week, where Anne and perhaps some of the wives would be the only non-alcoholics present. They either attended Anne's morning meditation session, where she read from the Protestant booklet called *The Upper Room*, followed by an informal discussion over coffee of the bible verses and short meditations found in that day's reading, and/or they came to the house in the evening for informal discussion meetings and work with new members.

Cleveland Catholics force the final split from the Oxford Group

By April 1939, there were fourteen alcoholics in Cleveland, Ohio, a major American manufacturing city on Lake Erie, just south of the Canadian border; they were led by a man named Clarence Snyder, who had gotten sober on February 11, 1938. The Cleveland people were traveling every week to the Wednesday night Oxford Group meeting at T. Henry and Clarace Williams's home in Akron, forty miles to the south. The problem was that a majority of the Cleveland contingent were Roman Catholics, and they told Clarence that their parish priest had told them they would be excommunicated if they continued attending Oxford Group meetings. One of the issues, according to later memories, arose because Oxford Group members were taught to confess their worst and most secret sins to one another. A good Catholic would only find that advisable or appropriate when done with a trained and competent priest, who knew how to distinguish between serious sins and imaginary issues, and who had the power of the keys and would be able to forgive the person's sins and restore that person to a state of grace.³² Clarence repeatedly tried to get Dr. Bob to stop holding the main weekly meeting for alcoholics at T. Henry and Clarace Williams's home in Akron, where an additional issue for the alcoholics was that they were being bunched in with the non-alcoholic Oxford Group members, but Dr. Bob's loyalty to T. Henry, Clarace, Henrietta Seiberling and the other non-alcoholic Oxford Groupers remained unbreakable.³³

Finally, in April 1939, Clarence was working on a Cleveland alcoholic named Albert (Abby or Al) Golrick (Abby's story made it into the second and third editions of the Big Book under the title "He Thought He Could Drink like a Gentleman"). When Clarence

began discussing the Catholic problem with Abby's wife Grace, he told her that he believed they needed to stop attending the Akron meeting and start their own meeting right there in Cleveland, but that he had been unable to find any place they could meet. Grace told him that she and Abby would be glad to welcome them into their home at 2345 Stillman Road in Cleveland Heights.³⁴ (AA historian Nancy Olson believed that Abby himself was Catholic, but I have been unable to produce independent confirmation of this.³⁵)

Armed with this new possibility, Clarence nevertheless made one final attempt to convince Dr. Bob to break the Oxford Group connection:

I says, "Doc you know these fellows can't come." I says, "They can't belong to the Oxford Group." I says, "We don't need all this folderol of the Oxford Group. We can eliminate a lot of this stuff. We have a book now with these Twelve Steps, and we have the Four Absolutes, and anyone can live with that."

He says, "Well you can't do that," he says, "you can't break this thing up."

I says, "We're not breaking anything up. All I'm interested in is something with more universality so that anybody can belong whether they have a religion or believe in anything or not. They can come."

He says, "Well you can't do that."

I says "We're gonna do something."

And he says, "Like what?"

And I says, "Well we'll see like what!"³⁶

At the very end of his life, at the time he married his third wife Grace (this was in 1971, the year he turned sixty-nine), Clarence had a long and turbulent life, filled with many disappointments and failures. He turned into a Protestant fundamentalist and began teaching an Assemblies of God Pentecostal-style recovery program in which he demanded that AA newcomers pray to Jesus, and fall down on their knees and turn their lives over to Jesus as their personal savior. Some AA historians focus primarily on that final phase of his life when they think about Clarence's style of AA teaching. But back here in 1939 he was a very different person. Only thirty-six years old, and still filled with hope and overflowing confidence in God's redeeming power, he instead emphasized a kind of AA based on *universalism*, where "anybody can belong whether they have a religion or believe in anything or not."³⁷

So on Wednesday, May 10, 1939, the recovering alcoholics from Cleveland went for one last time to the Oxford Group meeting at T. Henry and Clarace Williams's house in Akron. At the close of the meeting, Clarence announced that this was "the last time the Cleveland contingent would be down to the Oxford Group as a whole." He told Dr. Bob that

"We're gonna start our own group in Cleveland This is not gonna be an Oxford Group. It's gonna be known as Alcoholics Anonymous. We're taking the name from the book; and only alcoholics and their families are welcome. Nobody else We're gonna meet at 2345 Stillman Road, Cleveland Heights at Al and Grace G.'s home."

Doc stood up and said, "You can't do this."

Clarence replied, "There's nothing to talk about."³⁸

The meeting broke up in a near riot as the Cleveland protestors stood up and walked out. Three or four of the Cleveland alcoholics refused to join this rebellion, but nine of them (the majority) remained united, and held their first Cleveland meeting the next evening (May 11, 1939). Everyone from Akron also came up and barged into the Golrick's home. As Clarence described it:

"The whole group descended upon us and tried to break up our meeting. One guy was gonna whip me. I want you to know that this was all done in pure Christian love. A.A. started in riots. It rose in riots."³⁹

In a letter to Hank P. on June 4, 1939, Clarence told him that in the new Cleveland group there was "not too much stress on spiritual business at meetings."⁴⁰ It was conducted, in other words, in a way very different from the Oxford Group's strongly religious style. According to Mitchell K., "Clarence always felt that overt spirituality belong between a 'baby' and his sponsor," and should not be introduced into AA meetings. "Prayer and Bible reading was a prerequisite, Clarence felt, but only at home."⁴¹

To conclude the story, in late October 1939, the Akron alcoholics also quit going to T. Henry and Clarace Williams's home, and began holding their big weekly meeting at Dr. Bob's house. Then in January 1940 they moved the meeting to King School.⁴² AA's break with the Oxford Group was now complete.

The issue to Sister Ignatia: nonsectarian help to all vs. becoming tied to one narrow religious sect or cult

By January of 1940, Sister Ignatia had also negotiated a working agreement between Dr. Bob, St. Thomas Hospital, and her superior, Sister Clementine. There would now be an officially sanctioned AA-based alcoholism treatment program in place at St. Thomas Hospital.⁴³ But Sister Ignatia was quite clear about one central requirement: although run by a Catholic religious order, the hospital was “nonsectarian” (her word),⁴⁴ and admitted patients regardless of their religious affiliation. The Oxford Group on the other hand was a “sect” (again her word),⁴⁵ what we would today call a “religious cult,” with extremely narrow and rigid religious requirements for its members. Therefore any alcoholism treatment program carried on at the hospital had to be freed from any connection with that movement.

The new AA movement, all across the U.S. and Canada, quickly began to recognize the wisdom of this approach. What was called the Old Preamble (or Texas Preamble), read at the beginning of many AA meetings, expressed this understanding clearly:

We feel each person's religious convictions, if any, are his own affair, and the simple purpose of the program of AA is to show what may be done to enlist the aid of a Power greater than ourselves, regardless of what our individual conception of that Power may be.⁴⁶

Roman Catholics began flooding into AA

This arrangement—Alcoholics Anonymous as a nonsectarian program, not allied with any particular creed or denomination, and not setting up barriers against anyone of any religious background—worked so well that the question of whether Roman Catholics could join AA seems to have become a non-issue, at the practical level at least, from that point on. When the first AA group in Indianapolis was founded on October 28, 1940, for example, by a good Irish Catholic named Doherty Sheerin, apparently no one thought anything of it at all. The Catholic churches in that city allowed him to advertise AA in their church buildings and Catholic priests recommended the new alcoholism program enthusiastically.⁴⁷

Roman Catholic alcoholics had been flooding into the AA program in such large numbers, in fact, that in a letter written by Bill Wilson on October 30, 1940, he estimated that, “as matters now stand, I suppose A.A. is 25 percent Catholic.”⁴⁸

The most widely used set of newcomers lessons in early AA, a pamphlet called the *Tablemate*, arose out of the weekly beginners classes which began being held in Detroit on June 14, 1943, and was later given its first printed version in Washington D.C. We can note how the pamphlet’s instructions on how to do Step Five not only assumes that a large number of the alcoholics at these meetings would be Roman Catholics, but also takes the time to give a Catholic explanation of the difference between doing a real AA fifth step and going to what was in those days a good Catholic’s regular weekly confession:

The Catholic already has this medium readily available to him in the confessional. But—the Catholic is at a disadvantage if he thinks his familiarity with confession permits him to think his part of A.A. is thereby automatically taken care of. He must, in confession, seriously consider his problems in relation to his alcoholic thinking The non-Catholic has the way open to work this step by going to his minister, his doctor, or his friend.⁴⁹

The issue was the Oxford Group, not Protestantism: continued use of the Upper Room

The issue for Roman Catholics during this transition period (running from 1939 through the early 1940’s) is often assumed by AA historians to have been Protestantism as such, but a closer look shows that this was not so. Let us look for example at a pamphlet entitled *A Manual for Alcoholics Anonymous*, which was published in Akron in 1942 or not long afterwards, and designed to be given to newcomers just coming into the AA program. We can see from this pamphlet that Akron AA meetings were still frequently being begun with a reading from the Protestant booklet called *The Upper Room*, and that there was nothing noticeably Catholic about the meeting format:

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 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* In closing the entire group stands and repeats the Lord's Prayer.⁵⁰

And we know that *The Upper Room* continued to be the most commonly used AA meditational booklet, not just in Akron, but in AA meetings across the United States, down to 1948. At that time it began to be replaced by Richmond Walker's *Twenty-Four Hours a Day*, which quickly became the AA program's second most printed book, secondary only to the Big Book. But Rich was also a liberal Protestant, a very free-thinking Unitarian from Massachusetts, who drew many of his ideas from classical Protestant idealism of the radical and anti-traditional sort, including the New England Transcendentalists and the nineteenth-century German idealist philosophers.⁵¹

The books which early Akron AA's read: mostly Protestant liberal

Also, the Akron manual gave a recommended reading list for AA newcomers which is very instructive:⁵²

Alcoholics Anonymous (the Big Book) 1939.

The Holy Bible.

Henry Drummond, *The Greatest Thing in the World*, a talk given in 1887 and published immediately afterward.

Emmet Fox, *The Sermon on the Mount*, copyright 1934, 1935, 1938.

James Allen, *As a Man Thinketh*, first published in 1908 or a little before.

Winfred Rhoades, *The Self You Have to Live With*, 1938.

Ernest M. Ligon, *The Psychology of Christian Personality*, 1935.

E. Stanley Jones, *Abundant Living*, 1942.

Bruce Barron, *The Man Nobody Knows: A Discovery of the Real Jesus*, copyright 1924, 1925.

The Unchanging Friend, a series published by the Bruce Publishing Co. in Milwaukee.

Bruce Barron portrayed Jesus in warmly human fashion, in the way typical of the Protestant liberalism of that period. Following in the spirit of Adolf Harnack's *What Is Christianity?* he portrayed Jesus as totally human, not an otherworldly God-man, and

completely ignored the medieval doctrine of Jesus' death on the cross as a blood sacrifice for other people's sins.

E. Stanley Jones was a mainline Methodist, hence also on the side of the Protestant liberals in the early twentieth-century American struggle with the fundamentalist movement. Chapter 6 of his book begins with a section on "Prayer is Surrender," and Chapter 8 is entitled "The Morning Quiet Time." 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 the process, 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 does not "feel" like we are in real contact with God, and where we have extraordinary difficulty forcing ourselves to pray at all). So although we might call him a liberal or modernist, there was also a good deal of traditional monastic spirituality lying behind some of his recommendations. Methodist spirituality and Roman Catholic spirituality were sometimes extremely similar.

Two of the Akron books had a definitely psychological bent. The AA movement (in Akron as well as New York) was an attempt to combine some simple but very effective psychological insights with a spirituality which was deeply held, but phrased as much as possible in nonsectarian and very simple language.⁵³ One of these books on the Akron list was by Ernest Ligon, who was educated at Texas Christian University (Disciples of Christ) and Yale University, so he was fairly much a mainstream Protestant, but with a leaning towards the liberals and modernists. As an example, we can see how he stated in his book that not all the sayings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount were genuine words of Jesus, and/or they may not have originally been stated verbatim in those exact words. His book gave a Neo-Freudian psychological interpretation of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, where 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 Neo-Freudian psychiatrist Alfred Adler (1870-1937), and one can see the influence of other Neo-Freudian psychiatrists as well. F. H. Allport's *Social Psychology* was also listed in his bibliography (he 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.

Winfred Rhoades's book was based on his psychological work in the Boston Dispensary unit of the New England Medical Center, where he conducted classes in

“thought control” and helped and advised individuals with adjustment problems. He defined religion as “intrinsically not a belief, not a doctrine ... but conscious association with the divine Spirit and Life.” Again we see the rejection of doctrines and dogmas (whether modern fundamentalist doctrines or ancient traditional doctrines) in favor of the realm of feeling and intuition, and establishing contact with an immaterial, nonphysical, fourth dimension of reality.

There was only one Protestant on the Akron list who did fit into some sort of liberal or modernist mold. Henry Drummond, who was closely associated with Dwight L. Moody and the world of nineteenth century Protestant revivalism, was very much a part of old-fashioned conservative Protestantism. But this particular work by Drummond in fact talked about human love (and God’s love) in a way which would have delighted any Protestant liberal or modernist of the 1930’s and 40’s, so this was a case of the exception that proves the rule.

New Thought: Emmet Fox and James Allen

Two other figures on the Akron list—Emmet Fox and James Allen⁵⁴—were representatives of New Thought, and were therefore over on the radical side of modern Protestantism: their ideas were linked with groups such as Unity Church, the Religious Science movement, and the Church of Divine Science. Their more recent heirs include the followers of *A Course in Miracles* (ACIM), Gerald Jampolsky, Marianne Williamson, Louise Hay, and so on. Nevertheless, in terms of the fundamentalist-liberal controversy, both of these writers—and particularly Fox—very much rejected the dogmas of fundamentalism.

Fox was born in Ireland and came from a pious Roman Catholic family. He was educated by the Jesuits at Stamford Hill College in England, but after discovering his skills as a faith healer, he linked himself to the New Thought movement and the Church of Divine Science. His Catholic background still showed, in particular in the influence on him of the medieval spiritual tradition represented in figures like St. Denis (the author who wrote c. 500 A.D. under the name of Dionysius the Areopagite), John Scotus Eriugena and Meister Eckhart, and by the way he used allegory and symbol as his principal tool for biblical interpretation.

Fox spoke lovingly of what he called the birth of the Wonder Child within our souls: “Bible symbolism has its own beautiful logic, and just as the soul is always spoken of as

a woman, so this, the Spiritual Idea that is born to the soul, is described as a child. The conscious discovery by you that you have this Power within you, and your determination to make use of it, is the birth of the child.”⁵⁵ In this manner, each human being becomes an individualization of God, a divine consciousness “coming to birth” over and over again:

[Man’s] work is to express, in concrete, definite form, the abstract ideas with which God furnishes him [In doing thus each human being becomes] 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 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.⁵⁶

Fox denounced the fundamentalist conception of God even more vehemently than the liberal theologians of the mainline Protestant denominations:

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.⁵⁷

Fox also accepted all of the major findings of the new historical-critical biblical research, such as (to give one example) the discovery 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, including the major sixth century author whose name is unknown, but who is referred to by biblical scholars as Deutero-Isaiah (chapters 40-55).⁵⁸

And beyond that, Fox also believed in reincarnation and many other ideas that would have horrified any fundamentalist who read his books. He said that death for example was the final separation of the etheric body from the physical body 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.⁵⁹

To an even greater extent than the mainline Protestant liberals (by which one means people like the Congregationalists, Methodists, Northern Baptists, Episcopalians, some of the Presbyterians, and so on), the New Thought contingent in early AA believed in ideas that were often squarely opposed to good Roman Catholic doctrine. Yet they were just as committed to religious tolerance as the liberals, so Sister Ignatia's idea of setting up a nonsectarian program for restoring alcoholics to physical, psychological, and basic spiritual health was feasible with them too.

The only Catholic work on the Akron reading list: *The Unchanging Friend*

And with one exception—which we must talk about now—everything on the Akron list was Protestant. The only work that seems to have been Catholic was *The Unchanging Friend*, a series published by the Bruce Publishing Company. But unfortunately we know nothing about what it taught. Mel Barger says that “that company now seems to be out of business, although there are a couple of smaller publishing firms listed under that name. They published considerable Catholic-related material and some of it can still be found in libraries.”⁶⁰ But beyond that we can say nothing.

No Oxford Group books on the post-1942 Akron reading list

And on the other hand, it should be noted that not a single book on the Akron list was an Oxford Group book in the narrow sense. That is, there was no reference to works like A. J. Russell's *For Sinners Only*, V. C. Kitchen's *I Was a Pagan*, H. A. Walter's

Soul-Surgery, or Harold Begbie’s *Twice-Born Men* or *More Twice-Born Men*. Books which were too closely linked to the Oxford Group were studiously avoided.

Father Ralph Pfau’s Golden Books finally began appearing in 1947 and afterwards

The lack of major Roman Catholic representation in AA literature was finally remedied by the latter half of the decade. In 1947, Father Ralph Pfau published the first of his fourteen Golden Books, entitled the *Spiritual Side*, under the pen name “Father John Doe.” This was followed the next year by the second of the Golden Books, with the significant title *Tolerance*—reemphasizing the principle of a nonsectarian AA—and then by a long series of other works. He quickly became one of the four most published AA authors writing for AA readers—and most importantly of all, his books were as widely read and admired among Protestants as among Catholics. Catholicism now provided one of the major interpretive themes of the new Alcoholics Anonymous movement.⁶¹

But in the early 1940’s when Roman Catholics first began coming into AA in large numbers, it must be noted that the literature of the new movement was dominated by liberal Protestant and New Thought works. So it must be asked why they were not bothered by this kind of Protestantism but offended by Oxford Group ideas and involvement.

Why did Catholics object to the Oxford Group?

We must again prefix these remarks with a statement of all the valuable things which the early AA movement learned from the Oxford Group in 1935. By its emphasis on “life changing,” the Oxford Group had refocused twentieth-century spirituality on the original emphasis of the eighteenth-century evangelical revival: divine grace could change human character itself, and begin a real healing of the vices which immersed fallen men and women in the entire destructive repertoire of human sinfulness. And this in turn enabled AA to link itself back to the great Catholic tradition, from St. Augustine to St. Thomas Aquinas to St. Teresa of Avila, of the *cura animarum*, the healing of human souls by the power of God’s grace. The Oxford Group also provided the initial starting point for many

of AA's twelve steps, including the need to admit our sins to another human being, and the necessity of making amends.

But to understand what happened in 1939-1940, we also need to understand the degree to which many people held a very negative perception of the Oxford Group. Even a defender of the group like Victor C. Kitchen (author of the important Oxford Group book *I Was a Pagan*) admitted that his first visit to one of the group's house parties was motivated by the belief, based on reading popular reports, that he was going to see a circus sideshow of religious fanatics:

Based on things he had read in the newspapers, Kitchen had gathered the impression that "Buchmanism" was a kind of fanatical cult with bizarre practices. He assumed he was going to see something very exotic, with flickering torches in a dimly-lit room with tiger skin rugs on the floor. In an orgy of confession, men and women were going to stand up in mixed company and give lurid accounts of all the sins they had committed, including all the gross details of their most perverted sexual escapades. These emaciated true believers, hollow eyes gleaming with blind fanaticism, would also sit around and engage in automatic writing rituals which seemed to be a mixture partly of the kind of seances which mediums held when they were trying to talk to the spirits of the dead, and partly of what young people did at parties when they played with a Ouija Board and allowed the pointer to move around the letters of the alphabet written on the sides of the playing board in an attempt to receive messages from some other spirit world. Under the control of Frank Buchman and the other cult leaders, the converts would blindly do whatever these "divine commands" ordered, immediately and without question. The Oxford Group was portrayed as a fanatical and authoritarian cult, where the members gave up all their individualism and freedom. Members were not allowed to ask questions and explore issues rationally, but simply had to obey the cult leaders and let the group rule their lives.⁶²

The Oxford Group stressed the importance of what they called the Four Absolutes: Absolute Honesty, Absolute Unselfishness, Absolute Love, and Absolute Purity. There was a fanaticism to this: their zeal for these principles seemed to violate the warning from the Catholic tradition, going all the way back to St. Augustine, that after Adam and Eve's fall, ordinary human beings could (with the aid of God's grace) remain free of mortal sin

in this life, but that no human beings (other than Jesus and Mary) would ever be free of venial sins.

And to the Oxford Group, Absolute Purity referred to sexual sins, particularly (in their eyes) homosexuality, transvestite and transgender behavior, and masturbation. A 1954 Oxford Group/Moral Re-Armament book describes how they believed that homosexuals could be identified:⁶³

There are many who wear suede shoes who are not homosexual, but in Europe and America the majority of homosexuals do. They favor green as a color in clothes and decorations. Men are given to an excessive display and use of the handkerchief. They tend to let the hair grow long, use scent and are frequently affected in speech, mincing in gait and feminine in mannerisms. They are often very gifted in the arts. They tend to exhibitionism. They can be cruel and vindictive, for sadism usually has a homosexual root. They are often given to moods There is an unnecessary touching of hands, arms and shoulders. In the homosexual the elbow grip is a well-known sign.

The preoccupation with homosexuality went back in Buchman's life even to the period before he founded the Oxford Group. It should be said that the problem raised in 1939-1940 was not that the group condemned either homosexuality or masturbation, but that attitudes of that time regarded homosexuality and cross dressing in particular as things so shameful that they should not even be mentioned in polite society, but swept under the carpet and denied. Buchman himself would corner young men whom he barely knew and start accusing them of homosexuality or masturbation.

The tipping point, however, where a good deal of public opinion turned completely against the Oxford Group, came in an entirely different area, when Frank Buchman was quoted as saying, in an interview in the New York *World-Telegram* on 25 August 1936: "I thank heaven for a man like Adolf Hitler, who built a front line of defense against the anti-Christ of Communism." And Frank Buchman did in fact attend the 1935 Nazi rally in Nuremberg, to which he was invited by one of Heinrich Himmler's friends, and was Himmler's guest at the Berlin Olympics in August 1936. Buchman's defenders have, ever since, argued that the apparently pro-Hitler quotation was taken out of context, and that he had visited the Nazis to see if he could convert them to Christianity and avert the war that was threatening all of Europe. But the damage was already done in American public opinion, and by the end of 1939—when it was becoming increasingly apparent that the

U.S. was in great danger of being dragged into the war which Hitler had begun with his invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939—more and more Americans (including American Catholics) were becoming unwilling to support the Oxford Group in any way.

The American Catholic position: cooperation with members of other religions on nonsectarian projects

So the American Catholic Church was not going to allow good Roman Catholics to be drawn into what they regarded as the Oxford Group's cult-like and fanatical causes and beliefs. And the Church seems for the most part to have been willing to support this vision of a nonsectarian alcoholic recovery program (in the same way that American Catholics regularly participated in numerous nonsectarian charitable and socially useful public programs, working alongside Protestants, Jews, and others for the greater good of the whole community).

It was the old Catholic principle, seen in St. Thomas Aquinas and many other great Catholic teachers, which held that there were some beliefs which were matters of revealed truth only (including such things as Catholic dogmas about the divinity of Christ, original sin, the substitutionary atonement, the real presence of the body and blood in the eucharist, the sacraments as means of grace, and so on) which many non-Catholics might not necessarily share. But there were also matters of natural theology and natural morality in which men and women of good will might cooperate. Theologically, for example, good Catholics believed that the fact of God's existence, for example, could be demonstrated logically. So one did not need to accept the revealed truths of the Catholic faith in order to believe in God's existence. In the area of natural morality and natural law ethics, it was clear to all civilized and rational human beings that gross violations of the seven deadly sins, such as murder, lying, and stealing, could be shown to result in irrational and ultimately self-destructive behavior. Or in other words, good Catholics could participate in a tolerant and nonsectarian variety of AA in the same way in which they could run for public office, vote in elections, and handle coins marked "In God We Trust" in cities and states where the civil government remained tolerant and nonsectarian, even if Roman Catholicism was a minority religion in that city or state.

Fundamentalist Protestants eventually began to join AA, and they were accepted and tolerated as long as they followed the ground rules which had already been laid out: no

preaching their own particular religious dogmas in AA meetings, no attempt to convert other AA members to their specific beliefs, and tolerance for all.

No one in fact ended up losing. In fact it was found that the majority of alcoholics from fundamentalist backgrounds (as well as men and women from the socio-economic-educational class from which the fundamentalist denominations drew most of their members) would eventually start going to church, once they had been sober for a while, and that they would nearly always end up attending fundamentalist church services. Likewise, Roman Catholic priests and nuns who joined AA continued serving the Catholic Church faithfully, and the majority of Roman Catholic laypeople who got sober in AA became able to attend Catholic Church services once again with joy and comfort, and without being overwhelmed any more by the old feelings of guilt and despair which they often felt during mass in the days before they joined AA and worked the twelve steps.

There were an extraordinary number of cases where people who had fallen into atheism had their belief in God restored by working the twelve steps, and no known case of a man or woman alcoholic who came to the program as a believer, and ended up being turned into an atheist by AA!

The liberal Protestant contribution to AA

In spite of what appeared to be almost diametrically opposed theological beliefs on so many issues, in fact, the liberal Protestants were able to give something very important to the Roman Catholics in the Alcoholics Anonymous movement. There were many Catholic alcoholics who had violated some of the Church's moral rules when they were still drinking, in ways which left them too frightened to come back to God and the Church. This is a story which one heard from recovering Catholic alcoholics over and over again in AA meetings. Believing that God had totally and irreparably condemned them to eternal hell, they fell into despair and sinned all the more, believing that they were doomed anyway. All they could see was the implacable figure of Christ on his Judgment Seat, with a handful of souls being lifted by angels up to heaven, but with most of the poor people in that awful scene being dragged down into the flames of hell by loathsome demons. Many of them could not even enter a Catholic Church without feeling their insides torn apart by the fear that the priest—if he obtained any knowledge of what they had done—would drive them out with scolding, revulsion, and total condemnation.

A God who refused to forgive anybody was certainly not part of any good Catholic teaching. Quite the contrary, and any good priest would respond to a returning alcoholic by acting as the agent of God's forgiveness and healing love. But even the kindest and gentlest Catholic priest in the world was not going to be able to get near these frightened alcoholics to give them that message.

The liberal Protestants of the early twentieth century had worked out some extremely effective ways of reaching out to people who were frightened to death of God—which in reality meant every human soul in this fallen world, because God is the scariest thing in the universe—and persuading them to take a chance on trusting God just enough to start learning, bit by bit, that God's only desire was to heal them, and wipe away their tears, and slowly teach them how to feel joy and smile once again. They had worked these techniques out in the process of dealing with their own sometimes terrifying childhood fears, which had been produced by the hell-fire-and-damnation sermons of the nineteenth century frontier revivalists and tent meeting preachers. So liberal Protestant laypeople in AA were able on many occasions to act as surrogates for the good Catholic priest, reaching out with hands of love to fearful Catholic alcoholics, and encouraging them to return to the Church and her priests and sacraments, and the great spiritual teachings of the holy saints.

And a paralyzing fear of God was certainly not a Catholic problem alone. Unfortunately, the United States and Canada were (and still are) filled with too many churches which taught a condemning God to their laypeople, and a theology preoccupied with questions of “who gets punished?” and “how can I avoid being punished?”

And even more importantly, it must be noted once again that, no matter how hard we work to try to present comforting images such as depictions of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, or Jesus holding the little children in his arms, or St. Thérèse of Lisieux (the Little Flower) reaching out to us in love, the real God is still an inherently frightening reality, and this truth applies to all religions across the board. Rudolf Otto, one of the major Protestant liberal theologians of the early twentieth century, explained this especially clearly in his formative book, *The Idea of the Holy*. God is the Wholly Other, the divine abyss lying behind the universe's surface illusion of understandability. God looms before us as the *Mysterium Tremendum*, the mystery beyond all ordinary knowing, which fills our hearts with awe, dread, and trembling.⁶⁴ But the Protestant liberal tradition, in works like *The Upper Room* and *Twenty-Four Hours a Day*, knew how to calm the frightened

soul, and bring people into the sacred presence, where the divine grace could begin to fully exercise its miraculous healing powers.

The Catholic contribution to AA

The Catholics had what may have been an even more important contribution to make to AA, and to all the Protestants in that program. In the early days of the AA program, we read about alcoholics going through all of the steps (as they were understood then) in three or four hours. In the Big Book itself (as we see on page 65) the fourth step inventory was almost naively simple. The man who wrote the inventory was having an affair on his wife, and padding his expense account at work. He was resentful because another man at work, Mr. Brown, was not only angling for his job, but had also told his wife about the other woman.

When Roman Catholics began coming into the program in large numbers in 1939-40, many of them had already received some training in a more profound kind of soul-searching, the sort taught by the great Catholic spiritual teachers like St. Ignatius Loyola and St. Francis de Sales. They combined forces with that branch of early Alcoholics Anonymous which stressed the psychological side of AA, to turn the working of the fourth through seventh steps into a impressively deep *psychotherapeia* (divine process for the healing of the soul).

This strengthened the Alcoholics Anonymous program in extraordinary fashion. A look at early membership figures will make this clear. In the first four years (with almost no Catholic membership) AA membership grew 20 times larger. But during the next ten years (after the Catholics came in) membership grew over 750 times larger.⁶⁵

Time Span — Total Members

1935 — 5 members

1935-1939 — 100 members

1939-1949 — 75,625 members

1949-1959 — 151,606 members

1959-1969 — 297,077 members

Now some of this more rapid growth was probably due to the publication of the Big Book. But surely no one would try to argue that the flood of Catholics who began coming into AA in 1939-40, or the new deliberately nonsectarian ground rules, had a negative

effect on AA membership growth. And probably because of the quiet, unconscious incorporation into AA practice during these years of the traditional Catholic techniques of prayer, meditation, and moral inventory used for fostering lifelong spiritual growth, the average number of years sobriety among AA members has been steadily rising. We had a figure of 4 years average sobriety in 1977, for example, which we can see had more than doubled by 2007 to 8.1 years.

The history of Roman Catholics in early AA, and the story of the great AA teachers and leaders whom the Catholic Church contributed to the movement—Sister Ignatia, Fr. Ed Dowling, Fr. Ralph Pfau, Fr. John C. Ford, Fr. Joseph Martin, Dr. Austin Ripley, and Dr. Ernest Kurtz, to name some of the most famous—is an impressive tale of God’s grace at work in the world, and the all-conquering power of real love, forgiveness, tolerance, and cooperation. The success of AA teaches the lesson that human beings do not need to burn one another at the stake anymore, or fly airliners into skyscrapers in insane acts of murder and martyrdom, or butcher one another in hideous religious wars. We are seeing the development, before our very eyes, of a vision of the world that works. How could the good God, and the holy fathers and mothers of the church, not be delighted by the countless flowers of grace which AA has sprinkled all about the earth?

NOTES

¹ See Mary C. Darrah, *Sister Ignatia: Angel of Alcoholics Anonymous* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1992) 85-87, and particularly Sister Ignatia's words contained in a transcription of Bill Wilson interviewing her, from the Alcoholics Anonymous Archives in New York, as cited and quoted on Darrah page 86.

² 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.

³ 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, 2006). Or for a look at a highly philosophical Oxford Group work, see Glenn F. Chesnut, "Foreword," pages 2-29, to Philip Leon, *The Philosophy of Courage or The Oxford Group Way*, original text published 1939 by Oxford University Press, this electronic edition distributed by stepstudy.org, 2008, available online at <http://stepstudy.files.wordpress.com/2008/09/philosophyofcourage.pdf>

⁴ See the beautiful little classic, for example, by a Russian Orthodox priest living in exile in Paris, who worked out how to bridge the gap between Catholic and Orthodox theology, and explain each side's position and experiences to the other: Vladimir Lossky, *The Vision of God*, trans. A. Moorhouse (London: Faith Press, 1963).

⁵ *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1957) 63.

⁶ For more details here (and for other important dates during this general period of AA history, see Arthur S. (Arlington, Texas), *A Narrative Timeline of AA History* (April 2004), which is the chief reference work on AA dates, available online at http://www.silkworth.net/timelines/timelines_public/timelines_public.html

⁷ A. C. Dixon and (later) Reuben Archer Torrey, ed., *The Fundamentals: A Testimony To The Truth*, 12 vols. (Chicago: Testimony Publishing Co., 1910-1915). Available on the internet on the New York Public Library Internet Archive at <http://www.archive.org/details/fundamentalstest17chic> ; many of the individual essays are also available at <http://www.xmission.com/~fidelis/volume1/volume1.php> .

⁸ Harry Emerson Fosdick, "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" sermon preached on May 21, 1922 at First Presbyterian Church on West Twelfth Street in New York City; printed in *Christian Work* 102 (June 10, 1922): 716-722; abridged copy available online at <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5070/> ; full text at <http://baptiststudiesonline.com/wp-content/uploads/2007/01/shall-the-fundamentalists-win.pdf> .

⁹ Fosdick, “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?”

¹⁰ Fosdick, “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?”

¹¹ Fosdick, “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?”

¹² For a good introduction to the Enlightenment era, see Carl L. Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1932).

¹³ Fosdick, “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?”

¹⁴ Fosdick, “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?”

¹⁵ Harry Emerson Fosdick, review of *Alcoholics Anonymous*, orig. printed in *The Religious Digest* and two other religious journals; now available online at <http://silkworth.net/bbreviews/01003.html> .

¹⁶ Adolf von Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte* (3rd ed. in three volumes, 1894–1898; English translation in seven volumes, 1894–1899). For a comparison between Harnack’s approach to writing the history of Catholic theology, and that of contemporary Roman Catholic church historians (both liberal and conservative), see Glenn F. Chesnut, “A Century of Patristic Studies 1888–1988,” in Henry Warner Bowden (ed.), *A Century of Church History* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), pp. 36–73.

¹⁷ Lasting from the fourth to the seventh centuries A.D., see Glenn F. Chesnut, *Images of Christ: An Introduction to Christology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row/Seabury, 1984).

¹⁸ Adolf von Harnack, *Das Wesen des Christentums* (the original German appeared 1900; the English translation, *What is Christianity?*, appeared in 1901).

¹⁹ *Alcoholics Anonymous* (4th ed.), Appendix II “Spiritual Experience” p. 569; also p. 60.

²⁰ The words to “Jesus Loves Me” were written by a woman named Anna Bartlett Warner, who lived opposite the grounds of the United States Military Academy, where her uncle was chaplain. They first appeared in print in 1860; the tune was written by William Batchelder Bradbury in 1862. The words to “Jesus Loves the Little Children” were written by a preacher named Clare Herbert Woolston (1856–1927), a man who lived in Chicago, Illinois; they are normally sung to the 1864 Civil War tune “Tramp! Tramp! Tramp!” by George Fredrick Root.

²¹ So for example, Aquinas distinguished between mortal sins and venial sins by defining a mortal sin as “a conscious violation of a known law of God.” John Wesley, the Oxford University professor who founded the Methodist movement, made what was essentially the same distinction between what he called “sin improperly so called” and “sin properly so called,” where the latter was (in his words) a “conscious violation of a known law of God.”

²² Bill Wilson in *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1957) 168.

²³ Nancy Olson (moderator of the AAHistoryLovers) et al., *Biographies of the Authors of the Stories in the Big Book*, available online at http://www.a-1associates.com/westbalto/HISTORY_PAGE/Authors.htm .

²⁴ Bill Wilson in *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1957) 168-169; see also Ernest Kurtz, *Not-God: A History of Alcoholics*, expanded edition (Center City, Minnesota: Hazelden, 1991; orig. pub. 1979), p. 75. See also W. Robert Aufill, “The Catholic Contribution to the 12-Step Movement,” on the *Catholic Answers* website, dated 1996, available online at <http://www.catholic.com/thisrock/1996/9610fea1sb.asp> .

²⁵ See AAHistoryLovers Message No. 533, available online at <http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/AAHistoryLovers/message/5331>

²⁶ 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, 2006) and Glenn F. Chesnut, “Foreword,” pages 2-29 of the new online edition (September 27, 2008) of Oxford Group author Philip Leon’s *The Philosophy of Courage* at <http://stepstudy.files.wordpress.com/2008/09/philosophyofcourage.pdf> (Leon's book was originally published in 1939 by Oxford University Press).

²⁷ S.v. “Frank N. D. Buchman,” Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank_N._D._Buchman (July 2011).

²⁸ Chesnut, *Changed by Grace*.

²⁹ For more details here (and for other important dates during this general period of AA history, see Arthur S. (Arlington, Texas), *A Narrative Timeline of AA History* (April 2004), which is the chief reference work on AA dates, available online at http://www.silkworth.net/timelines/timelines_public/timelines_public.html

³⁰ Chesnut, *Changed by Grace 3; Dr. Bob and the Good Oldimers* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1980), 53-57.

³¹ *Dr. Bob and the Good Oldimers* 60-67.

³² Mitchell K., *How It Worked: The Story of Clarence H. Snyder and the Early Days of Alcoholics Anonymous in Cleveland, Ohio* (Washingtonville, New York: AA Big Book Study Group, 1997) 135-136. See also Mary C. Darrah, *Sister Ignatia: Angel of Alcoholics Anonymous* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1991) 31 and also Clarence H. Snyder’s biography, “The Home Brewmeister,” in Nancy Olson et al., *Biographies of the Authors of the Stories in the Big*

Book, available online at http://www.a-1associates.com/westbalto/HISTORY_PAGE/Authors.htm .

³³ Mitchell K. 136.

³⁴ Mitchell K. 136-137.

³⁵ Albert (Abby) Golrick’s biography, “He Thought He Could Drink like a Gentleman,” in Nancy Olson et al., *Biographies of the Authors of the Stories in the Big Book*, available online at http://www.a-1associates.com/westbalto/HISTORY_PAGE/Authors.htm .

³⁶ Mitchell K. 139.

³⁷ Grace was the one pushing Clarence in the fundamentalist direction. After their marriage, the two of them lived in Casselberry, Florida, just north of Orlando, and attended the Pentecostal services at the Assembly of God Church in nearby Winter Park, Florida. See Mitchell K. 215 and the article on “Clarence Snyder Home Brewmaster” at http://www.aabibliography.com/clarence_snyder_alcoholics.htm

³⁸ Mitchell K. 140.

³⁹ Mitchell K. 142.

⁴⁰ Mitchell K. 142.

⁴¹ Mitchell K. 142.

⁴² Arthur S., *Narrative Timeline*
http://www.silkworth.net/timelines/timelines_public/timelines_public.html

⁴³ Mary C. Darrah, *Sister Ignatia: Angel of Alcoholics Anonymous* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1992) 85-87. That is, beginning in January 1940, alcoholics were not only secretly admitted to St. Thomas Hospital, but were officially noted on the hospital’s books as having been admitted for alcoholism. On pp. 82-83, Darrah explains that she and Dr. Bob actually started admitting the first few alcoholic patients to St. Thomas Hospital during the late summer of 1939, but camouflaged this by writing some diagnosis other than alcoholism on the admittance form. The first patient was surreptitiously admitted in this fashion on August 16, 1939, when Dr. Bob told Sister Ignatia about his own alcoholism, and then begged her to get a man named Walter B. into a hospital room somehow.

⁴⁴ St. Thomas Hospital was “nonsectarian,” tape-recorded oral history of Sister Ignatia, C.S.A., 1954, her words as contained in a transcription of Bill Wilson interviewing her, from the Alcoholics Anonymous Archives in New York; as cited and quoted in Darrah, *Sister Ignatia* 86.

⁴⁵ The Oxford Group was a “sect,” letter from Sister Ignatia to Bill Wilson, 3 April 1957, Alcoholics Anonymous Archives in New York, and Mount Augustine Archives in Richfield, Ohio; as quoted in Darrah, *Sister Ignatia* 83.

⁴⁶ For the full text of one typical version of the early Preamble see AAHistoryLovers Message no. 3760 at <http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/AAHistoryLovers/message/3760> or http://silkworth.net/aahistory/1940_aa_preamble.html

⁴⁷ See Glenn F. Chesnut, “Doherty Sheerin and the Founding of A.A. in Indianapolis: October 28, 1940,” available online at <http://hindsfoot.org/nIndy1.html> and Ralph Pfau and Al Hirshberg, *Prodigal Shepherd* (Indianapolis, Indiana: SMT Guild, 1958).

⁴⁸ 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.

⁴⁹ The pamphlet is available online at <http://hindsfoot.org/detr0.html> , for the quote see Discussion No. 2 “The Spiritual Phase,” the section on the fifth step, at <http://hindsfoot.org/Detr2.html> .

⁵⁰ The Akron manual: *A Manual for Alcoholics Anonymous*, available online at <http://hindsfoot.org/AkrMan1.html> and <http://hindsfoot.org/AkrMan2.html> . The latest datable reference in the pamphlet is to E. Stanley Jones' book *Abundant Living*, which first came out in 1942, so it could not have been written prior to that date. But on the other side, the kind of hospitalization described for newcomers, and the mention of there only being a dozen or so AA meetings in Akron, indicate that it could not have been written many years after that at the latest.

⁵¹ Richmond Walker, *Twenty-Four Hours a Day*, orig. pub. anonymously in 1948 in Florida by the AA group in Daytona Beach, with the only ascription being the short phrase "compiled by a Member of the Group at Daytona Beach, Fla." The present rev. ed. is published at Center City, Minnesota: Hazelden, 1975. See also Glenn F. Chesnut, “Richmond Walker and the Twenty-Four Hour Book,” talk given at the 8th Annual National A.A. Archives Workshop, Fort Lauderdale, Florida, Sept. 27, 2003, available online at <http://hindsfoot.org/rwfla1.html> , <http://hindsfoot.org/RWfla2.html> , and <http://hindsfoot.org/RWfla3.html> . See also Glenn F. Chesnut, “Practicing the Presence of God: Richmond Walker's Twenty-Four Hour book—the path to soul-balance and inner calm,” taken from Glenn F. Chesnut, *The Higher Power of the Twelve-Step Program: For Believers & Non-believers*, Hindsfoot Foundation Series on Spirituality and Theology (San Jose: iUniverse, 2001), the first half of Chapter Five, “Two Classical Authors of A.A. Spirituality,” available online at <http://hindsfoot.org/hp5rw.html> .

⁵² At the very end of the Akron manual: *A Manual for Alcoholics Anonymous*.

⁵³ The representative of the early psychological wing of AA who left the longest and most detailed account of their beliefs was Sgt. Bill Swegan, see William E. Swegan with Glenn F. Chesnut, Ph.D., *The Psychology of Alcoholism*, Hindsfoot Foundation Series on Alcoholics Anonymous History (Bloomington, Indiana: iUniverse, 2011; orig. pub. 2003 as *On the Military Firing Line in the Alcoholism Treatment Program*, by Sgt. Bill S. with Glenn F. Chesnut). On the importance of combining psychology and spirituality in effective alcoholism treatment, see also Richard M. Dubiel, *The Road to Fellowship: The Role of the Emmanuel Movement and the Jacoby Club in the Development of Alcoholics Anonymous*, ed. by Glenn F. Chesnut, Hindsfoot Foundation Series on the History of Alcoholism Treatment (New York: iUniverse, 2004).

⁵⁴ 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). James Allen, *As a Man Thinketh* (1902) can be found in Mel B., *Three Recovery Classics: As a Man Thinketh (by James Allen), The Greatest Thing in the World (by Henry Drummond), An Instrument of Peace (the St. Francis Prayer)*, Hindsfoot Foundation Series on Spirituality and Theology (New York: iUniverse, 2004).

⁵⁵ Emmet Fox, *Power Through Constructive Thinking* (New York: Harper Collins, 1932-1940) 3.

⁵⁶ Fox, *Power Through Constructive Thinking* 21, also Fox, *The Sermon on the Mount and The Lord's Prayer*, in his commentary on the fourth clause in the Lord's Prayer ("Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, in earth as in heaven"), pp. 158-159. Glenn F. Chesnut, *God and Spirituality: Philosophical Essays*, Hindsfoot Foundation Series on Spirituality and Theology (New York: iUniverse, 2010), 232-233.

⁵⁷ Fox, *Sermon on the Mount* 4.

⁵⁸ Fox, *Power Through Constructive Thinking* 111.

⁵⁹ Fox, *Power Through Constructive Thinking*, the chapters on "Life after Death" and "Reincarnation."

⁶⁰ See AAHistoryLovers message no. 1930 at <http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/AAHistoryLovers/message/1930> .

⁶¹ Glenn F. Chesnut, "Ralph Pfau (Father John Doe) and the Golden Books," talk given on September 29, 2001 at the 6th National A.A. Archives Workshop in Clarksville, Indiana (across the river from Louisville, Kentucky). Available online at <http://hindsfoot.org/pflou1.html>

⁶² Glenn F. Chesnut, *Changed by Grace* 42.

⁶³ The Oxford Group began referring to itself as Moral Re-Armament (MRA) in 1938. Paul Campbell and Peter Howard, *Remaking Men* (New York: Arrowhead Books, 1954) 60-62. As quoted in the Orange Papers at <http://www.orange-papers.org/orange-root630.html> .

⁶⁴ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, 2nd ed., trans. John W. Harvey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950; 1st English trans. 1923). Glenn F. Chesnut, *God and Spirituality: Philosophical Essays*, Hindsfoot Foundation Series on Spirituality and Theology (New York: iUniverse, 2010), Chapter 5, “The Mysterium Tremendum.”

⁶⁵ Arthur S. (Arlington, Texas), Tom E. (Wappingers Falls, New York), and Glenn C. (South Bend, Indiana), *Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) Recovery Outcome Rates: Contemporary Myth and Misinterpretation* (October 11, 2008), page 30. Available online at <http://hindsfoot.org/recout01.pdf>