

## **Alcoholics Anonymous, Its Christian Endeavor Root, and A.A. Co-founder Dr. Bob**

**By Dick B.**

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### **A New Historical Research Challenge**

Whenever I find some solid evidence about A.A. history that no historian has mentioned, I become interested and challenged. Further, whenever I find that neither Bill W. nor the current A.A. publishing group has made mention of the item, I become even more interested and challenged. Finally, when I see that the evidence has a direct bearing on the early A.A. program in Akron, as reported to Rockefeller by Frank Amos – our trustee-to-be – the challenge becomes a priority. And if no one mentions a challenge that smacks of religion, church, Christianity, Bible, or alcoholism cure, I know that I'm on to an investigative quest that will be welcomed by the many who just plain want to know. That's the case here.

The Christian Endeavor root of A.A. is such a challenge. No AA historian other than Richard K. and I seems to have mentioned it at all. Nor did Bill Wilson or his latter-day, well-paid publishing crew. More and more forcefully, the “headquarters” crowd began pushing the idea “A.A. is not a religious society, since it requires no definite religious belief as a condition of membership” (See *44 Questions*. New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 1952, p. 19). This revisionist theme has nonetheless been rejected by the many courts that have ruled against the faulty reasoning that a fellowship dedicated to finding God and promulgating steps to a relationship with God is not religious in purpose and character.

Yet A.A.'s reticent co-founder Dr. Bob certainly pointed to A.A.'s Christian Endeavor root. First, in an almost negative context, Dr. Bob said in his personal story in the A.A. Big Book:

“From childhood through high school I was more or less forced to go to church, Sunday School and evening service, Monday night Christian Endeavor and sometimes to Wednesday evening prayer meeting”

(*Alcoholics Anonymous*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., p. 173)

The foregoing was supplemented with Dr. Bob's further statement that he resolved thereafter “never to darken the doors of a church” except where circumstances made it seem unwise to do otherwise. However, more than a decade after A.A.'s founding, Dr. Bob commented as to Bill and himself (*The Co-Founders of Alcoholics Anonymous: Biographical Sketches Their Last Major Talks*. NY: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 1972, 1975, pp. 11-14):

“We had both been associated with the Oxford Group, Bill in New York, for five months, and I in Akron, for two and a half years. Bill had acquired their idea of service. I had not, but I had done an immense amount of reading they had recommended. I had refreshed my memory of the Good Book, and I had had excellent training in that as a youngster. . . .

“I'm somewhat allergic to work, but I felt that I should continue to increase my familiarity with the Good Book and also should read a good deal of standard literature, possibly of a scientific

nature. So I did cultivate the habit of reading. I think I'm not exaggerating when I say I have probably averaged an hour a day for the last 15 years. . . .

“At that point, our stories didn't amount to anything to speak of. When we started in on Bill D., we had no Twelve Steps, either; we had no Traditions. But we were convinced that the answer to our problems was in the Good Book. . . .

“It wasn't until 1938 that the teachings and efforts and studies that had been going on were crystallized in the form of the Twelve Steps. I didn't write the Twelve Steps. I had nothing to do with the writing of them. . . . We already had the basic ideas, though not in terse and tangible form. We got them, as I said, as a result of our study of the Good Book.”

I found, after much further research, that Dr. Bob's brief comment about his church membership and attendance does not square with the facts—facts still under further extensive investigation by my colleague Richard K. Nor were Dr. Bob's comments considered in full or in context with Dr. Bob's other statements and views about the Bible, his training in prayer and Bible study as a youngster, and the ideas which he later developed as he worked with over 5,000 alcoholics subsequent to A.A.'s 1935 founding. In fact, the scanty presence and wholesale omission of the details of Dr. Bob's religious training suggest intent to support those who often cry in A.A. meetings I've attended that the Bible didn't work and the Oxford Group didn't work because Dr. Bob was drinking while studying both..

I will only summarize here my previously published, detailed evidence about Dr. Bob's youth and his statements about the Bible, his training in the Bible and Bible study, his prayer life, his quiet times, and his church life. In outline form, here are the points:

**Dr. Bob's stated that he had attended three or four church services and meetings each week at the North Congregational Church in St. Johnsbury, Vermont. He said that when he resumed his religious studies, he had refreshed his memory of the Bible and had received excellent training as a youngster in that in church and through Christian Endeavor. His son told me his father had read the Bible completely through three times in his “refreshment” period. His daughter told me her father read the Bible every day. Dr. Bob told his son he had read for an hour every night, drunk or sober, for many years. Dr. Bob spoke of the immense amount of literature he read. Scads and scads of books were found in his home, under his bed, and in the homes of his kids after the books had allegedly have been thrown or given away. And we now know the broad scope of the Biblical, Christian devotional, and other Christian literature he read. You can know it just by looking at the many remnant books we have found mentioned by family and friends or found in possession of his children. There is no doubt that, from early AA's beginnings, Dr. Bob set aside a quiet time three times each day for Bible study, prayer, and reflection. He read and circulated a large number of Christian books on the Bible, Jesus Christ, prayer, quiet time, the sermon on the mount, the Book of James, and 1 Corinthians 13. We also have Dr. Bob's own frequent statement as to the “absolutely essential” study by AAs of the Sermon, James, and Corinthians. Also, Bob's statement that AAs started the day with James, Corinthians, or the Sermon. We also have examined with care Dr. Bob's specific interest in *The Runner's Bible* where James is much discussed, his interest in at least four**

**well-known commentaries on the Sermon on the Mount, and his enthusiastic circulation of Henry Drummond's *The Greatest Thing in the World* (an essay on 1 Corinthians 13).**

I have a news article from *The Tidings* (A Roman Catholic paper) printed some eight years after A.A.'s founding. The article reported on the speeches by Dr. Bob and Bill on the same platform in Los Angeles before 4500 at the Shrine Auditorium. There, and once again, Dr. Bob explicitly urged that AAs should cultivate the habit of prayer and of reading the Bible.

Despite incomplete and erroneous reporting, we now know that Dr. Bob not only attended Protestant Christian churches frequently—first as a youngster and later in Akron at St. Luke, Westside Presbyterian Church, and finally St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Akron.

I particularly want to mention here again the two illuminating remarks Dr. Bob made about clergy and churches. His son quoted Dr. Bob's statements to me personally. Bob's son said: (1) Dr. Bob's real beef was with "sky pilots"—a not uncommon, bit of sarcastic nomenclature pointed at some preachers of that day. (2) Dr. Bob was far more interested in the "message" than the "messenger"—an interesting pointer toward Dr. Bob's avowed preference for Bible study, prayer, seeking God's guidance, reading Christian literature, and using devotionals. And I believe these remarks help explain his supposed aversion to church and underscore his fervent involvement in Bible study, prayer, guidance, Christian literature, and using devotionals like *The Upper Room*, *Daily Strength for Daily Needs*, and *My Utmost for His Highest*. It may also explain his infrequent mention of his personal church life—despite the fact that he and Anne were charter members of the Presbyterian Church during A.A.'s founding years in Akron and until well after the Big Book was published in 1939. Moreover, both his kids told me personally and reported in their *Children of the Healer* that their dad took his kids to Sunday school regularly. Of course, Dr. Bob specifically recommended that early AAs attend a church of their own choice—something that simply was no part of Bill Wilson's life..

The challenge? Did Dr. Bob's younger days in church, his prayer meetings, and Christian Endeavor impact on his later beliefs, actions, A.A. ideas, and the "fixing" of drunks in Akron AA? Another challenge: What was the background of Christian Endeavor itself; and what ideas of that society bear resemblance to those of pioneer AA? Still another challenge: What, in context, was Dr. Bob's real view of church, of clergy, of prayer, of prayer meetings, of the Christian Endeavor program, and of the Bible itself?

Some of the answers will be covered in our further, ongoing months of research and writing.

### **Preliminary Glimpses at Christian Endeavor**

#### **From its Founding Through the days of Dr. Bob's Participation**

##### **The Genesis of the Christian Endeavor Society**

The first society was organized on February 2, 1881. (See Francis E. Clark. *Christian Endeavor in all Lands*. Boston, MA: The United Society of Christian Endeavor, 1886, pp. 35, 41, 621).

Rev. Francis E. Clark, pastor of Williston Church in Portland, Maine, formed the society in the parlor of his home at 62 Neal Street—the parsonage of Williston Church. Members consisted of

boys and girls in the “Mizpah Circle”—a missionary circle for young people which was led by the pastor’s wife. During the February Mizpah meeting, Clark framed a constitution for the society and called it “Williston Young People’s Society of Christian Endeavor.” He wrote that the “greatest stress was on the *religious* features;” the society was to be “an out-and-out Christian society;” and the activities “were to centre around the weekly young people’s prayer meeting.”

W. H. Pennell, the teacher of the Young Men’s Bible Class, carefully explained the society and its constitution and led all the young people present in signing the new constitution. Several clauses of the constitution are historically instructive and bear repeating here (For the further details on the foregoing and following points and the constitution itself, see Francis E. Clark. *Memories of Many Men in Many Lands: An Autobiography*. Boston, MA: United Society of Christian Endeavor, 1922, pp. 77-87):

“Object. Its object shall be to promote an earnest Christian life among its members, to increase their mutual acquaintance, and to make them more useful in the service of God. . . .

“Officers. The officers of this society shall be a President, Vice President and Secretary. There shall also be a Prayer meeting Committee of five a Social Committee of five, and a Lookout Committee of Five.

“Duties of Officers. . . . The Prayer meeting Committee shall have in charge the Friday evening prayer-meeting;

“The Prayer-meeting. It is expected that all the members of the society will be present at every meeting unless detained by some absolute necessity and that each one will take some part however slight in every meeting. The meetings will be held just one hour and at the close some time may be taken for introductions and social intercourse if desired. Once each month an Experience meeting shall. . . [the remaining portions of this sentence were not shown in autobiography].”

About Christian Endeavor Founder Francis E. Clark

Francis Edward Clark was born on September 12, 1851 in the village of Aylmer, Province of Quebec, or Lower Canada, as it was then called. His ancestors, however, had lived in “the Old Bay State” for two centuries. His ancestral lineage was peopled with deacons and pastors and descendents who were members of the Orthodox Congregational Church. His young parents went to the Canadian frontier on other pursuits, but both died when Francis was quite young. He said, “All of my boyhood was spent in two Puritan families. . . . My mother and brother were members of the Presbyterian church, in which I, too, was dedicated to God’s service.” Very soon after his mother’s death, his uncle, Rev. Edward Warren Clark, of Auburndale, Mass., came to Aylmer and took him to the uncle’s Auburndale home. The uncle was the first pastor of the newly-formed Congregational Church in Auburndale. Because of ill health, his uncle was obliged to give up his pastorate. But he was elected chaplain of the Massachusetts Senate and Overseer of Harvard College, soon becoming chaplain of the Forty-seventh Regiment of Volunteers in the Civil War.

On the uncle’s return from the war, the family moved to New Hampshire; and the young Francis attended Claremont academy. From there, Francis was enrolled in Kimball Union Academy in

Meridian, New Hampshire. On graduation in 1869, he entered the Dartmouth class of '73. He graduated number 12 in his class and had received a Phi Beta Kappa "key." Incidentally, Francis commented at some length on the excessive drinking during his years at Dartmouth—something that is part of the Dr. Bob story at Dartmouth as well. In 1873, Francis decided to study for the ministry and entered Andover, which he characterized as "the great theological seminary of New England." Andover was Congregational in denomination. Near the end of his senior year at Andover, he was called to the pastorate of the Williston Church of Portland, Maine (For the foregoing materials, see Clark, *Memories, supra*, pp. 1-66).

### **A Brief Digression: The Period of Dr. Bob's Youth.**

Perhaps not by accident, A.A. literature has chosen to report little about Dr. Bob's youth. This may be a blessing for those of us who are taking a fresh start, a fresh approach, and a fresh viewpoint. The question concerns just exactly what Dr. Bob did as a youngster in the North Congregational Church at St. Johnsbury and just exactly what he was seeing, hearing, learning, and practicing in the Christian Endeavor Society at his church and even elsewhere. Those questions are being researched right now!

Here's what AA does tell us about Dr. Bob's youth. The facts provide an adequate start and framework that can point us toward his early religious years and religious training.

Robert Holbrook Smith was born August 8, 1879 in the family home at Central and Summer Streets in St. Johnsbury, Vermont. Judge and Mrs. Walter Perrin Smith were his parents. The Judge had a distinguished career as Probate Judge, state's attorney, state legislator, superintendent of St. Johnsbury schools, director of one bank, and president of another. He died in 1918; and he had taught Sunday school for 40 years! Dr. Bob's mother was said to have felt "that the way to success and salvation lay through strict parental supervision, no-nonsense education, and regular spiritual devotion."

From 1885 to 1894, Bob went to Summer Street elementary school, two blocks from his home. In 1894, Bob was 15 years old and entered St. Johnsbury Academy—an independent secondary school "for the intellectual, moral, and religious training of boys and girls in northeastern Vermont." In his senior year at St. Johnsbury, he met his bride-to-be Anne Ripley Smith at a dance in the academy gym. Seventeen years later, they were married. Bob graduated from St. Johnsbury Academy in 1898. He then set off for four years at Dartmouth College, sixty miles south at Hanover, New Hampshire. He graduated in 1902 and by that time was an illustrious graduate of the college drinking "fraternity." Sadly—by comparison with the endless biographies, stories of, by, and about, Bill Wilson and his life—A.A. has devoted only 23 pages to the foregoing general facts in the official biography of Bob's life (See *DR. BOB and the Good Oldtimers: A Biography, with recollections of early A.A. in the Midwest*. NY: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services., Inc., 1980, pp. 1-23). Regrettably, most of these pages contain little more of religious and spiritual significance—mostly just a Dr. Bob drunkalog, and this not even in the words of Dr. Bob.

As to Bill Wilson, Bill himself, A.A., and a host of biographers have provided us with details about Wilson's birth behind a bar, his renunciation of church, his atheism, his grandfather, his mother, his father, his sister, his boomerang, his violin, his first love, his second love and

wife-to-be Lois, his Burr and Burton Academy days, a hobo motorcycle ride, stock market meanderings, Lois's Swedenborgian religion, the involvement of Lois's family in Swedenborgianism, and the pair's marriage in the Swedenborgian church, as well as some information about Bill's Army days and law school attendance.

When it comes to reporting details about Dr. Bob, A.A. has been favored with very very little. There is nothing about Judge Smith's religious convictions, activities, and teachings to Bob. There is nothing about Grandma Smith's religious beliefs, activities, and communications with her son on those matters. There is nothing about the family's membership in St. Johnsbury's North Congregational Church. There is nothing about that church's prayer meetings, church services, Bible studies, and quiet hours. There is nothing about the nature of its Christian Endeavor Society; and there is nothing about CE activities of that particular church society. Nor is there any mention of what Bob learned as a youth from the church, from the Bible, from Christian Endeavor, from his parents, or from the religious ideas taught at the academy he attended. And that is where part of our research is now directed. Details are invited!.

### **Christian Endeavor Growth From 1881 to 1902—the date of Dr. Bob's graduation from college at Dartmouth.**

The growth of Christian Endeavor from its twenty member society in Williston Church in 1881 to its status at the time of Dr. Bob's graduation from college in 1902 is absolutely astonishing. Though Congregational in origin, Christian Endeavor met the needs of youth and the need of churches of various Protestant denominations to court, encourage, and instruct young people in the service of Christ. Its influence on churches and youngsters became world-wide in span and duration.

By the time its founder Dr. Francis Clark had written his autobiography in 1922, Christian Endeavor could say that eighty thousand organizations bore its name (Clark, *Memoirs, supra*, p. 699). It could and did say that three hundred thousand people attended one hundred and fifty different sessions at its 1899 Convention in Detroit (Clark, *Christian Endeavor, supra*, p. 368). It could and did estimate that about 250,000 Endeavorers every year join the evangelical churches of the world (Clark, *Christian Endeavor, supra*, p. 338). An online encyclopedia archive on Francis Clark recorded that, in 1908, United Christian Endeavor had 70,761 societies and more than 3,500,000 members scattered throughout the United States, Canada, Great Britain, Australia, South Africa, India, Japan and China

Let's compare, as to historical significance, Wilson's much-discussed Washingtonian Society of a century before A.A.'s founding. Society membership, said Wilson, "passed the hundred thousand mark," but, said he, it lost sight of its goal of helping alcoholics. It became embroiled in Abolition and Temperance matters, quickly faded from the scene after only a few short years of activity, and had been long dead for a good many decades before A.A. was founded (See Wilson's remarks quoted in *Pass It On*. NY: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 1984, pp. 325, 354, 366-367; *Twelve Steps And Twelve Traditions*. NY: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 1952, pp. 178-179). Furthermore, several perspicacious AAs were later to write that the real failure of the Washingtonian movement was its non-reliance on God and focus on temperance pledges.

Let's also look at the "Oxford Group"—the much discussed yet maligned "root" of Bill Wilson's enduring Twelve Steps. At the beginning, in 1922, its members simply consisted of a small group of Rev. Frank Buchman's traveling friends who had formed what they called "A First Century Christian Fellowship" which soon faded away as a group (See Garth Lean. *Frank Buchman: A Life*. London: Constable, 1985, p. 97).

Now, let's look at a timeline of Christian Endeavor from its founding in 1881 to the time of Dr. Bob's graduation from Dartmouth in 1902. The growth, tremendous size and outreach, and endurance of this Christian fellowship far surpass anything else in the pre-AA history scene.

1881 – February 2, the first society was organized in Williston Church.

October 8, the second society organized in the North Church, Newburyport, Mass.

Before 1882 dawned, there were at least three or four other societies—one in a

Christian church in Rhode Island; another in the St. Lawrence Church of Portland; another in Burlington, Vermont.

1882 – June 2 – the first convention was held in Williston Church with six societies of less than 500 members represented and others known to exist.

1883 – 1891 – Societies were rapidly formed in Canada, Hawaii, Ceylon, Foochow, Africa, England, Australia, Turkey, Japan, Spain, France, Samoa, Mexico, and Chile. With large conventions in those years and many societies.

1892 – Eleventh Annual Convention was held at Madison Square Garden. Attendance: 30,000.

1893 – 1896 – Societies and conventions involved China, Japan, the Army, South Africa, Switzerland, Germany, Laos, Scotland, Marshall Islands, India, Hawaii, Guatemala, the Caroline Islands, Italy, Bulgaria, Mexico, and Burma.

1897 – Sixteenth International Convention in San Francisco. 25,000 journeyed across the continental United States to be a part of the outreach and activity.

1898 – 1902 – Societies and conventions were organized and met in India, Russia, Philippines, Jamaica, Portugal, and Persia.

The Washingtonians were washed up in only a few years and long before AA was a twinkle in Bill Wilson's eye. The Oxford Group finally did gain world-wide notice through the 1930's; faced stiff opposition from the Roman Catholic hierarchy; ran afoul of thorny claims of Buchman's supposed Nazi affiliations, and the anti-war views of some at Oxford [not, however, connected with Buchman's people]. Unlike the Washingtonians, Christian Endeavor, or A.A., the Oxford Group itself was basically a one-man charisma show; and it soon found itself splitting in several directions a decade after World War II.

Yet, in the twenty years beginning with 1891, Christian Endeavor had stayed afloat, grown, gained support in many denominations, spawned similar societies in others, and acquired tens of thousands of identifiable adherents. It had literature, books, periodicals, newspapers,

conventions, world conferences, offices, officers and trustees, hymnals, summer schools, training schools, and an ever-increasing support and growth rate. In sum, there was absolutely nothing like Christian Endeavor that was similar in form, content, significance, and size during the years prior to or at the time A.A.'s conception or actual formative years—nothing at all like the Christian Endeavor Society which was to help instruct and train Dr. Bob in his youth, and which emphasized Bible, Church, Prayer Meetings, Quiet Hours, God, Jesus Christ, fellowship, service and witness (For details, see Clark, *Christian Endeavor, supra*, pp. 34-88, 621-628). It is no surprise to me, however, that (given today's secularized treatment approaches) world-wide Christian Endeavor picture has remained in the dark—completely unnoticed in today's "any god" or "not-god" recovery arena. The theme seems to be: If you want to talk about Jesus, the Bible, and A.A.'s Christian roots, do it somewhere besides A.A., a treatment center, or a government periodical.

### **The Christian Endeavor Society Pledge, Principles, and Practices**

#### **The Christian Endeavor Covenant and Pledge**

The active member's pledge used in most societies is as follows:

"Trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for strength, I promise Him that I will strive to do whatever He would like to have me do; that I will make it a rule of my life to pray and to read the Bible every day, and to support my own church in every way, especially by attending all her regular Sunday and midweek services, unless prevented by some reason which I can conscientiously give to my Saviour; and that, just so far as I know how, throughout my whole life, I will endeavor to lead a Christian life. As an active member I promise to be true to all my duties, to be present at and take some part, aside from singing, in every Christian Endeavor prayer-meeting, unless hindered by some reason which I can conscientiously give to my Lord and Master. If obliged to be absent from the monthly consecration meeting of the society, I will, if possible, send at least a verse of Scripture to be read in response to my name at roll-call" (Clark, *Christian Endeavor, supra*, pp. 251-252).

Interesting also are the first two of six covenants in the prison-societies of Christian Endeavor:

"First. I will accept Jesus as my Lord and Saviour.

"Second. I will try to learn and do His will by forming the habit of praying and carefully reading my Bible daily, and by thinking, speaking, and acting as I believe He would in my place. . . ." (Clark, *Christian Endeavor, supra*, p. 253).

Rev. Clark said the covenant has thus been analyzed:

"First, I will read the Bible.

"Second, I will pray.

"Third, I will support my own church.

"Fourth, I will attend the weekly prayer-meeting of the society.

“Fifth, I will take some part in it, aside from singing.

“Sixth, I will perform a special duty at the consecration-meeting if obliged to be absent” (Clark, *Christian Endeavor, supra*, pp 244-245).

Amos R. Wells, a prolific Endeavor writer, editor, and leader, wrote the following in his book *The Endeavorer’s Daily Companion*:

“Don’t believe in daily prayer and Bible-reading?

“Don’t believe in taking part in prayer-meetings?

“Don’t believe in going to church?

“Don’t believe in supporting your own church?

“Don’t believe in doing Christ’s will?

“Don’t believe in leading a Christian life?

“Don’t believe in *trying* to do all these things?

“Don’t believe in *promising* to try to do them?

“Why, of course you do when it is put that way! This is all you promise in the pledge—just to try to do them; and the pledge expressly says that you are not to do them whenever you think Christ would excuse you from them. Certainly no less excuse should satisfy you, pledge or no pledge” (Clark, *Christian Endeavor, supra*, p. 245).

Though we are getting ahead of ourselves in this article and as to later proposed research, we believe any real student of Dr. Bob’s remarks will find that A.A.’s co-founder was still doing the daily prayer and Bible-reading, was still conducting prayer-meetings, was still going to church, was still supporting his church, was still talking about doing his Master’s will, was still emphasizing the leading of a Christian life, and was not only talking about these things throughout his A.A. years, but was urging these things on his “pigeons”—as he called the new AAs. There was no significant talk in *Christian Endeavor* about the Four Absolutes of the Oxford Group; of a life-changing “art” of self-examination, confession of sins to another person, conviction, and “conversion” leading to a spiritual awakening. Nor even about some of pioneer A.A.’s own favored ideas in the Book of James, including James 5:16.

The *Christian Endeavor Pledge* really describes the simple early A.A. Akron program in bright colors. And, if you add to the CE program, A.A.’s insistence on abstinence and hospitalization for real alcoholics, and toss in some other *Christian Endeavor* principles and practices, you have the very program that Dr. Bob, his wife Anne, Henrietta Seiberling, and the Williams couple were holding forth for the deliverance of those early drunks. Let’s be clear, however, that these remarks do not ignore or discount the important Oxford Group backdrop and ideas that came to Akron from 1931 forward and their influence on the little A.A. fellowship.

## The Christian Endeavor Principles

Rev. Clark believed that the following four principles are the “roots of the Christian Endeavor tree.” They are, he wrote, the essential and only essential principles of the Christian Endeavor Society:

1. Confession of Christ.
2. Service for Christ.
3. Fellowship with Christ’s people.
4. Loyalty to Christ’s Church.

As to each of the four, Clark said the following, among other things:

“Confession of Christ is absolutely necessary in the Christian Endeavor Society. To ensure this are the methods of the Society adapted in every particular. . . . The true Christian Endeavorer does not take part to exhibit his rhetoric, or to gain practice in public speaking, or to show what a logical prayer he can offer to God; but he does take part to show that he is a Christian, to confess his love for his Lord; and this confession is as acceptable made by the unlearned, stumbling, lispng Christian as by the glib and ready phrase-maker. . . . The covenant pledge is simply a tried and proved device to secure frequent confession of Christ. . . . Our form of confession is the prayer-meeting. Here we acknowledge our faith. . . .”

“Another universal principle of Christian Endeavor is *constant service*. If confession is the lungs of the movement, service is its hands and feet. . . . In the ideal society every member is responsible for some definite, particular task. . . a society whose ideal, like Wesley’s is, ‘At it, and all at it, and always at it.’”

“Again, I have learned that *our fellowship* is an essential feature of Christian Endeavor. . . . This fellowship is not an accident or a matter of chance. It is an inevitable result of the movement. When the second society was formed, nineteen years ago, the fellowship began. Then it became interdenominational, interstate, international, intersocial, intercontinental, and, as some one has suggested, since ‘Part of the hosts have crossed the flood, And part are crossing now,’ it has become intermundane.”

“Once more, a universal essential of the Society of Christian Endeavor is *fidelity* to its own church and the work of that church. It does not and cannot exist for itself. . . a true society of Christian Endeavor must live for Christ and the church. Its confession of love is for Christ, the head, its service is for the church, His bride. . . .”

Clark concludes with this commentary on the fundamental, necessary features of the world-wide movement:

“Confession of our love for Christ—devoting ourselves to our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, so that we do not simply rely on His work of propitiation, finished on the cross, but view Him as our living King, whose will is law in every department of life.

“Proof of it by our service for Him—receiving constant religious training for all kinds of service involved in the various committees. . .

“Fellowship with those who love Him—interdenominational spiritual fellowship, through which we hope not for organic unity, but to realize our Lord’s prayer for spiritual unity, that all who believe in Him may be one.

“Fidelity to our regiment in which we fight for Him—strenuous loyalty to the local church and denomination with which each society is connected.

For more on the Christian Endeavor principles, see Clark, *Christian Endeavor, supra*, pp.

89-102. And we will speak shortly about the importance of “love and service,” in both Christian Endeavor and in Dr. Bob’s view of Alcoholics Anonymous.

### **The Bible – As Sourcebook, Subject of Study, and as to Quotation of Verses**

In early A.A., the Bible was the primary and essential source of the basic recovery program ideas. AAs read and were told to read it daily. Circulated literature centered on the Bible. Bible *study* was stressed, and the Bible was read at the beginning of each meeting. When asked about a program question, Dr. Bob would usually say: “What does it say in the Good Book?” He also frequently quoted relevant verses to AAs and their families as A.A.’s *DR BOB* does report. Until very recently when I was in Akron on research, Dr. Bob’s Bible (with inscriptions by him, Bill Wilson, and Bill Dotson—AA Number Three) was still brought to the front of the A.A. Number One (King School Group) meeting room and there remained until the meeting was over. Each early AA meeting had a topic, and the topic was usually based on some Bible idea, segment, or application (See Dick B., *The Good Book and The Big Book; The Akron Genesis of Alcoholics Anonymous; Why Early A.A. Succeeded; When Early AAs Were Cured and Why*).

The Bible occupied no less a prominent place in Christian Endeavor.

The earliest Christian Endeavor journal was called *The Golden Rule* with Rev. Clark as its editor-in chief (Clark, *Christian Endeavor, supra*, pp. 82, 622; *Memories, supra*, pp. 92, 97-98). See also Matthew 7:12 for one rendition of that “golden rule.”

The covenant pledge was, along with several other stated purposes, designed to secure “familiarity with the Word of God by promoting Bible-reading and study in preparation for every meeting” (Clark, *Christian Endeavor, supra*, p. 94). As mentioned, the first point in the analysis of the covenant is “I will read the Bible.” The pledge itself says: “that I will make it the rule of my life to pray and to read the Bible every day. . .” “Every Endeavor meeting has its topic, with many Scripture references and abundant helps.” “The Golden Rule. . . offered as a premium at one time the well-known ‘International Bible,’ a famous teacher’s Bible with notes by eminent scholars.” (Clark, *Christian Endeavor, supra*, pp. 244, 252, 261, 293).

Bible study was often the subject of oratory at Christian Endeavor Conventions. Speaking on some Christian Endeavor Principles, Rev. Russell H. Conwell—a favorite convention speaker—said: “I believe that a pledge is a good thing. . . . Hence I believe in the Christian Endeavor pledge to speak every week in the meeting; it makes men. I believe in the advice of

studying the Holy Bible for itself; it makes men” (Clark, *Christian Endeavor, supra*, p. 606). Said to be the greatest preacher in England of his time, the Rev. Dr. J. H. Jowett said at the British National Convention in Glasgow: “Let your endeavor grow out of the great and studious contemplation of the great mysteries in Christ;” and Jowett was speaking on “Christian Endeavor and Bible-Study” (Clark, *Christian Endeavor, supra*, pp. 608-609).

Writing on the non-denominational and international character of Christian Endeavor, Count Bernstorff, an eminent German Christian, wrote: “There is only one Christianity, because there is only one Christ. Is it English that one insists upon conversion. . . . Is it English to avow a oneness of spirit with Christians of other denominations. . . . Is it English that one should seek after holiness. . . . Is it English that all Christians should work together for the upbuilding of Christ’s kingdom? All these things are simple biblical truths, and should be the universal spirit of Christendom. Indeed, they constitute living Christendom” (Clark, *Christian Endeavor, supra*, pp. 618-619).

There is a vast amount of information about the Bible in the Christian Endeavorer’s life and meetings; and some of it will be discussed here. Most of it is being sought and researched right now. I leave you with this recent finding by Richard K, contained in the foreword to Rev. Francis E. Clark’s *World Wide Endeavor*:

“The Pledge requires daily reading of the Bible and prayer. This covenant kept makes spiritually-minded young people” [Rev. B.B. Tyler, D.D., Pastor, First Church of Disciples of Christ, New York City] (Clark, *World Wide Endeavor*, p. 7).

Richard K. also located these remarks by J. F. Cowan in his title, *New Life in the Old Prayer Meeting*. In his chapter entitled “More Bible and Less Topic.” Cowan wrote:

“Shakespeare, and Drummond, and Spurgeon, and Milton, and Meyer, and Moody, and other good men may be quoted profitably in a prayer-meeting as sidelights on the Word of God, but never to the exclusion of the Word of God. God’s Word is a lamp; they are only reflectors. A hundred of the brightest reflectors are no substitute for a lamp. Literary quotations are not out of place in a prayer-meeting; but let us light the lamp before we hang up the reflectors.

“A prayer-meeting with too much topic and not enough Bible is like a farm on which some one should try to substitute moonlight for sunlight. Moonlight is good for skating, and drives, and walks, but for raising corn and wheat, and for all the vital processes of life moonlight would be a poor substitute for sunlight. Let us have the sunlight first in our prayer-meetings, and after we have got God’s thought then it is time enough to have men’s thoughts on God’s thoughts. This is an age in which we are using too much peptonized [pre-digested] spiritual food: too many of us are getting our knowledge of the Bible at second hand, through books or daily devotions, through Sunday-school lessons, and the ‘meditations’ of others in published form. We need to get more of the Bible at first hand, and less of men’s thoughts on God’s thoughts, meditating ourselves, and being devout without a model. There is too much of the canning factory in our modern religious life, and not enough of the garden and farm.”

Perhaps many have wondered why Dr. Bob’s wife Anne wrote in, and widely shared from her journal, that the Bible should be the main sourcebook of all. Also why AA meetings started first

with the reading of the Bible. Also, why Dr. Bob and those who followed conventional meditation guidelines began their quiet time first with the Bible. Such also was the suggested practice in the devotional books the pioneers studied and used, and which laid out guides for quiet time.

### **The Prayer-Meetings – their content and importance**

The discussion above deals with the primacy of the Bible and also J. F. Cowan's remarks about that. Then too, in his chapter entitled "More Prayer in the Prayer Meeting," Cowan held forth equally simple principles as to prayer. He wrote:

"To be sure, no prayer-meeting leader should object to a personal testimony, or to any contribution calculated to edify, but at the same time there is great need in the average prayer meeting, of developing the volume of prayer. How may this be done?

1. By helping the people to understand what prayer is. There may be a great deal of prayer in the meeting that does not go by the name of prayer. There may be much that goes by the name of prayer that is not broad, symmetrical, Scriptural prayer. It may be helpful, here, to analyze prayer into some of its constituent elements; for example, as Mr. Moody did: (1) Adoration. . . (2) Confession. . . (3) Restitution. . . (4) Thanksgiving. . . (5) Forgiveness. . . (6) Unity. . . (7) Faith. . . (8) Petition. . . (9) Submission. The "Thy will be done" spirit that characterizes true prayer."

Dr. Bob's wife Anne reviewed a similar group of specific prayer definitions in *Anne Smith's Journal*, and she shared them with AAs and their families. Moreover, many years after A.A.'s founding, Rev. Sam Shoemaker was speaking to AAs at their International Convention. He defined a "spiritual awakening" as having four elements—conversion, prayer, fellowship, and witness. He also was quick to point out that "absurd names for God" and "half-baked prayers" were not a legitimate part of the awakening. Consider too that Akron AAs were exposed to much more about prayer than "half-baked" prayers. As I pointed out in *Dr. Bob and His Library*, Dr. Bob read and circulated a large number of books on prayer, quiet time, and how to pray.

Dr. Amos R. Wells was Editorial Secretary of the United Society of Christian Endeavor. His text-book on meetings and methods tell us much about the prayer meetings. He wrote:

"What are the results we may gain from the prayer meeting? They are five: original thought on religious subjects; open committal to the cause of Christ; the helpful expression of Christian thought and experience; the cultivation of the spirit of worship through public prayer and through singing; the guidance of others along these lines of service and life.

"How can we get original thought on the prayer-meeting topics? Only by study of the Bible, followed by meditation and observation. First, the Endeavorer should read the Bible passage; then he should read some good commentary upon it; then he should take the subject with him into his daily life for five or six days, thinking about it in his odd minutes and watching for experiences in his own life, or the lives of others, or of observing nature and looking for illustrations on the subject from all these sources.

"Are we to read Bible verses and other quotations? Yes, all we please, if we will make them the original expression of our own lives by thinking about them, and adding to them something, if

only a sentence, to show that we have made them our own. Always give the writer's name, or the part of the Bible from which you quote. Commit the quotation to memory and do not read it" (Amos R. Wells, *Expert Endeavor: A Text-book of Christian Endeavor Methods and Principles*. Boston: United Society of Christian Endeavor, 1911, pp. 9-11; Dick B., *Dr. Bob and His Library*, p. 114; *The Books Early AAs Read for Spiritual Growth*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed., pp. 13-17).

A recent find by Richard K. covers several Christian Endeavor subjects. Bible study is certainly one. So is prayer; and the famous evangelist and Christian Endeavor influence Dwight L. Moody wrote on the importance of prayer meetings in his title *Golden Counsels* in his chapter, "How to Have a Good Prayer Meeting" (D. L. Moody. *Golden Counsels*. Boston: United Society of Christian Endeavor, 1899, pp. 27-33).

We now know that Dr. Bob's wife taught early AAs and their families that the Bible should be the main source book of all and that not a day should pass without reading it. We know that Dr. Bob did read it every day. We know that it was read at every one of the pioneer meetings and each morning at the quiet times conducted by Anne Smith at the Smith home. And we know how often Dr. Bob quoted Scripture to make some point to AAs. At the early A.A. meetings, Bible "topics" were common, and many topics resembled those suggested by and used in Christian Endeavor prayer-meetings. To be sure, there were some limited "testimonies." But Dr. Bob specifically commented that their (the early AAs') "stories" didn't amount to much. However, there certainly was group prayer in the pioneer Christian Fellowship meetings. Actually, those meetings were, in effect, "old fashioned prayer meetings."—the essence of the Christian Endeavor program (See *DR. BOB and the Good Oldtimers*, *supra*, pp. 56, 71-72, 96-97, 100-102, 111, 116, 118-119, 129-136, 139-142, 144, 150-151; Dick B., *Anne Smith's Journal, 1933-1939*). Dr. Bob's son commented to me that the meetings were like "old fashioned revival meetings." Another pioneer, quoted in A.A. literature, called them "old fashioned prayer meetings."

And that's a fairly useful label to be used in contrasting Christian Endeavor prayer-meetings to the kind of "Oxford Group" meetings and house-parties that Bill and Lois continuously attended from the beginning of Bill's sobriety in 1934. The emphasis in the Oxford Group meetings Bill attended in the East was certainly not on prayer-meetings. It was on testimonies about how lives had been changed through Oxford Group techniques and thereby "attested" that God had done for them what they could not do for themselves. In Akron, however, the emphasis in their Christian Fellowship meetings was on Bible reading, group prayer, topics, and upstairs "surrenders" to Christ by newcomers. In sum, Akron AA meetings focused on Bible and prayer in "old fashioned prayer" or "old fashioned revival meetings" while Oxford Group meetings elsewhere emphasized life-changing meetings and testimonies. The difference between East Coast Oxford Group activity and the "clandestine lodge" of the Oxford Group in Akron becomes even more clear when you look at what Bill said to T. Henry and Clarace Williams when Bill was interviewing the pair in 1954. Bill said to Mr. and Mrs. Williams:

"I learned a great deal from you people [Mr. and Mrs. Williams], from the Smiths themselves, and from Henrietta [Seiberling]. I hadn't looked in the Bible, up to this time at all" (From the transcript of Bill Wilson's taped interview with T. Henry and Clarace Williams on December 12,

1954, which transcript is on file at General Services in New York. See also Dick B., *The Akron Genesis of Alcoholics Anonymous*, pp. 136-137).

### **The Quiet Hour – A regular Endeavor Observance and a Required AA Pioneer Practice**

“Quiet Time” was a “must” in early Akron A.A.; and, as trustee-to-be Frank Amos reported it, “He [the alcoholic] must have devotions every morning—a ‘quiet time of prayer and some reading from the Bible and other religious literature.’” Amos added: “The A.A. members of that time did not consider meetings necessary to maintain sobriety. They were simply ‘desirable.’ Morning devotion and ‘quiet time,’ however, were musts” (*DR. BOB, supra*, pp. 131, 136).

At another point, Bill Wilson added: “I sort of always felt that something was lost from A.A. when we stopped emphasizing the morning meditation.” (See *DR. BOB, supra*, p. 178).

Unfortunately, almost all A.A. writers and AA history writers have mischaracterized A.A. quiet times. Possibly because they were steering wide and clear of Jesus Christ and the Bible. Probably because they did not mention and did not want to mention the prerequisite “born again” surrenders. Mostly because they did not do their homework. In the first place, quiet time was and could be an individual thing, a morning thing, or a group thing; and it often was all of these. Secondly, some of the Oxford Group trappings of “journaling,” “listening,” writing down thoughts, and “checking” were just not a significant, if even relevant, part of Akron pioneer quiet times. Finally, almost invariably, A.A. revisionist-writers have left out the absolute necessity posited in Akron that one must become a child of God in order to pray effectively to, and hear from, God, their “Heavenly Father.” See Dick B., *Good Morning: Quiet Time, Morning Watch, Meditation, and Early A.A.; The Oxford Group and Alcoholics Anonymous; New Light on Alcoholism*. Notice particularly the Bible material in the second chapter of 1 Corinthians. The verses there speak clearly about spiritual wisdom imparted by God and differentiate it from the “foolishness” that the “natural man” (one who is not-born-again) can and does receive. The verses also point out that the natural man cannot even *understand* the wisdom imparted by God because it must be “spiritually discerned.” And Henrietta Seiblering often quoted this material to AAs.

Expressed in very simple terms, early AA “quiet time” involved these elements: (1) First, a decision for Christ (often called a “complete” or “real” Surrender) which enabled one to be born-again of God’s spirit and thus become one of God’s children. (2) Study of the Bible. (3) Prayer—both group and individual. (4) Use of devotionals like *The Upper Room* and *The Runner’s Bible*. (5) Seeking God’s guidance for their lives—something He promises and can do for those who have received the gift of the Holy Spirit and have become His kids (See 1 Corinthians 12:1-13; Galatians 1:11-12; 1 Peter 4:10-11; James 1:5-8).

And here are the CE guidelines which were part of Dr. Bob’s Christian Endeavor training as a youngster. Even more can be found in materials by the Rev Dr. F. B. Meyer and by the Evangelist Dwight Moody. The CE Founder Dr. Francis Clark wrote:

“Undoubtedly the effort that has done most to impress the deepest things of the Spirit of God upon the Christian Endeavor movement is the so-called ‘Quiet Hour.’ . . . Because there may be some who read these pages who may not understand the inner meaning of the Quiet Hour, or

what the old writers understand by ‘practising the presence of God,’ the writer. . . tries to tell his young friends just how the Quiet Hour may be spent. ‘Our Bible is open, perhaps to the familiar passage which reveals the wondrous truth that man dwells in God, and God in man, as John records it. Seek to realize this stupendous fact, for all Scripture is a lie if it is not a fact. Say to yourself over and over again: ‘God is here. God is here. God is within me. I am His child. God is my Father’.” (Clark, *Christian Endeavor, supra*, pp. 525-526).

“So it was proposed that those who wished should band themselves together in a purely voluntary organization called ‘the Comrades of the Quiet Hour.’ The name was chosen rather than the similar name of ‘The Morning Watch’ in order to give the utmost freedom as to the time which should be devoted to meditation and personal communion with God, though the morning was strongly recommended. Those who became “comrades” agreed to spend fifteen minutes a day not merely in Bible-reading and petition, but in genuine personal communion with the Unseen. . . . Quiet Hour literature began to abound; ‘Quiet Hours’ led by some of the most eminent Christians in the land began to be held in connection with the conventions both State and national. Now more than 40,000 have been definitely enrolled. . .” (Clark, *Christian Endeavor, supra*, p. 357).

See also Francis E. Clark, *The Presence of God; Living and Loving; The Golden Alphabet; A Daily Message for Christian Endeavorers*; and *The Great Secret*; Belle M. Brain, *The Morning Watch* and *Quaint Thoughts*; J. Wilbur Chapman, *The Surrendered Life: Quiet Hour Meditations*. And note that the foregoing titles were all published by United Society of Christian Endeavor. Popular also in Christian Endeavor was Brother Lawrence’s *Practicing the Presence of God* and F. B. Meyer’s *The Secret of Guidance*. For even further literature that AAs independently read on Quiet Time and the Morning Watch, see Dick B., *Dr. Bob and His Library, The Books Early AAs Read for Spiritual Growth*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed, and *Good Morning: Quiet Time, Morning Watch, Meditation, and Early A.A. Making Known the Biblical History and Roots of A.A. Time, Morning Watch, Meditation, and Early A.A.s sge for Christian Endeavorer*

### **The Christian Endeavor/AA Emphasis on Love and Service**

There is very frequent mention in Christian Endeavor literature of the importance of love and service. And I cannot recall any similar phraseology or emphasis in the thousands of Oxford Group writings I have read and analyzed. As to the subject, Christian Endeavor’s Dr. Clark wrote:

“Christian Endeavor is a watch

Whose mainspring is love,

Whose movement is service.

Whose hands point to heavenly joys on the dial of eternity” (Clark, *Christian Endeavor, supra*, p. 316).

The following is a relevant, succinct description of Endeavor’s position:

**"...it is a fellowship based on a broad platform of service, love to Christ, and work for Him. On this platform all can stand."** ((Francis E. Clark. *World Wide Endeavor: The Story of The Young Peoples Society of Christian Endeavor, From the Beginning and In All Lands.* [Philadelphia, PA: Gillespie, Metzgar & Kelley], 1895, p. 263).

*In his last, very brief, and much quoted address to AAs, Dr. Bob made the following point—seemingly springing forward from his long-held and later refreshed memory of earlier Christian Endeavor strong points:*

*"Our Twelve Steps, when simmered down to the last, resolve themselves into the words 'love' and 'service.' We understand what love is, and we understand what service is. So let's bear those two things in mind" (DR. BOB, supra, p. 338).*

*The last paragraph of A.A.'s own biographical sketch on Dr. Bob said:*

*"Dr. Bob firmly believed that 'love and service' are the cornerstones of Alcoholics Anonymous" (The Co-Founders of Alcoholics Anonymous: Biographical Sketches. Their Last Major Talks). NY: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 1972, 1975, p. 9).*

### ***The Necessity for Believing on Jesus Christ:***

*The Bible makes the following very specific comments about the way to salvation, the abundant life, and everlasting life through Jesus Christ (and see John 3:1-8, 14-17; 10:9-10; 14:5-6):*

*"This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we are all witnesses. . . . Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:32, 36).*

*"Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God hath raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand before you whole. . . . Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" Acts 4:10, 12).*

*"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. . . . For whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:9-10, 13).*

*In early A.A., a surrender to, and decision for, Christ was a "must"—though you'd hardly know it from reading almost any history pertaining to Bill Wilson or the fellowship as a whole. Yet when I was gathering material for my Akron Genesis book, Bill Wilson's secretary and A.A.'s first archivist Nell Wing phoned me from New York to tell me specific pages in DR. BOB and the Good Oldtimers which described the required surrenders. But the following statements by several A.A. Akron pioneers verify and detailed the specifics of the required early A.A. "surrender to Christ":*

*"They would not let you in unless you surrendered to Jesus Christ on your knees" (From a recorded telephone conversation with Danny W. in Lancaster, California, from A.A. old-timer Ed*

*Andy of Lorain, Ohio. The statement was made on January 9, 1993; see also, Dick B., The Golden Text of A.A., p. 31).*

*“They took me upstairs to be a born again human being and be God’s helper to alcoholics” (Letter from Larry B., A.A. old-timer from Cleveland, Ohio to the author, dated September 18, 1992. Larry stated that this quote correctly described his surrender; see also, Dick B., The Golden Text of A.A., p. 32).*

*Clarence Snyder—who came into A.A. in February of 1938 and was sponsored by Dr. Bob—said: “[I] went upstairs to T. Henry Williams’s master bedroom with Dr. Bob, T. Henry Williams, and an Oxford Group member. These men told [me] to get on [my] knees, and they joined me on their knees around T. Henry’s bed. These three men then led [me] through a ‘Sinner’s Prayer’ . . . which was the very one Dr. Bob had used from the beginning of A.A. surrenders in Akron” (See Dick B., Turning Point, pp. 140-142; The Golden Text of A.A., p. 32; That Amazing Grace, p. 27; Clarence Snyder, Going Through The Steps, p. 3; Mitch K., How It Worked, pp. 58, 70).*

*One would expect to see in Christian Endeavor literature countless accounts, examples, and discussions of decisions for, acceptance of, or surrenders to, Christ, and the resultant born again standing as sons of God. But that is not the case. Why?*

*I am of the opinion that the “altar call” or “confession of faith,” or similar invitations were not mentioned with great frequency because the Endeavorers were frequently already Christians, had already made their profession of faith in the church, and in fact were already part of the body of Christ. The Christian Endeavor pledge and program were designed to keep young Christians fired up in the church, keep them giving confessions of Christ, keep them supporting their church, and keep them serving their Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. That is not to say, however, the Christian Endeavor did not make acceptance of Christ a ready opportunity.*

*There is certainly discussion of decisions for Christ within Christian Endeavor. See Clark, Christian Endeavor, supra, p. 537. Note also what James DeForest Murch wrote in Successful C.E. Prayer-Meetings. The book was designed to spruce up, diversify, and multiply the various possible meetings Endeavorers could hold. As to possible evangelistic meetings, Murch suggested:*

*“An Evangelistic Meeting. Pattern your program after that of a modern revival meeting. A live leader of song should have charge of the music. The songs should be songs of soul-winning. Have a number of church-members to give brief testimonies and urge the young people to make decisions for Christ. The minister should be invited to make a closing exhortation and hear the confessions of faith, if such is the usual order. Personal work prior to the meeting itself will make it more effective in every way” (James DeForest Murch, Successful C.E. Prayer- Meetings (Cincinnati, OH: The Standard Publishing Company, pp. 66-67).*

*“A Front-seat Meeting. Or this might be called a Reconsecration Meeting. . . . At the close of the service let your minister give an invitation to all those who want to reconsecrate themselves to their C.E. pledge to come forward and occupy the front seats. Those who wish to accept Christ*

*as their personal Saviour should be included in this invitation. Those who have taken the front seats should then kneel in prayer” (Murch, Successful C.E., supra, p. 72)*

*The Reverend Dr. Charles M. Sheldon was an enthusiastic Christian Endeavor supporter (Clark, Christian Endeavor, supra, pp. 283, 149, 330, 563, 595). He wrote the famous In His Steps, said to be the most widely-read religious novel of all time, with over 8,000,000 copies sold. His book was owned, read, and recommended by Dr. Bob, by his wife Anne Smith, and by pioneer leader Henrietta Seiberling. Speaking about Christian Endeavor evangelism and Sheldon’s suggestions, Rev. Francis Clark wrote in Christian Endeavor, supra:*

*“The Sunday-evening after –meeting is another rare opportunity for evangelistic service, into which many pastors wisely press their Endeavorers. Dr. Charles M. Sheldon, as has been before stated, advocates making this great young people’s evangelistic service of the week for the actual bringing of men to a decision for Christ, and in his own experience has proved the vast usefulness of such a plan (p. 330).*

*The Foreword to Clark’s World Wide Endeavor includes this remark on conversion by Rev. Theodore L. Cuyler, D.D., Pastor, Lafayette Avenue Presbyterian Church, Brooklyn, New York:*

*“My chief solicitude for the Christian Endeavor societies is that they be kept strongly and tightly to their cardinal purpose, viz., the conversion and training of souls for the Master” (Clark, World Wide Endeavor, p. 5),*

*In the Christian Endeavor publication Golden Counsels, Dwight Moody made a point that has been missed by so many A.A. historians, writers, and commentators when they talk about “listening to God” without conceding or understanding that the new birth must precede it:*

*“Claim by faith the promises of the indwelling Christ. Until we are born again, and he lives in us by the Spirit, all our efforts will be in vain. Keep in touch with him. Get better acquainted with him. Talk to him in prayer. Let him talk to you through the Bible” (Moody, Golden Counsels, supra, p. 20).*

### ***The Practical Test: What would Jesus do?***

*There is a recurring “underground” expression uttered by A.A. old-timer believers. You will encounter it from time to time when they suggest as a solution for a quandary, “What would the Master say?” In his last major address to AAs, Bill Wilson told this “Dr. Bob story” on the point:*

*“For example, a fellow came to Dr. Bob and said, ‘I’m an alcoholic; here is my history. But I also have this other ‘complication.’ Can I join A.A.? Bob threw it out to all the other deacons, while the poor guy waited.*

*“Finally, there was some kind of hearing on it among the self-appointed elders. I remember how perfectly Bob put it to them. He reminded us that most of us were practicing Christians. Then he asked, ‘What would the Master have thought? Would he have kept this man away?’ He had them cold! The man came in, was a prodigious worker, and was one of our most respected people”*

*(The Co-Founders of Alcoholics Anonymous: Biographical Sketches Their Last Major Talks. NY: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 1972, 1975, p. 30).*

*There is a similar vein in the approach by Dr. Bob himself in his last major address to AAs:*

*“I’m talking about the attitude of every one of us toward our Heavenly Father. Christ said, ‘Of Myself, I am nothing—My strength cometh from My Father in heaven.’ If He had to say that, how about you and me? Did you say it? Did I say it? No. That’s exactly wht we didn’t say. We were inclined to say instead, ‘Look me over, boys. Pretty good, huh?’ We had no humility, no sense of having received anything through the grace of our Heavenly Father” (Co-Founders, supra, p. 19).*

*I cannot and do not claim that the “what would Jesus do” idea in A.A. came from Christian Endeavor language Dr. Bob had heard again and again. But I can say how popular Charles Sheldon’s book was among the A.A. founders and pioneers. I can say that the expression, “What would Jesus do” can be found in several important Christian Endeavor writings. And I can say that nowhere is this background idea and humble thinking more evident than in Christian Endeavor leader Sheldon’s *In His Steps*.*

*Sheldon begins his famous best-seller by quoting 1 Peter 2:21:*

*“For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.”*

*Much of Sheldon’s book is about Henry Maxwell, pastor of the First Church of Raymond; and early on, Sheldon quotes the preacher as follows:*

*“I want volunteers from the First Church who will pledge themselves, earnestly and honestly for an entire year, not to do anything without first asking the question, ‘What would Jesus do?’*

*“Our motto will be, ‘What would Jesus do?’ Our aim will be to act as He would if He was in our places, regardless of immediate results. In other words, we propose to follow Jesus’ steps as closely and as literally as we believe He taught His disciples to do” (Charles M. Sheldon. *In His Steps*—first published in 1897 (Old Tappan, NJ: Spire Books, published by Pyramid Publications, Inc. for the Fleming H. Revell Company, 1963, p. 16).*

*In His Steps repeats this same question over and over and over (pp. 21, 26, 28, 35, 38, 61, 63, 69, 73, 75, 84, 100, 104, 107, 110, 124, 134, 173, 174, 177, 183, 184, 188). The book illustrates the use of this simple test in a host of life-situations. And the test is not without Biblical context. Frequently, author Sheldon uses the question in connection with (1) Walking obediently in Jesus’ steps (pp. 11, 124, 155, 189). (2) Following Jesus (pp. 11, 65, 124, 140). (3) The imitation of Christ – which brought into play the Thomas a’ Kempis book by that name, owned by the pioneers, used by them in their *Quiet Times*, and even later handed out to St. Thomas Hospital patients by Sister Ignatia. (4) Seeking the wisdom of God as Jesus did so often and as believers are directed in the first chapter of the Book of James—a favorite in early A.A.*

*Moody wrote:*

*“Christ Our Model. . . . Is it possible really to be like Christ? Doubt and unbelief say, No. Faith says, Yes. God commands it, and therefore it must be possible. But how? Because we can have the same life, the same mind in us as was in Christ. . . . He will dwell in our hearts by faith, and our lives may thus become the expression of his own. I do not say that here we shall ever be like our model in measure or degree. But light is light. . . . A good definition of sanctification or holiness would be, conformity to his example. . . . Learn of Christ. Do not look to men. . . . It is said of the early disciples that the rulers ‘took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus.’ Moses had a shining face after he had been with God” (Moody, Golden Counsels, supra, pp. 17-20).*

### ***Christian Endeavor, “Cures,” and Early A.A.***

*Though recently published Alcoholics Anonymous literature has meticulously erased Jesus Christ, the Bible, and over a decade of A.A. cures from specific mention, AA pioneers were cured! Many said so. Reports about their program cures said so. Countless news and journal articles said so. And—whatever current A.A. scribes and history revisionists may say—cure is the proper word. And cured they were. They believed in the power of God. They believed they could be cured. And, if the following verses from such devotionals as *The Runner’s Bible* provided a source for their approach, they were believing what the Creator said:*

*“. . . [For] I am the Lord that healeth thee” (Exodus 15:26).*

*“Bless the Lord, O my soul. . . . Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases” (Psalm 103:1, 3).*

*“I have seen his ways, and will heal him” (Isaiah 57:18).*

*“For I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the Lord” (Jeremiah 30:17)*

*Most in Akron heard these healing verses. Many may even have studied them from devotionals such as Nora Smith Holm, *The Runner’s Bible*. NY: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1915, pp. 107-119. See also Dick B. *The Golden Text of A.A.: God, The Pioneers, and Real Spirituality*, pp. 22-26). As to much of which, Bill Wilson had also commented:*

*Hence if science passed a death sentence on the drunk, and we placed that fearful verdict on our alcoholic transmission belt, one victim talking to another, it might shatter the listener completely. Then the alcoholic might turn to the God of the theologian, there being no other place to go” (See Dick B., *The Golden Text*, supra, p. 21).*

*And, in Akron, turn to the Creator for “Divine Help” is exactly what they reported they had done. Many, including Bill Wilson, Dr. Bob, and AA Number Three specifically reported they had been cured by reliance on the Creator. No revisionist, secular, universalist writings can change that! See: Dick B., *God and Alcoholism: Our Growing Challenge in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century; Cured: Proven Help for Alcoholics and Addicts; When Early AAs Were Cured and Why; Richard K., Early A.A. – Separating Fact from Fiction: How Revisionists Have Led Our History Astray;**

*So You Think Drunks Can't Be Cured: Press Releases By Witnesses To the Cure; A New Light: "The First Forty" (All three titles: Haverhill, MA: Golden Text Publishing Company, 2003).*

*Through collaborative research and writing, and in independent and ongoing investigations, Richard K. and I can tell you that this "cure" historical research is a work-in-progress. The facts are there. The cures are there. The history is voluminous. The analysis and dissemination has only begun! You yourself can do the verifying also. You can find hundreds and hundreds of materials on early A.A. and Cure—even in its Alcoholics Anonymous World Services office and archives. You will probably find little about such cures in Oxford Group writings and certainly not in Washingtonian history. The rescue of drunks was a proclaimed Washingtonian objective. But in both the Washingtonians and the Oxford Group, the rescue was expected to come from life-change or pledges or temperance meetings. "Cure of alcoholism" was, from 1935 to 1939 a phrase and a triumph reserved for those early AAs who sought the Creator's healing power for a cure and who accomplished it, proclaimed it, and documented it.*

*That's not the A.A. picture today unfortunately. Reliance on God's power was implicit in a favorite Oxford Group expression: "Sin the Problem. Jesus Christ the Cure. The result: A Miracle." And even that phraseology should interest those who define alcoholism as sin or those who think that the Oxford Group could not and did not bring about cures.*

*Christian Endeavor, however, was far ahead of its time in seeing a practical application of the power of God to produce miraculous cures in our lives. To be sure, however, one cannot ignore the great contemporaneous cures effected through work by the Salvation Army as reported in Harold Begbie's famous *Twice-Born Men*. The work of the Oxford Group and of the Salvation Army are not the subject of this article. But I will point out (since it might bear on Dr. Bob's own cure and views about God as the source) that Christian Endeavor spoke glowingly of Dr. E. D. Starbuck's cure remarks, published in his title, *The Psychology of Religion*; and also of the work of Professor Coe who confirmed it.*

*Christian Endeavor had this to say:*

*"The Christian Endeavor Society may also fairly claim from the beginning to have put into practical operation the psychologist's dictum already quoted, 'No impression without expression.' Long before psychology was studied except by the learned few, long before it had become a fad in certain quarters, the Society attempted to put into practice its latest philosophy, and recognized the vital importance of religious activity to supplement and round out religious instruction.*

*"The cure for helplessness that comes with storm and stress in the period of adolescence, says Professor Starbuck, 'is often found in inducing wholesome activity. 'Faith without works is dead.' Let us call to mind that storm and stress and doubt are expressed sometime during youth by something like seventy per cent of all the persons studied. On the other hand, heightened activity, which is characterized not only by interest in religious matters, but by engaging in actual religious work, was experienced by only about twenty per cent of all these persons. This is doubtless very much out of proportion. Many persons have found the solution of their difficulties by actually setting about doing things'" (Clark, *Christian Endeavor*, supra, pp. 228-229).*

*The foregoing quotes bespeak the pre-occupation of some religions and psychology of that day (and perhaps even today) with “self-help,” “suggestion,” “auto-suggestion,” “hypnotism,” “new thought,” “moral psychology,” “relaxation techniques,” “inward transfer,” “re-education of the conscious powers,” and “psychotherapeutics” See Elwood Worcester, Samuel McComb, Isador H. Coriat. Religion and Medicine: The Moral Control of Nervous Disorders. NY: Moffat, Yard & Company, 1908. These psychological approaches have frequently been claimed as a new approach to Christian religion and sometimes been mislabeled “conversion” cures. See Elwood Worcester and Samuel McComb. The Christian Religion as a Healing Power. NY: Moffat, Yard and Company, 1909. The Emmanuel Movement stands as one example. See Leslie D. Weatherhead. Psychology Religion and Healing. NY: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1951. But the cure that comes from “altering” or “re-educating the subconscious” is not the cure that Christians ascribe to salvation, putting on the mind of Christ, and acting with belief in and obedience to God’s Word. See as to healing consummated in Christ: Isaiah 53:3-5; Matthew 8:16-17; 1 Peter 2:24; as to the new man in Christ: 2 Corinthians 5:17-18; as to putting on the new man—the mind of Christ: Romans 12:2, Ephesians 4:23, Colossians 3:10; and as to claiming cure by belief: Mark 16:16-21; Hebrews 4:14-16; 1 John 5:4-5; William Law. The Power of the Spirit. PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1971; E. W. Kenyon. Jesus The Healer. WA: Kenyon’s Gospel Publishing Society, 2000; Ethel R. Willits. Healing in Jesus Name. Detroit: Ethel R. Willits, Evangelist, 1931; James Moore Hickson. Heal the Sick. London: Methuen & Co., 1925. The latter two Christian healing books were owned, studied, and circulated to AAs by Dr. Bob.*

*We hasten to say, in a moment, the Christian Endeavor people were involved in temperance, and other issues, and there is no particular indication that their Christian service work primarily for their churches led them into the arena of curing drunks. Hence the emphasis in the foregoing quotation from Rev. Clark is to “helplessness” due to stress, not the helplessness that causes one to turn to God for help in overcoming alcoholism. That is not to say, however, that Christian Endeavor people did not consider it possible:*

*“Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saveth them out of their distresses. He sent his word, and healed them. . . .” (Psalm 107:19-20).*

*“And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions we desired of him” (1 John 5:14-15).*

*Thus Sheldon’s In His Steps and the tremendous evangelism of Dwight Moody certainly establish their interest in bringing salvation to drunks and watching them be healed of their addiction. In the eyes of these Christians, drunks were not “powerless;” they were in need of a new birth accompanied by spiritual, mental, and physical wholeness, forgiveness, and healing. Something not accomplished by “mind cure” or pseudo “conversion,” but by asking—as Christians and sons of God—for, and receiving healing from a loving Creator.*

### ***Temperance and Politics.***

*Some proponents of A.A., and a good many others, are very proud of, and satisfied with, A.A.’s refusal to become involved in liquor issues. Regrettably, this has led some to draw conclusions*

*that Christians interested in temperance were almost certain to fail as a group and in the alcohol field because of their focus on “outside” and “political issues.” You might try making this idea fly in the social gospel and social action churches of today—where freedom marches, gay and lesbian controversies, abortion issues, and anti-war slogans occupy a good portion of religion’s time. Yet invariably, the faulty and flawed example of the Washingtonian Movement is dredged up to establish primarily that a religious fellowship like A.A. must not dare to step over the line of “alcoholism only.” The Washingtonian movement was large for a moment; involved for a moment in liquor, temperance, and politics; and then perished “in a moment.” The Washingtonians are past history, not church history.*

*Now the Oxford Group people were sometimes involved in sobering up drunks as part of their life-changing program; but the Group devoted its fair share of time to politicians, war, and other topical issues. However, the Oxford Group hardly lost its wallop when it turned itself from individual life-changing and drunk-helping to “world changing through life-changing.” The Oxford Group emphasis in 1938, and even before, shifted to the rescue of “drunken nations” as Frank Buchman put it. And the name Moral Re-Armament which was then adopted signified the change in direction. Once MRA was rejuvenated and reorganized in 1940, the later days brought prominent national and international leaders, many foreign nations, and a good many activist Americans and British into the scene. This occurred between at least 1930 and 1950. Yet the Oxford Group did not perish either because it saved drunks or because it sought to reconcile nations. In fact, some of its best-known writers and long-surviving activists were not only drunks, but alcoholics who were cured of drinking by the power of God. These included Rowland Hazard, Victor Kitchen, Charles Clapp, Jr., F. Shepard Cornell, and later James Houck.*

*Many have said the Washingtonians failed in their movement primarily because they never had God in the picture at all. Many also believe that the Oxford Group eventually faded from the scene for the simple reason that its founder Dr. Frank Buchman died and that its world-wide thrusts seemed of less importance after World War II was concluded and the United Nations was founded. Also, nobody can discount the insistent opposition of the Vatican to the whole Oxford Group fellowship and its practices. The Oxford Group’s demise was not, at that time, due to the lack of God. It was due to a good many other factors including the split which caused Reverend Samuel M. Shoemaker to leave in favor of church life and those who rejected some of Dr. Frank Buchman’s authoritarian ideas.*

*Wilson was fond of saying that the Washingtonians and the Oxford Group taught AAs more about “what not to do” than “what to do.” But the statement was a canard. The Washingtonians were long gone before Wilson picked up his first drink. Their brief fireworks display involved nothing like the Akron-spawned Christian fellowship. And the Oxford Group program unquestionably was codified into the heart of Wilson’s 12 Steps and Big Book writings. And Wilson ultimately said so.*

*Christian Endeavor was involved in temperance, political, and war issues; but it never forgot the Creator, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Bible, prayer, love and service. Dr. Clark wrote:*

*“Temperance is always a burning theme in Endeavor conventions in English-speaking countries, and sometimes practical temperance measures are taken, as when the Endeavorers of Boston, seeing that one of the rumsellers, like most of the other shopkeepers of Boston, had hung*

*out the sign, "Welcome Endeavorers!" took him at his word, went into the saloon, and held a prayer-meeting before the bar" (Clark, Christian Endeavor, supra, p. 196)*

*"TEMPERANCE WORK. A society temperance pledge may be hung upon the wall, with the signatures of all members upon it. Plan for temperance meetings long in advance, and make them as strong as possible. Introduce into every temperance meeting some account of recent temperance victories, and the progress of the movement. Obtain addresses now and then from temperance enthusiasts. Learn what are the temperance laws of your own State and community, and how they are kept. How long since your town held a temperance mass-meeting? Plan one and hold it. Why should not the temperance committee learn, for the information of voters, the position as to temperance of the candidates before the people for election" (Clark, Christian Endeavor, supra, p. 584).*

*Christian Endeavor was founded in 1881. It very soon gained world-wide membership and significance. It was and is embraced by far more Protestant clergy and churches over the long-run than were the Washingtonians and Oxford Groupers. It may properly be said, to the extent that Christian Endeavor ideas were a major force in the foundation of Akron A.A., that Christian Endeavor taught the pioneers what to do. And they did it with astonishing success. Yet Christian Endeavor itself never laid a glove on them or even much on drunks as such. The AAs applied the biblical truths and Christian practices by personal decisions for Christ, by personal reliance on the Creator, by individual and group Bible study, old fashioned prayers and prayer meetings, quiet times, "works," fellowship, love and service. Sounds a lot like the Christian Fellowship that began helping drunks through the power of God in Akron, Ohio, beginning June 10, 1935.*

*END*

*Note: This is the first in a series of articles which will be written about A.A. and Christian Endeavor. "More will be revealed," as some AAs like to say. Much more is being collected and read. Many books and materials are under review. A good deal of personal investigation is taking place in New England where Christian Endeavor began and where both Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob were born, raised, and educated.*

*Bibliography specifics can be found in title descriptions on the Dick B. website: <http://www.dickb.com/titles.shtml>. Dick B. can be contacted by email ([dickb@dickb.com](mailto:dickb@dickb.com)), phone/fax: 808 874 4876; and mail to PO Box 837, Kihei, HI 96753-0837. A definitive bibliography can be found in Dick B., *Making Known the Biblical History of Alcoholics Anonymous* (<http://www.dickb.com/makingknown.shtml>). Most of the major historical books and articles pertaining to every phase of A.A. origins, spiritual roots, spiritual history, and the early program are already located at and available for view and study at the Griffith House Library, The Wilson House, East Dorset, Vermont.*