

[Article Eighteen]

The Oxford Group and Alcoholics Anonymous

By Dick B.

Part Three

Understanding our Fellowship, Big Book, and Twelve Steps as Dr. Bob Understood Them When Bill and Dr. Bob Developed Them in Akron

I have said and written many times—just as did Bill Wilson—that nobody invented Alcoholics Anonymous, nor did its principles and practices come from just one source. There are those who believe almost all our principles and practices came from the Oxford Group. But that is not so. Nor did either Dr. Bob or Bill say so. Nor did the two founders argue or dispute over the diverse sources—Bible, Quiet Time, Shoemaker’s teachings, Anne Smith’s Journal, the Oxford Group life-changing program, and the Christian literature of all sorts that early AAs read.. Each co-founder, however, did ultimately stress certain of the several sources.

Thus, Bill Wilson said of ten of the Twelve Steps: “The spiritual substance of our remaining ten Steps came straight from Dr. Bob’s and my own earlier association with the Oxford Groups, as they were then led in America by that Episcopal rector, Dr. Samuel Shoemaker” (See *The Language of the Heart*, p. 298; Dick B., *New Light on Alcoholism*, 2d ed., p. 6). The facts bear out Wilson’s assertion.

Note, however, that Bill was speaking *only of ten of the Twelve Steps*. He was not discussing the A.A. Fellowship, nor his own Big Book, nor the A.A. slogans, nor the *source* of the Oxford Group principles, which came straight from the Bible (See Rev. Sherwood Sunderland Day, *The Principles of the Group*, p. 1: “The principles of ‘The Oxford Group’ are the principles of the Bible”).

And here is what Dr. Bob said about the source of the A.A. *Program*. He was not discussing the A.A. Fellowship, nor Bill’s Big Book, nor the source of the Oxford Group principles. He was discussing where the basic ideas for the Twelve Steps came from. Dr. Bob said:

When we started in on Bill D., we had no Twelve Steps. . . . But we were convinced that the answer to our problems was in the Good Book (See *The Co-Founders of Alcoholics Anonymous*, pp. 9-10; Dick B., *The Good Book and The Big Book*, p. 19).

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 a result of our study of the Good Book (See *DR. BOB and the Good Oldtimers*, p. 96; Dick B., *The Good Book and The Big Book*, p. 4).

Before we undertake this further study of the Oxford Group principles that found their way into A.A.

(And they are numerous!), we need to realize—from our Founders’ statements: (1) Bill said the *spiritual substance* of ten of the *Twelve Steps* came from the Oxford Group. (2) The Oxford Group said (and their writers bear this out) that its principles came from the Bible. (3) Dr. Bob said the *basic ideas* in the *Twelve Steps* were the result of the pioneers’ *study of the Bible*. (4) Early Akron A.A. was a Christian Fellowship; likened in part to “an old fashioned prayer meeting;” and brought alcoholics to Jesus Christ through *surrenders, Bible study, prayer, practicing the principles of the Bible, and seeking God’s guidance* (See Dick B., *Why Early A.A. Succeeded*).

Oxford Group Parallels Bill Adopted in A.A.’s Writings and Steps

In this study, we will be talking about the remarkable instances where the language Bill Wilson used in his Big Book, in the Twelve Steps, in his talks, and in the slogans very closely resembles language used by a host of Oxford Group writers in a host of Oxford Group writings (See, for example, Dick B., *The Oxford Group and Alcoholics Anonymous*, 2d ed., pp. 341-64—giving 187 specific illustrations; *New Light on Alcoholism: God, Sam Shoemaker, and A.A.*, 2d ed., pp 153-70—giving 149 specific illustrations). We can’t begin to repeat them all or to claim the foregoing titles contain them all. But this first study will give you some to think about:

As to the First Step:

“It [sin] makes a gap between myself and the Ideal which I am powerless to bridge. . . Only God, therefore can deal with sin. He must contrive to do for us what we have lost the power to do for ourselves” (Shoemaker, *If I Be Lifted Up*, pp. 131, 133).

“Oh God manage me because I can’t manage myself” (Russell, *For Sinners Only*, p. 79; Howard, *Frank Buchman’s Secret*, pp. 41-44; Harris, *The Breeze of the Spirit*, p. 10).

As to the Second Step:

“Security lies in a faith in God which includes an experiment. It lies in believing that God is” (Shoemaker, *National Awakening*, pp. 40-41).

“Willingness to believe” (Brown, *The Venture of Belief*, p. 26).

“When we come to believe in God at all, we come to believe in Him as having something definite to say about our lives. To believe in the fact of the will of God is only to believe in God in the concrete” (Shoemaker, *Religion That Works*, p. 55).

“A vast Power outside themselves” (Shoemaker, *A Young Man’s View of the Ministry*, p. 42).

“A Force outside himself, greater than himself” (Shoemaker, *If I Be Lifted Up*, p. 176; Kitchen, *I Was a Pagan*, pp. 63, 78).

As to the Turning Point:

“You need to find God” (Shoemaker, *Realizing Religion*, p. 9).

“We must surrender our wills to a greater Will, and that will set us free” (Foot, *Life Began Yesterday*, p. 35).

“The crisis of self-surrender has always been and must always be regarded as the vital turning point of the religious life” (Shoemaker, *Realizing Religion*, p. 9; Begbie, *Life Changers*, p. 126).

“He made a decision to surrender to God” (Foot, *Life Began Yesterday*, p. 30).

“Let go! Abandon yourself to Him. Say to Him, ‘Not my will but Thine be done’” (Shoemaker, *Religion That Works*, p. 19).

As to the Third Step:

“The decision to cast my will and my life on God” (Shoemaker, *Twice-Born Ministers*, p. 134).

“Opening their minds to as much of God as he understood, removing first the hindrance of self-will” (Shoemaker, *Children of the Second Birth*, p. 47).

“That is what the Oxford Group is working for, changed lives, God-centered in place of self-centered” (Foot, *Life Began Yesterday*, p. 47).

“For most men, the world is centered in self, which is misery” (Shoemaker, *Realizing Religion*, p. 11).

“I surrender Thee my entire life, O God. I have made a mess of it, trying to run it myself. You take it—the whole thing—and run it for me, according to Your will and plan” (Kitchen, *I Was a Pagan*, p. 67).

“The first action is mental action, it is a decision of the will to make a decision—one decides that one has not controlled one’s life particularly well hitherto, and therefore it had better be put under new management” (Foot, *Life Began Yesterday*, p. 10).

That’s All—For now!

As Bugs Bunny used to tell us: “That’s all, folks!” But there’s more to come—more Steps, more quotes, more parallels. But this should be enough to whet your appetite. Perhaps now you see why I am so anxious to get into public access and view the 23,900 item historical collection assembled in my 11 years of research. Treat yourself to the actual reading of *For Sinners Only*, *Life Began Yesterday*, *I Was a Pagan*, *Children of the Second Birth*, and *Realizing Religion*. See our new title, *Making Known the Biblical Roots of Alcoholics Anonymous* (a complete summary of all 23, 900 items—books, articles, tapes, videos, papers, etc.). Some can now be seen at The Wilson House. Some at Dr. Bob’s church (St. Paul’s) in Akron. Most still here on Maui. More to be placed when benefactors are located. See <http://www.dickb.com/index.shtml> for more details.