
The Early Akron Recommended Reading List:

The Works It Contained and Their Significance

for Understanding Early Akron A.A.

Glenn C. (South Bend, Indiana)

PART ONE:

A pamphlet entitled *A Manual for Alcoholics Anonymous*, often referred to as the Akron Manual, was written and published by early Akron A.A. at a very early period, as an introductory booklet to hand to newcomers when they began the detoxification process. [Note 1] Based on things that are mentioned in the Manual, it was most probably put together during the summer or fall of 1939, and certainly no later than 1940. A copy of it can be found at <http://hindsfoot.org/AkrMan1.html> (the first half) and <http://hindsfoot.org/AkrMan2.html> (the second half) on the Hindsfoot Foundation website (<http://hindsfoot.org>). So this small pamphlet is an extraordinarily valuable document. It is a little window opening into the world of early Akron A.A. shortly after the Big Book first started coming off the press.

~~~~~

At the very end of the Akron Manual it says "the following literature has helped many members of Alcoholics Anonymous," and then it gives a list of ten works as a kind of recommended reading list:

*Alcoholics Anonymous* (Works Publishing Company).

The Holy Bible

*The Greatest Thing in the World*, Henry Drummond.

*The Unchanging Friend*, a series (Bruce Publishing Co., Milwaukee).

*As a Man Thinketh*, James Allen.

*The Sermon on the Mount*, Emmet Fox (Harper Bros.).

*The Self You Have to Live With*, Winfred Rhoades.

*Psychology of Christian Personality*, Ernest M. Ligon (Macmillan Co.).

*Abundant Living*, E. Stanley Jones.

*The Man Nobody Knows*, Bruce Barton."

~~~~~

THE BIBLE was the second item on the list, right behind the Big Book. But earlier in the pamphlet it was made clear that there were certain places in the Bible that they wanted the newcomers to especially focus on: the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7, the letter of James, 1 Corinthians 13, and Psalms 23 and 91. This was a typical early twentieth-century Protestant liberal selection of passages to emphasize, but they were also especially useful for A.A. purposes because none of them required the newcomer to believe in the divinity of Christ or that salvation could only be found by praying to Jesus.

~~~~~

EMMET FOX, *The Sermon on the Mount*, is still well known to A.A. people today. He was a major representative of an American religious movement called New Thought, which was connected to, but also different from, Mary Baker Eddy's Christian Science movement. Among present-day American religious denominations, Unity Church is the largest group using that basic kind of approach. Emmet Fox's position was strongly Christian in its orientation, although the kind of Protestantism he represented was clearly in the liberal camp.

Please note that nineteenth and early twentieth-century New Thought was most definitely NOT the same as "New Age," which was a late twentieth-century movement involving claims that its practitioners were able to do spirit channeling and use the mystical properties of crystals, and things of that sort. New Age sometimes include beliefs drawn from Wicca -- that is, ancient witchcraft -- and other unconventional religious ideas. Or to put it another way, *New Thought* was fundamentally Christian in its orientation, whereas *New Age* is for the most part extremely hostile to Christianity.

~~~~~

JAMES ALLEN, *As a Man Thinketh* (34 pages long). He published his book in 1908 or a little before. I would also put his ideas in the same general category as New Thought, even though he was English. He may or may not have read any of the American authors in the general New Thought genre, which is why I hesitate to call him "New Thought" in the narrow sense of the term.

~~~~~

HENRY DRUMMOND, *The Greatest Thing in the World* (45 pages long). His book was a beautiful commentary on 1 Corinthians 13. He was closely associated with Dwight L. Moody in the 1870's, so we might describe him as one of the best examples of the richness and depth of thought which we can find in some parts of the nineteenth century evangelistic movement.

Drummond was a Scotsman, who was Professor of Natural Science at the College of the Free Church of Scotland, and had written a book (famous in his lifetime but forgotten

today) called *Natural Law in the Spiritual World*, which was an attempt to make peace between science and religion. This is important, because early A.A. had no sympathy whatsoever with religious people who were completely anti-scientific in their attitudes and who tried to deal with modern science by rejecting its findings. Early A.A. realized that there was a spiritual dimension of reality which went beyond anything which the scientific method could investigate, but they also realized that the profound discoveries of modern science could neither be denied nor neglected.

The modern evangelical movement, at its beginnings in the 1730's and 40's, had an enormously respectful attitude toward the new science. Both Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley, the movement's two greatest theologians, were deeply interested in Newtonian physics, the new biological discoveries, modern medicine, electricity, and modern psychology. The evangelical movement remained positive in its attitude to modern science down through most of the nineteenth century, as we see in Henry Drummond. But then the Fundamentalist movement, with its often negative attitude toward modern science, began developing in a series of events which took place in 1895-1919. [Note 2]

~~~~~

E. STANLEY JONES, *Abundant Living* (first came out in 1942, 156 pages long). Chapter 6-10 is one of the best discussions of prayer that I have ever read. He ends up that section with a discussion of guidance and entering the Divine Silence. If Richmond Walker did not read this book, he read something in that tradition (there were similar kinds of material in *The Upper Room* for example). At any rate, this book helps enormously in understanding more of what Walker was doing in his selection and modification, in the fine print sections of *Twenty-Four Hours a Day*, of various passages from *God Calling* by Two Listeners.

Chapter 6 of E. Stanley Jones' book begins with a section on "Prayer is Surrender," and Chapter 8 is entitled "The Morning Quiet Time." Jones gives a good deal of detail on what we are supposed to be doing during this Morning Quiet Time, including talking about the role of the subconscious in the process, how to deal with the problem of "wandering thoughts," and what to do when we are confronted with what the medieval tradition called aridity (where it doesn't "feel" like we are in real contact with God, and where we have extraordinary difficulty forcing ourselves to pray at all). On both of these latter issues, I suspect that he as a Methodist had read John Wesley's *Standard Sermons*, including especially Wesley's sermons on "Wandering Thoughts" and "Heaviness through Manifold Temptations."

John Wesley in the 1740's was one of the two major theoreticians of the modern evangelical movement during its beginning years. He was an Anglican priest who taught theology and classics at Oxford University in England for a number of years, but ended up becoming a traveling revival preacher who founded the Methodist movement. His work was thoroughly scripturally grounded - - he knew the New Testament by heart in the original Greek, and knew not only Old Testament Hebrew, but also several other ancient Semitic languages. Yet he and Jonathan Edwards (the other major formative

evangelical thinker of the 1730's and 40's) both made skillful use of the work of the seventeenth-century British empiricist John Locke, who invented modern psychology, and both of them knew that a knowledge of psychology was necessary for understanding how to preach the gospel effectively and produce real moral change in people's lives. It is totally incorrect to believe that good evangelical theology and modern psychology are opposed to one another. What gave the evangelical movement so much power during its early period was its use of the best psychology of its period.

John Locke had discovered not only the basic principles of behavioral psychology and operant conditioning, but had also discovered the way early childhood traumas could continue to influence adult behavior in negative ways. And he also made the first serious studies of the profoundly psychologically disturbed who were confined in insane asylums and discovered "the inner logic of insanity" which affected these people.

Wesley, who knew Locke's work forwards and backwards, was the first person I have read in the modern period who used the term "psychotherapy" - - though of course as a teacher of classics at Oxford University, it was used by him in the original Greek form as *psyches therapeia* (!!!) Wesley said that good psychotherapy (which meant "the healing of the soul") was what true scriptural Christianity was actually about. And although he did not use the word subconscious, he anticipated Sigmund Freud by over a century in his understanding of the distinction between conscious thought and the subconscious layer underneath which creates so many of our spiritual problems. And like Freud he realized that this subconscious material came out in both free association and dreams.

Around fifty years ago, Protestant seminaries all over the country began putting people on their faculties with professional degrees in psychology and psychotherapy to teach counseling techniques to their students. I had to pass an exam in psychotherapy and counseling to obtain my degree from the seminary at Southern Methodist University, and that was back in 1964. The best books and articles on practical psychology today are being published by conservative evangelical theologians, who seem to have a better understanding of what is important. But most Christian pastors in the United States today know that there *is no conflict* between good spirituality and good psychotherapy.

~~~~~

BRUCE BARTON, *The Man Nobody Knows: A Discovery of the Real Jesus* (235 pages long, copyright 1924, 1925). Some of his images -- Jesus as successful modern American businessman and corporate executive taking charge of the situation!! -- are amusing, and would be easy to ridicule and make fun of, but the presence of this book on the Akron List is nevertheless important. It helps to establish something I have already argued in earlier pieces that I have written, namely that the "center of gravity" within A.A. in its earliest stages (the center of the bell-shaped distribution curve) lay for the most part with the kind of classical Protestant liberalism which we see in Adolf Harnack's *What Is Christianity?*, Horace Bushnell's *Christian Nurture* (he was a New England Congregationalist), and the meditational book (produced by the Southern Methodists) called the *Upper Room*.

Barton was particularly following the spirit of the enormously influential Harnack [Note 3] in tossing aside most of the traditional complex doctrines of the Trinity, the Chalcedonian Definition of the union of the divine and human in Christ, the substitutionary doctrine of the atonement, and so on, and concentrating on producing a very human picture of Jesus as a real live human being with a teaching which was very simple but which also provided the key to living a truly good life. If Barton mentions a traditional Christian doctrine about Christ's person and work -- for example, the "divinity" of his mission -- he tries to explain it, not in terms of ancient Greek and medieval Catholic philosophy and metaphysics, but as a kind of extension of rather commonplace things that would make sense to an everyday American (in this case, total conviction about the sacredness of his mission). In other words, Barton was enthusiastically doing (from his own businessman's perspective) exactly what Harnack said that we should do.

And Barton also helped to make it clear to early A.A.'s that they were not to seek an other-worldly spirituality where they walked around two feet off the ground with their hands folded piously in front of them and tried to achieve the perfection of a plaster saint gazing soulfully upwards towards heaven. They were to seek a kind of spirituality which gave them the ability to take action, even forceful action if necessary, and learn how to deal with the real world on real world terms -- but nevertheless not falling prey to petty vengefulness, trying to over-control, exploding in out-of-control rage, or other counterproductive kinds of responses. A good A.A. sponsor sometimes bluntly gives orders to his or her pigeon, and Barton's book explains the spiritual foundation of this.

~~~~~

ERNEST M. LIGON, *The Psychology of Christian Personality* (1935, in its 18th printing by 1950, 407 pages long). In this book, Ligon analyzed the Sermon on the Mount and its relationship to modern psychology. Ligon was deeply influenced by the Neo-Freudians: the goal was to fully "integrate" the personality, and deal with problems in the individual's socialization, and so on. In the bibliography at the back of his book, he mentioned two books by the Austrian psychiatrist Alfred Adler (1870-1937), but one can see the influence of other Neo-Freudian psychiatrists as well. F. H. Allport's *Social Psychology* was also listed in his bibliography (he was the brother of the psychologist Gordon W. Allport). The citing of this fundamental work on social psychology indicated the special importance of social factors in Ligon's psychological thought.

The term Neo-Freudian refers to a group of psychiatrists including Alfred Adler, Karen Horney, Harry Stack Sullivan, Eric Fromm, and Erik Erikson. Carl Jung is sometimes also included in this group, but his ideas had no role in Ligon's thought. The Neo-Freudians whom we are talking about here modified orthodox Freudian doctrine by talking about the importance of other issues such as social factors, interpersonal relations, and cultural influences in personality development and in the development of psychological illnesses and disorders. They believed that social relationships were fundamental to the formation and development of personality. They tended to reject Freud's emphasis on sexual problems as the cause of neurosis, and were more apt to

regard fundamental human psychological problems as psychosocial rather than psychosexual.

The two great dangers to spiritual and psychological health, Ligon said, were inappropriate (1) anger and (2) fear - - the same basic position as the Big Book. He defined what was meant by the "natural instincts" in ways closely similar to the chapter on the Fourth Step in *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*. My feeling here is that Bill W. must have either read this book, or read somebody closely similar, or picked up some of Ligon's ideas from talking to people who had read this book.

Ligon came from Texas and did his B.A. and M.A. at Texas Christian University, which is connected with the Disciples of Christ (Christian Church). He did both a graduate seminary degree (a B.D., normally a three-year program) and a Ph.D. in psychology at Yale, so he had an excellent grounding in both theology and psychology. At the time he was writing this book, he had links to Westminster Presbyterian Church in Albany, New York. But he knew things about John Wesley which normally only a Methodist would know about, so it is not totally clear what his religious background was: Disciples of Christ? Presbyterian? Methodist? It was clearly a Protestant background of some sort.

The crucial thing at any rate is that he had his graduate theological training at Yale, so that he would have been trained in the best Protestant theology and biblical studies of that period. So Ligon accepts modern biblical criticism to some degree -- not all the sayings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount were genuine words of Jesus, he says, or may not have originally been stated verbatim in those exact words -- but as far as I can see so far, Ligon went no further than most classical Protestant liberals of that period, including Harnack. [Note 4]

Like Emmet Fox, he was most definitely NOT part of what is called the Fundamentalist movement. This is important, because the Fundamentalist movement had gotten started in the United States at the beginning of the early twentieth century, and even though it still had relatively little influence during the 1930's, it could in theory have been an influence on early A.A., just in terms of the time frame. Nevertheless, Fundamentalism seems to have had little if any effect on early A.A. as far as I can see from my own researches. I have found no A.A. writings from the early period arguing for the verbal inerrancy of scripture or defending the doctrine of the Virgin Birth or the physical resurrection of Jesus, or any other of the "Christian Fundamentals" which this movement was dedicated to defending.

On the other hand, Ligon was NOT a representative of the sometimes almost insane world of the later radical Bultmannian form critics who began "demythologizing" the New Testament and ultimately denying that Jesus said much of anything at all that he is credited with having said. By the 1960's, this kind of radical scholarship began taking over many of the Protestant seminaries, and some of their more notoriety-seeking leaders still enjoy getting their names and ideas into the newspapers and magazines so they can scandalize the pious. To repeat, this kind of silliness is not what Ligon was doing at all.

Probably the most important thing to note about the inclusion of Ligon's book on *The Psychology of Christian Personality* in the Akron list of recommended books, is that the notion that early Akron A.A. was totally hostile to talking about the psychological aspects of the twelve step program is simply a myth. When Dr. Bob spoke to the A.A. First International Convention in Cleveland in 1950, just a few months before he died, what he actually said was:

"There are two or three things that flashed into my mind One is the simplicity of our program. Let's not louse it all up with Freudian complexes and things that are interesting to the scientific mind, but have very little to do with our actual A.A. work. 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."

Let us put Dr. Bob's words in historical context. He was warning about the dangers of getting *too much* complex psychological theory into A.A., like Sigmund Freud's insistence that the Oedipus complex lay at the bottom of every male's subconscious mind, so that he subconsciously wants to kill his father (and all other authority figures) and force himself sexually on his mother (and all the other females whom he encounters).

Or let us give another example. The psychiatrist Eric Berne gave an orthodox Freudian psychoanalytical interpretation of alcoholism in a book he wrote in 1964, in which he stated that its dynamics were based on oral deprivation (not getting enough time at the mother's breast when an infant), and that its internal psychological advantages lay in rebellion and in self-castigation in an attempt to relieve the inner guilt complex. Its external psychological pay-offs came in the form of avoidance of sexual and other forms of intimacy. No psychiatrist was ever able to have much if any success at all in getting alcoholics to stop drinking using this kind of approach. Berne defends his theory in that book and then blames the alcoholics for not getting well under his care! This was not uncommon among psychiatrists at that time: it was somehow the alcoholics' fault that their psychiatric theories did not work.

This is the kind of thing that Dr. Bob was warning A.A. people to stay away from. But to see how psychiatry and psychology could be used in the proper kind of way, the Akron List suggested reading Ernest Ligon's book *The Psychology of Christian Personality* instead. Both Ligon and Sgt. Bill S. (the early A.A. member who wrote the most about the psychological aspects of alcoholism) were Neo-Freudians who rejected that kind of esoteric talk about Freudian sexual complexes and breast deprivation and so on, and talked about psychological issues that made a good deal more common sense in language that could usually be understood by anyone who read books regularly.

It is also probably true that quoting this off-the-cuff remark by Dr. Bob, made when he was dying and barely able to stand up in front of the audience, points us in the wrong direction anyway. The real issue for A.A. was that most psychologists and psychiatrists of that time were staunch atheists who tried to get their patients to toss away all that superstitious guilt-inducing nonsense (as they regarded it) that religious teachers had loaded them down with. But A.A. people eagerly praised psychologist William James

and psychiatrist Carl Jung, two respectable professionals who both acknowledged the importance of the spiritual dimension. They praised Yale-trained psychologist Ernest Ligon who argued that Jesus' spiritual teaching in the Sermon on the Mount was in fact good psychology of the best sort. That is what I believe was the real issue: A.A. could not make use of any psychological or psychiatric theory which attacked the necessary spiritual dimension of recovery.

~~~~~

WINFRED RHOADES, *The Self You Have to Live With*, seems to still be available, even though it has not been studied by us yet.

~~~~~

So far, no one has been come up with much information on the series called *The Unchanging Friend* which was published by the Bruce Publishing Co. in Milwaukee. Mel B. says "Bruce now seems to be out of business, although there are a couple of smaller publishing firms listed under that name. They published considerable Catholic-related material and some of it can still be found in libraries."

=====

PART TWO:

But simply on the basis of what has been learned from this Akron reading list so far, and from other things we know about the period, we can definitely state that early Akron A.A. was influenced by all the following six strands of thought:

1. VIA THE OXFORD Group and we know not what other sources, it was strongly influenced by the Augustinian tradition of salvation *sola gratia* (by grace alone) and the concept of Original Sin. The latter implied the necessary imperfectibility of human beings after Adam and Eve's fall from grace, and also the horrendous potential for evil which lay in the human heart. This could have come from *good* Roman Catholic theology and spiritual literature, or works involving a *good* sixteenth-century Protestant understanding of salvation (Luther's *Bondage of the Will*, etc.) mediated through a Methodist synergistic understanding of the relationship between God and man in the work of salvation. But it is very strong Augustinianism which we see in the Big Book: pride is the central sin, and so on and so forth. It was this which saved A.A. from the central weakness of classical Protestant liberalism.

The Protestant Neo-Orthodox movement had in fact already begun, and Reinhold Niebuhr (its greatest American representative) taught at Union Theological Seminary in New York from 1928 till his retirement in 1960. Protestant Neo-Orthodox thinkers put the Augustinian doctrine of salvation by grace alone, the doctrine of Original Sin, and the concept of human pride as the root of all evil, at the heart of their theology and stressed the importance of these three concepts in everything that they wrote. Father Sam

Shoemaker, Bill Wilson's early spiritual supporter and guide, would have certainly known about what was going on at Union, which was after all right there in the same city, because of its extraordinary importance within American theological studies. The five top doctoral degree granting schools in the field of theology at the national level were Yale, Union in New York City (which was associated with Columbia University), Chicago, Harvard, and Princeton. I am increasingly beginning to think that some sort of contact with the Protestant Neo-Orthodox movement via first or second-hand contact with Union Theological Seminary in New York would have been a very likely way that early A.A. could have developed some of the ideas that A.A. historian Ernie Kurtz has written about: the strong emphasis upon (a) our human imperfectibility and (b) that we human beings are Not-God but simply finite and limited members of the created realm, which means that as long as we keep on trying to play God we will continue to sink into ever greater evil. As Karl Barth put it in the *Romsbriefe* (his famous commentary on the Apostle Paul's Letter to the Romans, published in 1919, which began the twentieth-century Neo-Orthodox movement), we will never be able to hear God's "Yes" until we first hear God's "No" to all our human presumption and arrogant claims to be the masters of the universe ourselves.

2. CLASSICAL Protestant liberalism: see the article I have written which is on the Hindsfoot Foundation website at <http://hindsfoot.org/ProtLib.html> And behind these nineteenth and early twentieth-century Protestant liberals lay the thinkers of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment: authors and philosophers like Voltaire, Kant, and Jonathan Swift in Europe and the British Isles, and in America major leaders like Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and George Washington. A.A. people were very much children of the Enlightenment from the very beginning, and even more so by the late 1940's and 50's, when a good many of the remaining connecting links to Christianity began rapidly to be broken. A.A. is committed to the basic Enlightenment philosophy down at the visceral level. This is what they will instinctively fight for above all else. There is no way that a historian who is not deeply familiar with the principles of the Enlightenment can understand A.A. at all.

3. NEW THOUGHT: this is very important, and has to be studied in order to understand a good deal of what was going on in early A.A. And one of the influences lying behind the New Thought movement was New England Transcendentalism, so that the study of figures like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Thoreau and Louisa M. Alcott can also help in understanding some of the ideas that many early A.A. people took for granted. [Note 5]

4. THE OLD EIGHTEENTH and nineteenth century evangelical movement (including in the United States the Great Awakening and Frontier Revivalism), which was NOT the same as the ideas of the Fundamentalist movement which arose in the twentieth century. It was also NOT the same as most of what one sees among the televangelists who are preaching on various television channels at the present time. The old classical evangelical movement meant people like Dwight Moody (originally a Congregationalist) and General William Booth (originally a Methodist), and so on. It was Mel B.'s *New Wine* which first

started me looking at their importance. Their influence, and the books they wrote, were still around during the early twentieth century.

5. MODERN PSYCHOLOGY and psychiatry. Although the names of Carl Jung and William James were frequently bandied about in early A.A. circles, it was the American Neo-Freudians who seem to have had the greatest influence. We see this in Akron A.A.'s recommendation of Ligon's book on personality development, and we see the same kind of influences affecting the work of Sgt. Bill S., who got sober on Long Island in 1948, and was closely associated with Marty Mann and early New York A.A. In other words, there was no real difference between Akron and New York A.A. on this issue - - this is another modern myth that has developed - - because in both places they realized that some knowledge of modern psychology could be useful in better understanding A.A., and in both places it was the Neo-Freudians whom they looked to as the kind of modern psychology which was most compatible with A.A.

In both the midwest and on the east coast, some A.A. people put greater stress on the spiritual aspects of the program, and some put greater emphasis on the psychological aspects of the program. There could sometimes be real tension in early A.A. over this issue, but it was not one region of the United States pitted against another - - the issues affected A.A. almost everywhere.

Sgt. Bill S. is especially important because he was the early A.A. figure who is our best representative of the kind of early A.A. which stressed psychology more than spirituality. In fact he was the ONLY early A.A. figure who wrote about this at length. See his book with Hindsfoot: <http://hindsfoot.org/kBS1.html>

Also see <http://hindsfoot.org/kBS4.html> and <http://hindsfoot.org/kBS5.html> on the Lackland Model of alcoholism treatment which he and Dr. Louis Jolyon "Jolly" West devised in the early 1950's, a strongly A.A. related treatment method which achieved a fifty percent success rate even in the rather hostile environment of a major military base, where military people at that time fiercely denied that they had any alcoholics at all in the U.S. armed services, and did everything they could to discourage any kind of real treatment of suffering alcoholics.

On the general issue of psychological vs. spiritual emphases in early A.A., see <http://hindsfoot.org/PsySpir.html>

The chapter in Sgt. Bill's book entitled "The Effects of Alcohol on Our Emotional Development" has been praised to the skies by every surviving good old-timer who has read it. Bill, they say, managed to get into that chapter the heart of the way we understood the psychological dimension of the program back in the old days. In fact, I would recommend that the modern A.A. reader should spend more time studying that little chapter than reading Ligon's book, because Bill translates all the psychological terminology into A.A. language that is easy to read and understand, and gives concrete examples from his own drinking years to illustrate all his points.

Neo-Freudian psychiatry therefore seems to have been the kind of psychological theory which most influenced early A.A. There were nevertheless exceptions, in particular Ralph Pfau in Indianapolis (who wrote the Golden Books under the pen name of Father John Doe and was the third most widely read early A.A. author). Father Ralph made use of an interesting new psychiatric approach, developed by a psychiatrist in Chicago named Abraham A. Low. Dr. Low had also rebelled against the orthodox Freudian psychoanalysts, but unlike the Neo-Freudians, Low had developed one of the earliest cognitive-behavioral theories as his own alternative. [Note 6]

6. THERE WAS A STRONG Roman Catholic (and Episcopalian Anglo-Catholic) influence on early A.A. The Akron List mentions *The Unchanging Friend*, which Mel B. tells us came from a Roman Catholic press. We are searching hard to see if we can find some copies.

We also know from Mary Darrah's work that Sister Ignatia was handing out to each person who came through St. Thomas Hospital either Thomas a Kempis' *Imitation of Christ* (a work which came out of the late medieval *devotio moderna*, with its scepticism about the scholastic theologians at the universities and all their minute theological distinctions in their discussions of doctrines and dogmas) and (even more significantly) a little meditational book composed of excerpts from St. Ignatius Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*, which had an important influence on the way early A.A. regarded the tenth step, among other things. Although Roman Catholics only made up about one sixth of the general American population at that time, let us not forget that as early A.A. spread, it tended to center on large American cities, many of which had large Roman Catholic immigrant populations which made the percentage far higher. At Father Ralph Pfau's weekend A.A. spiritual retreats, it often tended to be around 60% Protestant and 40% Roman Catholic.

We also must not forget that the Episcopalians (the Anglo-Catholics or Anglicans) regarded themselves as Catholics, not Protestants. They usually celebrated a sung mass every Sunday morning as their regular Sunday morning service, which was basically just an English translation of the Roman Catholic mass. They had the Stations of the Cross on the walls of the sanctuary, a holy water font beside the door, kneeling benches on the backs of the pews, medieval vestments and incense, and so on. Father Sam Shoemaker was an Episcopal priest (who wore the priestly black suit and clerical collar if you notice the old photos), and Henrietta Seiberling and Dr. Bob and his wife Anne were Episcopalians, along with Marty Mann's right-hand man Yev Gardner, who was an ordained Episcopal deacon. Mel B. tells me that when he once asked Dr. Bob and Anne's son Smitty what it meant that they had all gone to the Episcopal Church in Akron when he was child, Smitty gave the standard Episcopalian quip, mimicking the light beer commercials touting their product as containing "all the flavor but only half the calories." Smitty said that the Episcopalians were "kind of 'Catholic Light,' all the ritual but only half the guilt."

The Episcopalians read a lot of traditional Roman Catholic theology and spirituality, but also read a lot of the Protestant literature on theology and especially biblical studies,

although they tended to be conservative about taking up radical German Protestant theological fads, of which they were inherently suspicious.

~~~~~

Out of this extremely complex mix we see early A.A. being born: (1) a strong Augustinian theology, perhaps mediated partly through the influence of Reinhold Niebuhr, (2) classical Protestant liberalism, (3) New Thought and perhaps also New England Transcendentalism, (4) the old eighteenth and nineteenth-century evangelical movement, (5) modern psychology and psychiatry, particularly the Neo-Freudians, and (6) a strong Roman Catholic (and Episcopalian Anglo-Catholic) influence.

The Akron List is especially important, I believe, because it does such a good job of pointing us towards some of these major ingredients which went into the A.A. synthesis.

It was a fascinating world out of which early A.A. emerged, but it requires some knowledge of the history of ideas, including especially American religious history and the history of twentieth-century psychology and psychiatry, to appreciate the full richness and depth of the ideas which informed this little handful of inspired men and women, who remade American life at any number of significant levels over the sixty years that followed.

=====

#### **NOTES TO THE ARTICLE:**

NOTE 1. Barefoot Bob told me that he was sure that this Akron pamphlet was produced within a year of the time when the Big Book was published, which would mean at some point in late 1939 or early 1940. Since the Akron Manual tells alcoholics to use the Big Book as their basic text, this means that it has to have been written after that book was published, which means at some point after April 1939.

We can be further aided in dating the pamphlet by investigating what was going on in Akron A.A. and in St. Thomas Hospital in Akron during this period. Mary C. Darrah, *Sister Ignatia: Angel of Alcoholics Anonymous* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1992), Chapter 3, "The Spiritual Connection," gives the fullest account.

In August 16, 1939, Dr. Bob approached Sister Ignatia for the first time about admitting an alcoholic to St. Thomas Hospital. In the late summer of 1939, she started arranging to have alcoholics admitted on a regular basis and put two at a time into private rooms. But St. Thomas was a Roman Catholic hospital, and before anything further could be done in setting up a formal program of alcoholism treatment, A.A. had to separate itself from the Oxford Group, which was Protestant. When A.A. made its separation from the Oxford Group in November 1939 and then started meeting at King's School in January 1940, Sister Ignatia was able to take the next steps. She said later that "It was not until,

probably, January, 1940 that a definite working agreement was achieved with the knowledge of my superior, Sister Clementine, Dr. Bob, and probably, the Chief of Staff. Had we proposed it to the whole staff, at that time, you may be sure that we could not have gotten a foothold."

By 1941, there were so many alcoholics who needed admission that Room 228, a four-bed ward, was assigned for permanent use by Dr. Bob's alcoholic patients. Not long after, Sister Ignatia was also able to gain the additional use of a two-bed hospital room right across the hall, giving them six beds they could employ. Then she was eventually able to trade these two rooms (across the hall from one another) for an isolated place in the hospital where there was a seven-bed ward, a utility room with plumbing connections, and a door leading into the balcony at the back of the hospital's chapel. This new ward opened its doors on April 19, 1944.

*Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, p. viii, agrees with this basic time framework, that is, that Dr. Bob and Sister Ignatia first began working together extensively at St. Thomas Hospital in August 1939. And *Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers*, pp. 187-8, gives us additional information, and tells us that in August 1939, the problem facing the A.A. people was that Dr. Bob had been told by the other hospital in the area which he had been using for drying out alcoholics, that they would no longer admit these drunks, ever again. So he came to Sister Ignatia and pleaded with her for the use of a private room for an alcoholic they were currently working with. She finally thought of a little room which the nurses used for preparing flowers which had been sent to patients, and they discovered that it was just barely possible to push a hospital bed through its door.

How does this information help us in dating the manual? The little pamphlet assumes that the alcoholic will usually be put in a hospital room for several days in order to dry out, and also that A.A. visitors will be coming into the room and talking with the patient continually throughout the day. But the pamphlet does not state that the hospital would be St. Thomas Hospital, which means that it could have been written even before August 1939. But since it could also have been written later than that, we need to ask further questions.

On internal grounds from within the text of the manual, how much later than that could it have been written? The pamphlet seems to assume that the alcoholic patient is going to be in that hospital room completely alone except for the A.A. visitors who call on him. By 1941, Room 228 at St. Thomas Hospital, a four-bed ward, had been assigned for the A.A.-sponsored patients. The Akron Manual certainly seems to have been written before that point, when it was only one alcoholic in a private room. And in April 19, 1944, a large ward was opened at St. Thomas where a group of alcoholics could be housed during the initial treatment phase. I think we can say quite conclusively that what is described in the Akron Manual does not match up at all with the treatment program at the Alcoholic Ward which was established at St. Thomas Hospital in 1944.

So I believe that Barefoot Bob's dating has to be basically correct: the Akron Manual definitely has to have been written after April 1939, but it likewise was fairly certainly

written before 1941. And the assumption that the alcoholic is going to be all by himself in a private room, as opposed to the system of having two or more alcoholics sharing a room, actually makes the date of composition look to me like the summer of 1939, and no later than the fall of 1939.

~~~~~

NOTE 2. FUNDAMENTALISM: The modern evangelical movement which began in the 1730's and 40's had a positive attitude toward science until the debate over the theory of evolution began to heat up a century and a half later. When Charles Darwin published *The Origin of Species* in 1859 and *The Descent of Man* in 1871, public controversy over the idea that human beings were descended from apes continued to mount in the United States. Most of the evangelical churches began to fall into bitter disputes and split apart into fiercely opposed factions.

The Fundamentalist movement, which was a reaction against the Darwinian doctrine of evolution and also the spread of classical Protestant liberalism, was born when the Niagra Conference in 1895 issued its statement of the "Five Points of Fundamentalism": (1) the verbal inerrancy of scripture, (2) the divinity of Jesus Christ, (3) the Virgin Birth, (4) the physical resurrection of Christ and his bodily return at the end of the world, and (5) the substitutionary doctrine of the Atonement, that is, adherence to the medieval doctrine which was first introduced by St. Anselm in 1098 in his *Cur Deus Homo*. (This was the new theological theory that we were saved by Christ's death on the cross because it paid the penalty due to God for the sins we human beings had committed. For the first thousand years, Christianity had understood the work of Christ in other kinds of ways, and tended to place the power of salvation in the Incarnation rather than in the Crucifixion, often expressed in the kind of way which we see in the vision of the Divine Light at the very end of Dante's *Divine Comedy*.)

It is important to note that being a Fundamentalist meant adherence to certain specific theological doctrines. It was not the same thing as simply reading the Bible regularly, praying daily, and singing the traditional hymns to Jesus at church on Sunday. The classical Protestant liberals did all that, and any Fundamentalist whom you asked about it would make it clear these things did not count unless you agreed with all five of those "fundamental" dogmas at a bare minimum.

Around 1909, a series of twelve tracts called *The Fundamentals* began being published in the United States and distributed in other parts of the English-speaking world with American money. In 1919 the World's Christian Fundamentals Association was formed, which began sponsoring rallies in many American cities. Then came the event that really put the new Fundamentalist movement out in the public eye: In 1925 William Jennings Bryan helped prosecute a Tennessee school teacher named J. T. Scopes for teaching the doctrine of evolution to his students, in a court case widely reported by the newspapers, which came to be called the Scopes Monkey Trial.

Ten years later Bill W. met Dr. Bob and the A.A. movement began. The two of them, along with all the other early A.A. writers and leaders whom I know about, seem basically to have tried to stay out of the new Fundamentalist vs. Modernist controversy as much as they could. But they also were very careful indeed to make sure that A.A. members knew that A.A. people were not required to believe in any of the Five Points of Fundamentalism. It is my own belief that there were relatively few genuine Fundamentalists in A.A. during its first five or ten years, and that the largest single group in A.A. during that period held more what we would call classical Protestant liberal beliefs.

By 1939 the A.A. leaders were increasingly recommending that newcomers only read a small selection of biblical passages deliberately chosen because they did not speak about the divinity of Christ or contain any notion that people had to pray to Jesus or rely upon his death and resurrection to save them. In the Sermon on the Mount, prayer is to God the Father, and in the Letter of James, it is to God the Father of Lights. In chapter 13 of First Corinthians (unlike the chapters that come before it and after it), the higher power is spoken of only as the one who already knows us fully, whom we shall at last see face to face.

When Richmond Walker published his *Twenty-Four Hours a Day* in 1948, it swept the country rapidly, and put an end to A.A. use of the classical Protestant liberal meditational book called *The Upper Room*. This means that by that point, the center of gravity in American A.A. had clearly moved from the classical Protestant liberal position to something much more radical, that is a desire among many members for a kind of spirituality which made little or no mention of Christianity at all. Individual members were free to be Fundamentalists or conservative Baltimore Catechism Roman Catholics or anything else they wanted in their private prayers, but in most parts of the United States, it was made clear that Christian references were to be kept out of A.A. meetings, with very few exceptions to that rule.

Several months ago, I conducted a memorial service for an A.A. member who had just died. He was a Roman Catholic and the overwhelming majority of the two hundred or so people present were from Christian backgrounds. There was one Jew, and a few who were hostile to organized religion in almost any form. But I wore my black suit and clerical collar and used the traditional words of the Christian funeral service, even though some A.A. readings and prayers were also included, and everyone seemed to feel comfortable. On the other hand, this was not an A.A. meeting in the formal sense and, as is always the case, those A.A. members who were not Christians came to do honor to the memory of the A.A. member who had just died, and recognized that he would have wanted the Christian liturgical material. I have attended both Fundamentalist Protestant funeral services for A.A. members and Roman Catholic funeral masses. I am sure that if the A.A. member who had just died were Jewish, everyone would have come to a Jewish funeral service in order to pay their last respects, and so on with other religions.

NOTE 3. Adolf Harnack (1851-1930) was Germany's leading scholar in the history of Christian dogma at the beginning of the twentieth century, especially in the area called

patristics, that is, the history of Christian ideas and practices in the first five to seven centuries of the Christian era. One of his other major works was his seven volume *History of Dogma* (original German edition 1886-9 as three volumes, English translation 1894-9), which was still being used well into the twentieth century. In other words, Harnack's criticism of traditional Christian doctrine was not that of an ignorant man who knew nothing about that which he criticized!

~~~~~

NOTE 4. Beginning in the eighteenth century, before the American Revolution, it had been noted that the same sayings of Jesus are frequently given in slightly different words when they appear in more than one gospel. In the United States, Thomas Jefferson was already aware of this, and had attempted to write an account of Jesus's words and actions involving a synthesis of the different gospel accounts. There were also German scholars who were aware of this problem.

By the early twentieth century, when liberal Protestant scholars taught courses on the New Testament, they would frequently have the students purchase a kind of book which had a title like "Harmony of the Gospels" or "Gospel Parallels." This book would put the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke in parallel columns, so that the students could see the slight variants that occurred in the different accounts of what Jesus had said.

It had become clear by that time that the gospels were not written until after the great Jewish War that had ended with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Temple in 70 A.D., and in fact Matthew, Mark and Luke were probably not written until somewhere between 80 and 90 A.D. Jesus had been executed by an Italian businessman who was the Roman governor of Judaea in 30 A.D. (or no more than a year or two later at most). The letter of James said that it was the wealthy Italian, Greek, Syrian, and Judaeian business community in Jerusalem which was basically responsible, because they regarded Jesus' attacks on materialism as "bad for business." During the fifty to sixty years that passed between Jesus' death and the writing of the gospel accounts, the information about what he had said on various occasions was passed down mostly by oral tradition. This made the differences in wording between the three gospels make perfect sense.

Protestant liberals were therefore aware that we could not know the exact words that Jesus said on many occasions, at least not down to the precise letter, but they also believed very strongly that anyone with a modicum of simple common sense could easily work out what the main points were in his message. So they rejected the Fundamentalist belief in the literal inerrancy of the scriptures (anyone who could pick up a Harmony of Gospels and read what was right before his eyes could see that this was impossible) but they nevertheless regarded Jesus as their inspired Lord and Teacher. One can see in Ligon at all times the incredible respect he had for the teaching of Jesus, which he regarded as the truth about the nature of human life and the correct relationship between God and the human race.

~~~~~

NOTE 5. The New England Transcendentalists need to be studied in order to understand certain ideas contained in both New Thought and in some A.A. circles. Two useful websites are:

http://jackhddavid.thehouseofdauid.com/papers/4334_1.html

<http://www.westminster.edu/staff/brennie/wisdoms/transcen.htm>

In 1836, a group of young Unitarians, led by Ralph Waldo Emerson, Frederic Hedge, and George Ripley, rebelled against the staid teachings of Harvard Divinity School, and formed the Transcendental Club of America. Henry D. Thoreau and Louisa M. Alcott were other famous names associated with the movement. They believed in the divinity of nature, that mind was more important than matter, and that there is an inner light within the human soul which can perceive divine truth. There is something of the Absolute and Eternal in every human soul. There was an immortal mind residing within every human being which was distinct from the outer Self. Time and space are not external realities, but ways in which the mind constructs its sense world. God, freedom, and immortality are transcendental ideas which the mind intuits via a special kind of knowledge which is not the same as ordinary sense perception. God is immanent in the world, and because of this indwelling of divinity within the realm of nature, the individual soul can apprehend the beauty, truth, and goodness incarnate in the natural world, and appropriate for itself the spirit and being of God.

Their ideas came out of the Kantian philosophical tradition, particularly as that tradition was expressed in England by the great poets Samuel Coleridge and William Wordsworth, and they were strongly influenced by Plato's philosophy too. They also knew just a little bit about Asian religions, such as the Hindu tradition, and some of them were willing to embrace ideas like the transmigration of souls. This may have been one of the sources of the occasional Buddhist and Hindu ideas which sometimes appear in early A.A. writings, such as advising people to act without being over-concerned about the results of their actions, and some sort of awareness of the dangers represented by what Buddhism called the chains of karma, and how one can free oneself from them.

In this regard, the early Akron pamphlet called *Spiritual Milestones in Alcoholics Anonymous* - - see <http://hindsfoot.org/AkrSpir.pdf> Adobe Acrobat file - - assumes throughout that the members of their A.A. group have come from Christian backgrounds, which was fairly close to 100% true at that time. But the little booklet also says, "The modern Jewish family is one of our finest examples of helping one another Followers of Mohammed are taught to help the poor, give shelter to the homeless and the traveler, and conduct themselves with personal dignity. Consider the eight-part program laid down in Buddhism: Right view, right aim, right speech, right action, right living, right effort, right mindedness and right contemplation. The Buddhist philosophy, as exemplified by these eight points, could be literally adopted by AA as a substitute for or addition to the Twelve Steps. Generosity, universal love and welfare of others rather than considerations of self are basic to Buddhism."

The people in early Akron A.A. had no difficulty with someone bringing in Hindu or Buddhist ideas to help them develop a better spiritual program, and Buddhism clearly was the non-Christian religion which fascinated them the most. The influence on American thought of the New England Transcendentalists -- some of them quite famous authors regularly read by American school children -- may have been one of the background factors which made them open to the world of Asian religious ideas.

Richmond Walker, an A.A. member who got sober in Boston, developed some of these New England Transcendentalist ideas in the little meditational book which he wrote in 1948, *Twenty-Four Hours a Day*, the book that took the A.A. world by storm. He put a quotation from the Hindu religious tradition at the beginning of the little volume to make sure that his readers understood that one did not need to be a Christian at all in order to practice the spiritual life. He also took the Oxford Group work *God Calling* by Two Listeners and inserted ideas like the concept of the little spark of the divine in every human soul, and the idea that mind (and the world of ideas) is more basic than matter. His references to the Kantian concept that our minds are locked within a box of space and time when it comes to observing the physical world, may have partially been mediated to him through New England Transcendentalist influences, although he probably had been exposed to Kant himself in his college courses - - he certainly understood what Kant's philosophy was about, and what the philosophical problems were which were raised by that system for any attempt to talk about God. And he also understood the world of Platonic philosophy which lay behind Kant and the Transcendentalists.

~~~~~

NOTE 6. Dr. Abraham A. Low established his own movement, called Recovery Inc., in 1937, which began spreading all across the United States and is still a very strong movement today. One may consult their website at [http://www.recovery\\_inc.com/](http://www.recovery_inc.com/) for current information on where and when meetings are held in various cities. One well-known writer on this movement is Professor Linda Farris Kurtz, who believes (as do many other of the best modern mental health professionals) that Recovery Inc. is an extremely useful group to which they can send patients with certain types of emotional problems such as anxiety attacks, phobias, and inability to handle even relatively minor everyday social conflicts. Among her publications one could read Linda Farris Kurtz, DPA, *Self-Help and Support Groups: A Handbook for Practitioners*, Sage Sourcebook for the Human Services, vol. 34 (Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage Publications, 1997). This work deals prominently with Recovery, Inc., among other organizations. She also co-authored another work, Linda Farris Kurtz and Adrienne Chambon, Ph.D., "Comparison of Self-Help Groups for Mental Health," *Health and Social Work*, Vol 12 (1987): 275-283, which compares Recovery, Inc., Emotions Anonymous, and GROW International.

=====