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The Four Absolutes—More Revealed

Comments by Dr. Bob's Wife Anne in Her Journal

Dick B. (Copyright, 2002)

A Word or Two about Anne's Discussion of the Absolutes

We've previously covered the origin of the Four Absolutes in Dr. Robert E. Speer's *The Principles of Jesus* and the expansion of them in Professor Henry B. Wright's *The Will of God and a Man's Lifework*. And we will shortly produce another article with some of the more contemporary comments about the Absolutes (honesty, purity, unselfishness, and love) by Oxford Group writers and Dr. Bob while A.A. was shaping its program between 1935 and 1938. But there's much to be learned from the comments and teachings that Dr. Bob's wife Anne Ripley Smith shared from the journal she wrote between 1933 and 1939. Her comments are particularly important because Anne shared them with AAs and their families during A.A.'s developmental years; and they were frequently topics for discussion in the morning quiet times held by Anne Smith at the birthplace of A.A. during the pioneer years (See Dick B., *Anne Smith's Journal 1933-1939: A.A.'s Principles of Success*, 3rd ed. Kihei, HI: Paradise Research Publications, Inc., 1998)– <http://www.dickb.com/annesm.shtml>

John R. (now deceased) was one of the longest surviving of the A.A. pioneers. He made this statement about how Anne Smith's Journal was used at the beginning of A. A.:

Before one of these meetings [the morning quiet times at Dr. Bob's home], Anne used to pull out a little book [her spiritual Journal] and quote from it. We would discuss it. Then we would see what Anne would suggest from it for our discussion.

Though many in and out of A.A. have since written their own statements about, and interpretations of, the Four Absolutes, the most accurate source of how they were used and defined in early A.A. is unquestionably the material in Anne Smith's Journal. And this accuracy is needed because the Absolutes are frequently the subject of discussion and writing in various A.A. groups and conferences today.

Bill and Lois Wilson often spoke of Anne Smith's impact on A.A.; and the following are two of Bill's pertinent comments about Anne's teachings:

[Bill Wilson:] Bob and Anne and Henrietta [Seiberling] have been working so hard with those men and with really wonderful success. . . . Anne and Bob and Henrietta have done a great job (Letter from Bill Wilson to his wife Lois, from Akron, in the earliest days. See *DR. BOB and The Good Oldtimers*, p. 108).

[Bill Wilson:] . . . Clevelanders had gone to Dr. Bob's home, sitting with him and Anne

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over cups of coffee at their kitchen table. Eagerly they had absorbed knowledge of their problem and its solution and had breathed deeply of the remarkable spiritual atmosphere of the place (See *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, p. 19).

Anne Smith, our Moral Inventory, and the Four Absolutes

Anne—following the example of many in the Oxford Group—often referred to the Four Absolutes as the Four Standards, the Standards, the Moral Standards, and the Moral Test. Early in her Journal, she wrote:

It is absolutely necessary to face people with the moral test. Fundamentally, sin is independence toward God, living without God. Seeing one's self as God sees one, brings hatred out of sin (Dick B., *Anne Smith's Journal*, *supra*, p. 30).

Speaking about Jesus's sermon on the mount (Matthew 7:1-5), Anne wrote:

Who checks another checks himself. If I have an urge to check because of personal feelings, I am not seeing in light of Christ's love. Criticism born of my own projection. Something wrong in me. Unless I can crystalize the criticism, I had better look for the mote in my eye (*Anne Smith's Journal*, pp. 30-31).

Anne advocated testing or checking one's own conduct against the four *moral* standards of Jesus Christ. She said (*Anne Smith's Journal*, pp. 32-33):

Test your thoughts. It is possible to receive suggestions from your subconscious mind. Check your thoughts by the four standards of Christ.

Make the moral test. 4 Standards.

Basis of an Interview. Is a challenge on the four standards.

What thoughts do I expect? Am I ready to write them down and willing? It is not making my mind a blank but trusting God to use my mind, my thought life and my imagination. First of all come uncomfortable thoughts of wrong relationships with family, friends and people I work with. Resentments to be faced and set right. Restitution to be made, bills, letters, untidy desks, or house to be send straight.

Behind every general need is a particular moral need, so that a general surrender will focus into one point.

Surrender on one's moral issue. Destroy the thing that [not able to decipher] nearest. Then the next step becomes plain.

Anne was no less specific and clear that she was referring to the Four Absolutes in the foregoing discussion of the moral standards. She declared (*Anne Smith's Journal*, p. 33):

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Why I [not able to decipher the next words] had been absolutely honest, but not living.

[Referring to Jesus's commandment of love:] Follow Christ's absolute commandment.

Absolute honesty demands that we no longer wear a mask.

Sharing It is being honest even after it hurts.

Every time we register aloud the new attitude and change of heart with absolute honesty another bridge is burned behind us and another stake is driven in to anchor and mark our progress.

Check your life constantly by the four absolutes.

Dr. Bob shared his wife Anne's belief in the importance of the four absolutes. He called them "yardsticks" (See references in *Anne Smith's Journal*, pp. 33-34). Bill Wilson, however, had no such enthusiasm. Bill shifted the gears from listing, checking, and examining for honesty, purity, unselfishness, and love. He replaced that inventory with one that searched for resentment, self-seeking, dishonesty, and fear. Anne, however, was no less relentless in her journal about the importance of finding and purging the "negative sins" to which Bill referred. She specifically called for rejecting and correcting resentments, self-centeredness, dishonesty, and fears (*Anne Smith's Journal*, pp. 35-36). And, as can be seen from the foregoing quotes, Anne not only addressed rigorous honesty, purity, unselfishness, and love in the inventory process, but also in the "sharing" process [precursor of the Fifth Step]. See *Anne Smith's Journal*, pp. 36-41. Anne used sharing language that found its way directly into A.A.'s Fifth Step: "I must share to be honest with God, myself & others" (*Anne Smith's Journal*, p. 39). Also, Anne wrote: "Being honest to God, self and other people. . . . It is being honest even after it hurts. It is giving your real self to another person" (*Anne Smith's Journal*, p. 77).

Anne Never Overlooked the Creator, His Son, or the Bible

As established in our first article, the four absolute moral standards came directly from the Bible, according to the construction given them by Dr. Speer. One should therefore never overlook God or Jesus Christ or the Bible in studying and interpreting the Four Standards. And why? Because, in the view of the evangelists and scholars of the 1800's who espoused them, the later Oxford Group writers who adopted them, and the early A.A. pioneers who used them, these were God's standards. They represented to "cardinal teachings of Jesus Christ" as one A.A. pioneer put it. They came directly from the specific Bible verses we mentioned in Speer's *The Principles of Jesus*.

If you get these facts under your belt, you will see what Dr. Bob, Anne, and their Oxford Group friends were talking about when it came to the issue of a need for "perfection" in using the Four Absolutes as moral standards. They spoke only of "yardsticks" and "goals" and "targets." But Wilson ultimately rejected the absolutes, claiming they required drunks to try to get too good by

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Thursday (See *Anne Smith's Journal*, p. 122). But such a statement reflected Wilson's lack of understanding of the Bible, the meaning of "Be ye therefore perfect," and the interpretation given this concept by the Oxford Group people and by A.A.'s other founders.

For example, concerning the rigorous demands of the "beatitudes" in Jesus's sermon on the mount (Matthew 5:3-11), Anne had carefully stated that they stood for Christ-like virtues to be *cultivated* (*Anne Smith's Journal*, p. 135).

And here's what Anne had to say about that cultivation and the sources of information to be applied (*Anne Smith's Journal*, pp. 82, 78, 72):

Of course the Bible ought to be the main Source Book of all.

Start the person on a new life with simple, concrete and definite suggestions, regarding Bible study, prayer, overcoming temptation and service for others

Let all your reading be guided. What does God want me to read?

Claim from God humility, patience, courage, faith and love.

I must let Christ run my life—always self before.

Don't try, but trust. Any kind of goodness that you try to achieve with effort will be self-righteousness which has self in the center. That is why it is repellent. "Not having mine own righteousness" is Paul's phrase [See Philippians 3:9]. The only effort we need to put forth is that of daily surrender and daily contact with Christ. We find release not by our own efforts but by what Christ does for us and in us when we open every area of our lives to him.

The quality of life is an adventure not an arrival. We surrender to God from more and more and from more to maximum. As E. Stanley Jones says, "Christianity is an obtainment not an attainment and the more we obtain, the more we see there is to obtain." Maturity comes from fuller self renunciation and surrender and often it takes new experience to bring us farther along the way. The goal is "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in Heaven is Perfect [Compare Matthew 5:48 in the sermon on the mount].

The Place to Find the Facts is in Our Pioneer History

To my knowledge, regrettably A.A. itself has never published the contents, or even excerpts from, *Anne Smith's Journal*. I was provided with a copy for study, quotation, and publication by A.A.'s Trustees Archives Committee and its archivist Frank Mauser, at the written request of Dr. Bob's daughter Sue Smith Windows. And that *Journal*, and my book about it, are (to me) the greatest single product of my 12 years of research into the spiritual roots of A.A.

If you know the Big Book, the Steps, our Fellowship, our literature, the Oxford Group, and
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certainly the Bible, you'll begin to see exactly and specifically where—as a practical matter—our spiritual principles came from. matter. Take a look at Anne's Journal. You'll see Big Book phrases, Step language, A.A. Biblical ideas, Oxford Group expressions, and our slogans (even "one day at a time"). In fact, as one historian wrote in substance: "the A.A. language in Anne's Journal leaps at you." And why not! Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob sat with Anne daily in the great summer of 1935. Anne wrote down the materials from 1933 to 1939 when Bill published his Big Book. Anne had them with AAs and their families.

What a place to find the facts. About our history. And about the Four Absolutes (Check out Dick B., *Anne Smith's Journal 1933-1939*, 3rd ed. HI: Paradise Research Publications, Inc., 1998).

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