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The Books and Materials Early AAs Read

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Early AAs were readers. The Bible was the written word of God. The daily devotionals were written guides. Oxford Group people wrote. Sam Shoemaker wrote. Anne Smith wrote. And there were a great many books available for reading. Dr. Bob was an avid reader, and so was his colleague Henrietta Seiberling. Every pioneer A.A. meeting had tables set out in T. Henry's house where literature was available. Dr. Bob recommended and circulated many books. He kept a journal which recorded the books loaned, and he quizzed the alcoholics on the Bible and on the written materials they had borrowed from him. Whatever their proclivity for reading, early AAs all attested to the presence of the Bible and *The Upper Room*. They mentioned *The Runner's Bible*. They mentioned E. Stanley Jones books. They mentioned Henry Drummond's *The Greatest Thing in the World*. They mentioned *My Utmost for His Highest*. They mentioned James Allen's *As a Man Thinketh*. They mentioned the popular Glenn Clark books, Emmet Fox books, and Harry Emerson Fosdick books. There were religious books, and almost every one elaborated on some aspect of ideas AAs were borrowing from the Bible and the Oxford Group for their basic principles.

There was plenty of material on the Bible, prayer, healing, divine guidance, the Sermon on the Mount, 1 Corinthians 13, and the Book of James. There were Oxford Group/Shoemaker materials on finding God, changing lives, conversion, the guidance of God, fellowship, witness, and the teachings of Jesus. There has, perhaps, never been a fellowship with such diversity of subject matter at the immediate beck and call of its participants. Nor with such encouragement of its study by the "leadership."

Dr. Bob's Library

Dr. Bob and everyone that knew him well in the early A.A. days spoke of the immense amount of reading he did. He read the Bible through three times and studied it daily. As he put it:

I read everything I could find, and talked to everyone who I thought knew anything about it (*DR. BOB*, p. 56).

[Of the Oxford Group books and the Bible] . . . 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 (*The Co-Founders of Alcoholics Anonymous*, p. 11-12).

[To his son, "Smitty"] Well, I should know something, I've read for at least an hour every night of my adult life—drunk or sober (*RHS*, pp. 37-38).

DR. BOB and the Good Oldtimers reported:

For the next two and a half years [After January, 1933], Bob attended Oxford Group meetings regularly and gave much time and study to its philosophy. . . . He read the Scriptures, studied the lives of the saints, and did what he could to soak up the spiritual and religious philosophies of the ages (p. 56).

Dr. Bob's daughter told the author that her father frequently stayed up late into the night studying the Bible (*Dr. Bob's Library*, p. 13).

With the foregoing comments as a start, the author was privileged to see the huge number of books that Dr. Bob had assembled, read, studied, and circulated. The author saw them in the home of Dr. Bob's daughter, Sue Smith Windows, in Akron; and he saw them in the home of Dr. Bob's son, Robert Smith, in Nocona, Texas. Many of the books had Dr. Bob's name and address in them with the notation "Please return." *Dr. Bob's Library* lists the materials in detail. But it is important to cover here the subject matter to show how much light it was able to shed on the ideas A.A. pioneers were studying and borrowing.

The Bible

This aspect of Dr. Bob's reading was considered so important that his Bible was donated to the King School Group (A.A. Number One), and it is taken to the podium at the beginning of each meeting, to this very day—a ceremony the author personally witnessed in the company of Dr. Bob's daughter Sue.

Books about the Bible

In the family's possession are *God's Great Plan, A Guide to the Bible* and *The Fathers of the Church*. It is also likely that Dr. Bob read an Oxford Group pamphlet by Roger Hicks (who was one of the Oxford Group people in Akron in 1933) titled *How to Read the Bible*. Also *An Outline of the Life of Christ* by Shoemaker's assistant minister The Reverend W. Irving Harris (written in 1935). Also *The Lord's Prayer and Other Talks on Prayer from The Camps Farthest Out* by one of Bob's favorite authors Glenn Clark (written in 1932). Without a doubt, we know that Dr. Bob read Emmet Fox's book *The Sermon on the Mount*.

Christian Classics

The *Confessions of St. Augustine*, *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas a Kempis, and *The Practice of the Presence of God* by Brother Lawrence were all owned by Bob and were frequently quoted by the writers whose books Bob read.

The Life of Jesus Christ

Anne Smith recommended reading at least one book on the life of Christ a year for a while, commenting that even more would be better. Dr. Bob's daughter confirmed that Dr. Bob read these. They included: *Jesus of Nazareth: A Biography* by George A. Barton, *The Life of Jesus*

Christ by The Rev. James Stalker, *Studies of the Man Christ Jesus* by Robert E. Speer, *The Jesus of History* by T. R. Glover, *The Manhood of the Master* and *The Man from Nazareth* by Harry Emerson Fosdick, and *Jesus and Our Generation* by Charles Whitney Silkey. Most of these were quoted in the source books Dr. Bob read.

Daily Bible Devotionals

These devotionals have been mentioned before. They include *Daily Strength for Daily Needs* by Tileston, *My Utmost for His Highest* by Chambers, *The Runner's Bible* by Nora S. Holm, *The Upper Room*, *Victorious Living* and *Abundant Living* by E. Stanley Jones, *Handles of Power* by Lewis L. Dunnington, *I Will Lift up Mine Eyes* by Glenn Clark, *The Meaning of Prayer* by Harry Emerson Fosdick. And probably the highly recommended Oxford Group pamphlets: *How to Find Reality in Your Morning Devotions* by Donald W. Carruthers, *The Guidance of God* by Eleanor Napier Forde, and *The Quiet Time* by Howard J. Rose.

Books on Prayer

Dr. Bob was intensely interested in the efficacy of prayer, and his library bespeaks this interest. Among his many books about the subject of prayer were Glenn Clark's *The Soul's Sincere Desire*, Starr Daily's *Recovery*, Mary Baker Eddy's *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, Charles and Cora Filmore's *Teach Us to Pray*, Emmet Fox's *Getting Results by Prayer*, Gerald Heard's *A Preface to Prayer*, Frank Laubach's *Prayer (Mightiest Force in the World)*, Charles M. Layman's *A Primer of Prayer*, William R. Parker's *Prayer Can Change Your Life*, and F. L. Rawson's *The Nature of True Prayer*.

Books on Healing

There is no doubt that Dr. Bob and his wife relied on the healing power of God. That fact is adequately reported in A.A.'s own histories. But the collection of their books, and the remarks in Anne Smith's Journal show that they owned and read the following: *Christian Healing* by Charles Filmore, *Healing in Jesus Name* by Ethel R. Willitts, and *Heal the Sick* by James Moore Hickson.

The Sermon on the Mount

Dr. Bob's interest in Jesus's sermon was exemplified not only by the many times he studied and quoted it, but also by the foregoing books as well as the following specific studies of the Sermon on the Mount: *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* by Oswald Chambers, *The Christ of the Mount* by E. Stanley Jones, *The Sermon on the Mount* by Emmet Fox, and *The Soul's Sincere Desire* and *I Will Lift Up Mine Eyes* by Glenn Clark.

Love

Anne Smith devoted four pages of her spiritual journal to Toyohiko Kagawa's treatise on love, titled, *Love: The Law of Life*. Dr. Bob often recommended Henry Drummond's *The Greatest Thing in the World*—a study of the famous love chapter in the Bible, 1 Corinthians 13. Anne often quoted 1 John 4:8—“God is love;” and Dr. Bob frequently spoke of God as a God of love. He summarized A.A.'s ideas as being, in their essence, “love and service.”

The Oxford Group

Dr. Shoemaker's books of the 1920's and 1930's were, of course, Oxford Group books, but the author found in the possession of Dr. Bob's family the following books written by other Oxford Group people: *For Sinner's Only* by A. J. Russell, *He That Cometh* by Geoffrey Allen, *Soul Surgery* by Howard A. Walter, *What is The Oxford Group?* by the Layman with a Notebook, *Life Changers* by Harold Begbie, *Twice Born Men* by Harold Begbie (written before the Group was formed), *New Lives for Old* by Amelia Reynolds, and *One Thing I Know* by A. J. Russell. Anne Smith recommended some of these as life-changing stories. Also some of the Shoemaker titles written for that purpose. It seems apparent from Dr. Bob's remarks about the immense amount of Oxford Group literature he had read and the immense amount of reading he did that his Oxford Group reading included many more than the foregoing titles.

Samuel M. Shoemaker, Jr.

Moreover, one could not, as Dr. Bob said, claim he had read an immense amount of Oxford Group literature, without having read many Shoemaker books. Shoemaker was the most prolific Oxford Group writer, was in touch with Oxford Group people in Akron, and was a close friend of Bill Wilson's. Therefore, though the following were the Shoemaker books the author found in possession of Dr. Bob's family, there must have been many others: *Children of the Second Birth*, *Confident Faith*, *If I Be Lifted Up*, *The Conversion of the Church*, *Twice-Born Ministers*, and *One Boy's Influence*. There were also popular Shoemaker pamphlets, titled *Three Levels of Life* and *What If I Had but One Sermon to Preach?*

Quiet Time Books

Dr. Bob and Anne, and even Bill and Lois Wilson practiced Quiet Time. And the Smiths were well versed in a number of books on the subject. Some were previously mentioned. The following were also popular: *When Man Listens* by Cecil Rose, *God Does Guide Us* by W. E. Sangster; *The God Who Speaks* by B. H. Streeter; *How Do I Begin?* by Hallen Viney; and *When I Awake* by Jack C. Winslow.

William James and Carl Jung

Bill, Bob, and many early A.A.'s read Professor William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (cited by name in A.A.'s Big Book) and Dr. Carl Gustav Jung's *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*. Jung was later called a “founder” of A.A. as was William James.

Other Spiritual Source Books

We will cover our bibliographies in a moment. But here there should be a list of some particularly popular spiritual books early AAs read and which were read by Dr. Bob as well: James Allen's *As A Man Thinketh*; Glenn Clark's *Fishers of Men, Two or Three Gathered Together, How to Find Health Through Prayer, and Touchdowns for the Lord*; Harry Emerson Fosdick's *The Meaning of Service, The Meaning of Faith, As I See Religion, On Being a Real Person, and A Great Time to be Alive*; Emmet Fox's *Find and Use Your Inner Power, Power Through Constructive Thinking, Alter Your Life, You Must be Born Again, The Great Adventure, and Your Heart's Desire*; the many E. Stanley Jones books; Charles M. Sheldon's *In His Steps*; *In Tune with the Infinite* by Ralph Waldo Trine; *Psychology of a Christian Personality* by Ernest M. Ligon; and *Religion Says You Can* by Dilworth Lupton.

Bibliographies

It is not fruitful here to list every book that early AAs read, particularly the Oxford Group and Shoemaker books. But the bibliographies in the following books by Dick B. will provide complete data on all the books believed to have been available and read: (1) *Dr. Bob and His Library*; (2) *The Akron Genesis of Alcoholics Anonymous*; (3) *The Oxford Group & Alcoholics Anonymous*; (4) *New Light on Alcoholism: God, Sam Shoemaker, and A.A.*; (5) *Good Morning!: Quiet Time, Morning Watch, Meditation and Early A.A.*; (6) *Turning Point: A History of Early A.A.'s Spiritual Roots and Successes*; and the most complete and up-to-date is (7) *The Books Early AAs Read for Spiritual Growth*, 7th Edition.

What Oldtimers Said

Some books and pamphlets were very frequently mentioned by A.A.'s pioneers. They were: the Bible, *The Upper Room*, *My Utmost for His Highest*, *The Runner's Bible*, the Glenn Clark books, the E. Stanley Jones books, James Allen's *As a Man Thinketh*, Henry Drummond's *The Greatest Thing in the World*, the Emmet Fox books, Harold Begbie's books, two Lewis Browne books, William James, Carl Jung, the Oxford Group literature, and Sam Shoemaker's books.

These are mentioned in A.A. histories. And they were mentioned in pamphlets and bulletins put out by A.A. offices and groups. They were also mentioned by many of the surviving families and pioneers the author interviewed.

What Did the Literature Contribute?

Many of the core ideas that AAs adopted were ideas that were covered in depth by many different books and materials they read.

Materials about Finding God

AAs were told by Sam Shoemaker, by the Oxford Group, and by their own literature that they needed to find God—and find Him now! Sam Shoemaker wrote on this topic a great deal. So did Leslie D. Weatherhead in books that Bill Wilson owned or may have owned. So did the other writers.

Materials Defining a Spiritual Experience and Awakening

Throughout Bill Wilson's leadership in A.A., he talked much of his famous “hot flash” experience. He pointed to William James's book *The Varieties of Religious Experience* as a validation of what had occurred to him. It is fair to say that neither Dr. Bob nor most AAs ever had anything like Bill's experience. But their reading did define for them what it meant to be converted, to have a conversion experience, to experience the presence of God, and so on.

Understanding God

Shoemaker said you could understand and know God by following Jesus Christ's suggestion in John 7:17—by conducting an “experiment of faith.” Once AAs abandoned the Bible, the discussions of the Creator, and their reliance on coming to God through His Son, they began to lose understanding of God. They began talking of a higher power which could be a group, a lightbulb, a door knob, a chair, and nonsense which could not be found in early A.A. nor in the literature early AAs read.

Knowing God's Will

If early AAs wanted to know God's instructions on faith, believing, prayer, study of His Word, forgiveness, healing, deliverance, love, restitution, service, resentment, fear, selfishness, dishonesty, their literature was replete with road maps to pertinent sections of the Bible and teachings about these things.

Moral Standards

Early A.A. was not about “relationships anonymous.” Whether they read the Bible, the Ten Commandments, or the Four Absolutes, AAs were given much instruction on how to behave in accordance with God's will. This is true today in only a very limited way.

Quiet Time and Meditation

Early AAs were the recipients of specific information on the biblical origins of Quiet Time on what Quiet Time was, and on how to practice it through Bible study, helpful books, prayer, listening, checking, and so on. Lacking that information today, AAs have been subjected to a barrage of “meditation” and “reflection” materials by writers who have put new spins, new time-saving squibs, and a wide variety of private interpretation on what had originally been understood as a substantial period of communion with God.

Life-Changing

To this very day, A.A.'s basic text speaks of the alcoholic's need to *change*. Early AAs were given specifics on what they were to *change from*, where to obtain the *power to change*, and what they were to *change to*.

Techniques for Effective Witness

There was no shortage of specific information in early A.A. as to *what the message was*, *how to carry it*, and *what to do with the newcomer*. If they simply looked to the Book of Acts and the commentaries about it, they were well supplied. Anne Smith so suggested.

The Importance of Fellowship

Though they may not realize it today, AAs received a rich body of instruction concerning the body of Christ, from the Book of Acts and the many Christian materials they read. They learned the intended meaning of the fellowship of the Spirit, and how God worked with His children where two or three were gathered together.

The foregoing are just a few of the topics covered in the hundreds of books, devotionals, pamphlets, and articles available for the taking by early AAs.