

Big Book – A.A. 12-Step Manuscript Writing – Refresher

Serving the Primary Purpose

Dick B.

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Part Two

Contending Ideas and Approaches

And the Matter of Christian and Biblical References

Wilson’s drafts had met with many objections from his New York and East Coast friends.¹ The Christian AA, John Henry Fitzhugh Mayo, was on one end of the objections. And Fitz contended that the book ought to be Christian in the doctrinal sense of the word; that it should say so; and that it should use Biblical terms and expressions to make that clear.² Bill’s partner Henry Parkhurst was on the other end of the argument. And Parkhurst wanted a “psychological book which would lure the alcoholic in. [and said that] Once in, the prospect could take God or leave Him alone as he wished.”³ In the end, Bill Wilson caved in to the elimination of “the dogma we had picked up from the churches and missions which had tried to help us.”⁴ In the alteration process, at least 400 pages of the manuscript were edited to cut and sharpen the book.⁵ Lois Wilson expressed her view of the changes and deletions, claiming:

The pros and cons were mostly about the tone of the book. Some wanted it slanted more toward the Christian religion; others, less. Many alcoholics were agnostics or atheist. Then there were those of the Jewish faith and, around the world, of other religions. Shouldn’t the book be written so that it would appeal to them also? Finally it was agreed that the book should present a universal spiritual program, not a specific religious one, since all drunks were not Christian.⁶

The Changing References to God in the Word-of-Mouth Principles

As to the all-important Twelve Steps themselves, Bill claimed there had been some six “word of mouth” principles in the “program of our pioneering time.”⁷ However, many writers have overlooked Bill’s further concession and qualification that “these principles were advocated according to the whim or liking of each of us, and though in Akron and Cleveland they still stuck by the O.G. (Oxford Group) absolutes of honesty, purity, unselfishness, and love, this was the gist of our message to incoming alcoholics up to 1939, when our present Twelve Steps were put

¹ *The Language of the Heart*, 200; *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, 159-60.

² *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, 162.

³ *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, 163.

⁴ *The Language of the Heart*, 200.

⁵ *Pass It On*, 204.

⁶ *Lois Remembers*, 113.

⁷ *The Language of the Heart*, 200.

to paper.”⁸ But Bill failed to point out the varying ways in which references to Almighty God had been handled by himself and by others at different times.⁹

Some have erroneously believed that the six word-of-mouth ideas were actual “Oxford Group steps” borrowed from the Oxford Group.¹⁰ But there were no Oxford Group steps as such; and there clearly were no *six* Oxford Group “tenets.”¹¹ Some have speculated that the ultimate Twelve Steps were taken from the six word-of-mouth ideas and expanded by Bill to Twelve.¹² However, as we have noted, Bill penned at least three different versions of those six word-of-mouth ideas.¹³ And the facts unearthed and now expanded in our Shoemaker research show that, wherever the six or twelve step ideas came from, their language came primarily from the teachings of Reverend Samuel M. Shoemaker, with whom Bill had consulted as to the program, the Steps, and the manuscript.¹⁴ In fact, Bill so much recognized the value and utility of Shoemaker’s teachings and role that he actually asked his friend Sam Shoemaker to write the Twelve Steps.¹⁵ However, Shoemaker declined and said to Bill Wilson that they should be written by an alcoholic and that Bill was the one to do it.¹⁶

⁸ *The Language of the Heart*, 200.

⁹ Sometimes, Bill claimed, “We prayed to **whatever God** we thought there was. . .” See *Pass It On*, 197; *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, 160; and Ernest Kurtz, *Not-God* (MN: Hazelden, 1991), 69 [Bold face added]. But, in his Grapevine article, Bill claimed: “We prayed to **God** to help us to do these things as best we could.” See *Real Twelve Step History*, 81; *The Akron Genesis*, 256-57; *The Language of the Heart*, 200; and William L. White, *Slaying the Dragon* (IL: Chestnut Health Systems, 1998), 132 [Bold face added]. Then, the author’s of A.A.’s *Pass It On* reconstructed what it said were the original, 12 Steps and quoted the Eleventh Step: “Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our contact with **God** (page 198) [Bold face added]. And Lois Wilson spoke of the Oxford Group origins mentioned by Bill, and described the sixth idea as follows: “pray to **God** for help to carry out these principles.” *Lois Remembers*, 92 [Bold face added]. See extended discussion in Dick B., *Twelve Steps for You: Take the Twelve Steps with the Big Book, A.A. History, and the Good Book at Your Side*, 4th ed. (Kihei, HI: Paradise Research Publications, Inc., 2005), 33-37. And it seems that any honest appraisal of the varied and diverse mentions of prayer to God would indicate that “**God**” and “**whatever God**” were terms used to suit the whims of Bill himself—depending on whether he was under fire for mentioning “God” or was speaking when “God” had been deleted from some Step language and finally replaced with “**God as we understood Him**” in Steps Three and Eleven of the First Edition of the Big Book. Alcoholics Anonymous (New York City: Works Publishing Company, 1939, pp. 71-72. Yet even that “God as we understood Him” language could fairly be attributed to the teachings of Rev. Sam Shoemaker who first employed the expression in his book *Children of the Second Birth*. See Dick B., *New Light on Alcoholism*, 95-97, 156; *Twelve Steps for You*, 19-20, 25.

¹⁰ *Pass It On*, 197.

¹¹ *Pass It On*, 206, note 2. See the extended discussion in Dick B., *The Oxford Group and Alcoholics Anonymous*, 2d ed. (Kihei, HI: Paradise Research Publications, Inc., 1998).

¹² *Pass It On*, 197-99; *Lois Remembers*, 113.

¹³ Dick B., *Twelve Steps for You*, 33-37.

¹⁴ Dick B., *New Light on Alcoholism*, 357-84; *Twelve Steps for You*; *Real Twelve Step Fellowship History*; *The First Nationwide A.A. History Conference*; *When Early AAs Were Cured and Why*; and *By the Power of God*

¹⁵ As I previously discussed in detail, one of the oldest living Oxford Group activists—a man who was well acquainted with both Sam Shoemaker and with Dr. Frank Buchman—several times related the following in person and on the telephone to me: “Bill Wilson asked Sam Shoemaker to write the Twelve Steps.” The man was James Draper Newton. The clergyman who told Newton the fact twice was Rev. Garrett Stearly (who worked with Shoemaker for two years, served on the vestry of his church, and actually lived in rooms on the fourth floor of Calvary House where Sam himself resided). Stearly was a man who was called by Shoemaker one of the American leaders of the Oxford Group. See *New Light on Alcoholism*, 8-10, 73; *The Oxford Group and Alcoholics Anonymous*, 126-28.

¹⁶ Dick B., *New Light on Alcoholism*, 73.

The Conflicting, Alternating, References to God and to Idolatrous Deities

The Missing Originals: Whatever the original drafts of the Big Book actually contained has yet to be established.¹⁷ The original drafts don't seem to exist, and I certainly sought them out at Stepping Stones and from many other available, reliable manuscript sources.¹⁸ Even, the Christian, Biblical, and Mission materials that were tossed out have never been produced or made available if in fact they still exist.¹⁹ Finally, although three writers employed by A.A. General Services "reconstructed" the original steps, none provided documentation for his or her product.²⁰

The Apparent Alterations: It seems clear that one of the earlier forms of the Twelve Steps spoke about God as the One who could restore the AAs to sanity.²¹ The writings also used the word "sin."²² Now deleted. They spoke of surrender on one's knees.²³ Now deleted. And, after these words were eliminated, language in two of the Steps was modified to speak of "God as we understood Him" instead of "God."

The Bible Language That Referred to the Creator Was Retained and Quoted but Not Cited as to Source: Even in the early manuscripts, and also even in today's Big Book editions, Bill and the A.A publishing arm retained and have retained hundreds of specific Big Book Biblical references to God, using words such as "God," "Creator," "Maker," "Father," "Father of light," "Spirit," and "Power, which is God."²⁴

The Compromising Language: Despite his hundreds of explicitly Biblical references to Almighty God (through the use of Biblical terms and capitalized words), Bill added other compromised language about a some "Higher Power;" "Creative Intelligence," "Universal

¹⁷ *Pass It On*, 198.

¹⁸ In search of the manuscript, I first focused on Stepping Stones, where I was permitted to, and did examine every possible location of such a manuscript. I found some of Bill's yellow scratch paper manuscripts. I found several of his typed stories. I found Henry Parkhurst's book outline. But I could not locate the Big Book manuscript, nor could Paul L., the archivist who assisted me. I spent a great deal of time in Connecticut with Dennis Wayne Cassidy—an A.A. historian now deceased—who believed he had a copy. Dennis did have copies of Lois's biographical notes. He did have a copy of the Niles Peebles printer's manuscript of DR. BOB and the Good Oldtimers. These have now been turned over to me; in fact, Dennis's family turned over all that Dennis had. But neither Dennis nor I located the manuscript. I discussed the matter with A.A. archivist Frank Mauser, with A.A.'s retired archivist Nell Wing, and with Bill Pittman, who became the Director of Historical Information at Hazelden. None of these could provide the answer as to any existing manuscripts. Pittman had actually discussed the question with Ruth Hock who had typed them for Bill and submitted to the printers the ultimate revised Big Book manuscript.

¹⁹ *Pass It On*, 204. After careful investigation with the authors of *Pass It On*, I concluded they established that the 400 pages were eliminated; and I was informed by Bill Pittman that he had asked Ruth Hock what the missing pages contained. Ruth told Bill they contained mostly Biblical and Christian materials.

²⁰ *Pass It On*, 200.

²¹ *Pass It On*, page 198, states that Step Two read "Came to believe that God could restore us to sanity." The newly acquired and available Printer's Manuscript shows the handwritten change from "God" to "Power greater than ourselves."

²² *Pass It On*, page 197, quoted Bill's version of the "original six steps" and said, "We made a moral inventory of our defects or sins."

²³ *Pass It On*, page 198, states that Step Seven read "Humbly on our knees asked Him to remove these shortcomings—holding nothing back."

²⁴ Examples in the Big Book 4th ed. are: "God," p. 45; "Creator," pp. 13, 28; "Maker," p. 63; "Father," p. 62; "Father of Light," p. 14; "Spirit," p. 66; "Power, which is God," p. 46.

Mind,” “Czar of the Heavens;” as well as other non-biblical words—whether capitalized or not—that Bill plainly intended as references to “some” God.²⁵ Contrasted with this compromising language is Bill’s own written description of what he said when he had his conversion experience at Towns Hospital. Bill there said to himself: “Bill, you are a free man! This is the God of the Scriptures.” And then I was filled with a consciousness of a presence.²⁶ A bit later, he added, “So I hung on, and then I knew there was a God and I knew there was a grace. And through it all, I have continued to feel, if I may presume to say it, that I do *know* these things.”²⁷

Gloria Deo

[Part Three follows, and it will cover “The Many, Varied, Big Book and Step Sources” that fed the actual content of the text and steps themselves, as written in the First Edition itself]

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²⁵ Specific examples in the Big Book, 4th ed. are: “Higher Power,” p 43; “Creative Intelligence, Universal Mind, Spirit of Nature;” “Czar of the Heavens,” pp. 12, 46; “Spirit of the Universe,” p. 46; as well as “Director,” and “Principal,” p. 62.

²⁶ *The Language of the Heart* (NY: The AA Grapevine, Inc, 1988), 284.

²⁷ *The Language of the Heart*, 284.