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## **A Review of Earliest A.A.'s Roots**

### **The A.A. of Today Is Not the A.A. of Yesteryear**

**by Dick B.**

Alcoholics Anonymous is celebrating its 66<sup>th</sup> year. As it does so, many of us who have been delivered and have recovered look back to its earliest principles and practices. I remember, with great thankfulness to Almighty God for His deliverance, healing, forgiveness, and abundant kindness. I also recall my experiences in the A.A. Fellowship with much gratitude for its warmth, friendship, succor, challenge to change, and its emphasis on love of, and service to God and others. At age 76, I can see I have a new life because I chose many years back to give up drinking and seek a new way of life, beginning with membership in A.A.

But A.A. has changed. The AA of today is not the AA of yesteryear. It is not just a matter of the passage of time, change of social conditions, and diversity of members. From my experience in sponsoring many men in recovery, the alcoholic/addict of today is just as screwed up as I was. He probably became so a great deal sooner and in a much more dangerous way. But alcoholism is still a terrible, destructive, malady. And the early AAs, particularly the forty pioneers focused primarily around the work of Dr. Bob and the A.A. members in Akron. And they found a way to rely on the Creator and achieve astonishing successes. So why not look to what they really did in those days, long long before A.A. itself found its growth at a standstill, its success rate plummeting, and its own status that of a confused puzzle. For there are many new questions.

Was or is A.A. religious or spiritual? Did or does A.A. rely upon God Almighty or upon some other god or gods, often called "higher power," "lightbulb," "tree," "something," "it," or a "radiator?" Did or does A.A. encourage a return to religion or has religion become a whipping boy? Did or do A.A.'s still study the Bible, Bible devotionals, and religious literature and observe a Quiet Time? Or has the focus shifted to some undefined meditation and study of A.A.'s own "Conference Approved" literature? Did or does A.A. stress God, the Bible, the accomplishments of Jesus Christ, or do these subjects evoke criticism in today's A.A. literature and meetings? There are many more identity questions. And they have divided A.A. today into what one astute scholar has called "authentic A.A." A.A. and the others "pseudo A.A." Even more significantly, the questions have resulted in shoving A.A. into public controversy, into the courts, and into spawning outside groups of atheists, Christians, Christ-centered fellowships, and just plain church!

Let's look at A.A.'s roots. Roots that have been ignored, unknown, compromised, and criticized. Surely a program that originally was to grip a nation and its medical and religious community should be known in detailed form for what it said and did and practiced.

Very simply, A.A. was based on the Bible. Its co-founder Dr. Bob said A.A. took its basic ideas

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from study of what he and others called “the Good Book.” Both Bill W. and Dr. Bob, as co-founders, frequently said that the sermon on the mount (Matthew 5 to 7) contained the underlying philosophy of A.A. Dr. Bob pointed to Jesus’ sermon, 1 Corinthians 13, and the Book of James as being absolutely essential to the solution of their problems. The Oxford Group, of which A.A. was an integral part in its developing years, espoused principles which it said were the principles of the Bible. Its founder Dr. Frank Buchman was said to be “soaked in the Bible.” Its principal American writer and spokesman on the East Coast, Dr. Samuel Shoemaker, Jr., was called a “Bible Christian.” And both these men, and their ideas, impacted directly on the A.A. Fellowship, on its Big Book, on the Twelve Steps, and on the very language AAs use to this day.

Let’s look further at A.A.’s Good Book roots. First, A.A.’s basic text is filled with words and phrases from the Bible. There are references to faith without works (e.g., James 2:17, 20, 26); Thy Will be done (e.g., Matthew 6:10), Love thy neighbor as thyself (throughout Old and New Testament books); and to God, Creator, Maker, Father, Spirit, and Father of Light. There are more. Each Step was based upon or taken specifically from a biblical idea (sometimes several different ideas). Step One involved Romans 7:24-25. Step Two involved John 7:17. Step Three involved Matthew 6:20. Step Four involved Matthew 7:1-5; Step Five involved James 5:16. Step Six, though complex, involved a number of Bible ideas dealing with “conviction.” Step Seven, James 4:10. Step Eight, Matthew 5:25. Step Nine, Matthew 5:23-24. Step Ten, Matthew 26:41; Step Eleven, Psalm 5:3, James 1:5, Proverbs 3:5-6; 2 Timothy 2:25, Matthew 6:25-33; and Step Twelve, Acts 1:8, Acts 26:22-32, and all of the verses involved in the Oxford Group “four absolutes”—honesty, purity, unselfishness, and love. Even, A.A.’s well-known slogans came mostly from the Bible. The details and documentation can be found in my title, *The Good Book and The Big Book*.

Other biblical sources played their part. These are: (1) Quiet Time and the daily devotionals such as *The Upper Room*. (2) The teachings of Rev. Sam Shoemaker, Jr. (3) The life-changing principles and practices of the Oxford Group. (4) The contents of the spiritual journal [1933-1939] that Dr. Bob’s wife Anne Smith shared almost daily with pioneers and their families. (5) The religious literature they read so often such as Drummond’s *The Greatest Thing in the World*, Allen’s *As a Man Thinketh*, Fox’s *The Sermon on the Mount*, Holm’s *The Runner’s Bible*, and many Glenn Clark and E. Stanley Jones books. These are discussed and documented in my title, *Turning Point*.

So what’s the point? What’s the profit of review early A.A. history? First and foremost, the early AAs believed in and relied upon God. They came to *understand* God by studying His Word, which they called the Good Book. Early AAs stressed doing the will of God. They found most of God’s will laid out in the Bible in such places as the Ten Commandments, Jesus’ two Great commandments (Matthew 22:36-40), and so many of the other expressions of God’s will for man (e.g., 1 Timothy 2:4). They needed to know how to pray; and they took their most widely used prayer from Jesus’ sermon (Matthew 6:9-13, sometimes called the “Lord’s Prayer”). They needed to know how to pray for and help others, and they took their cue from James 5:13-16. They needed to know about asking for God’s guidance; and they looked to many verses including James 1:5-8.

They needed to know about God’s principles for living, which the Oxford Group had distilled from the teachings of Jesus. And they needed to check their conduct against these principles. In fact, Jesus taught that God’s Word is truth. So they looked to the Bible for truth about the foregoing and about how to be delivered, healed, forgiven, and have the abundant life that Jesus promised (John

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10:10).

And of what did their basic program consist? They had the Bible, and they had the Oxford Group principles. These they studied and incorporated into their very simple spiritual program of recovery. They usually hospitalized the newcomer, shared their victories with him, left him with only a Bible for reading, and had him surrender to God before he was discharged, after only a few days of hospitalization. They usually handed him a copy of *The Upper Room*. They introduced him to others. He was counseled by Dr. Bob and by Anne. Each morning, he attended Quiet Times with Bible study, prayer, and requests for God's guidance in morning meetings at the Smith Home. These were led by Anne Smith (who shared ideas from her spiritual journal). They had other meetings each day. And they had a regular Oxford Group meeting each week. They were encouraged to attend church and have religious affiliations. Quiet Time was a "must." The Bible was stressed for reading. They opened their meetings with prayer, then read Scripture, then had discussions on how to live according to biblical principles, then surrendered if they had not already done so, were informed about newcomers needing help, then closed with the Lord's Prayer, and fellowshiped with each other. They observed some basic Oxford Group life-changing practices, known as the Five C's, usually with Dr. Bob. And they often stayed in the homes of Dr. Bob and Anne (and several others in the Akron area) until they were well enough to sally forth.

Many of the pioneers stayed sober for years and until their deaths. We know their sobriety dates and names. The photos of many hang on the wall of Dr. Bob's home in Akron. And there are rosters of members in Akron and in Cleveland, where a 93% success rate was recorded and where the fellowship grew in one year from one group to thirty. Names and addresses are listed.

Are these facts relevant today? Clarence Snyder mentioned all of them in his years and years of sobriety in A.A. and at the retreats he conducted. For those of us puzzled by the confusing terms such as "spiritual" and "higher power" and "acceptance," they are. For those of us who want to rely upon the power of God and get the same results early AAs did, these facts are quite relevant. For those of us who want better to understand the words and phrases in the basic A.A. text, they are. For those of us who don't want to be intimidated in meetings when we mention God, the Bible, Jesus Christ, and church, they are. For those of us who just want to know the whole story, the full score, the unedited and uncompromised ideas of the A.A. pioneers, they are. For those of us who do not want to go elsewhere, they are. And the 66<sup>th</sup> year is as good as any to start reviewing the facts.

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