

# **Father Ralph Pfau and the Golden Books**

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## **The Path to Recovery from Alcoholism and Drug Addiction**

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**Recovering our inner balance and perspective  
by freeing ourselves from our obsessive guilt,  
shame, and neurotic perfectionism**

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# **Part I**

## **Father Ralph Pfau**

## CHAPTER 1

### **Ralph Pfau (“Father John Doe”) as Major Twelve-Step Leader**

Fr. Ralph Pfau — along with Bill Wilson, Richmond Walker, and Ed Webster — was one of the four most published early A.A. authors, writing most of his works under the pseudonym “Father John Doe,” but well-known to the fellowship all across the United States, Canada, and Latin America. He was one of the key figures who helped to shape the Alcoholics Anonymous movement during its second major phase: the thirty-year period which ran from the publication of the Big Book in 1939 to the end of the 1960’s.<sup>1</sup>

He had made his own plunge into alcoholism not long after his ordination as an Indiana diocesan priest in 1929. During a period of only ten years, he had to be removed from three different parishes in different parts of the state because of his excessive drinking,<sup>2</sup> with each of these episodes (in 1933, 1939, and 1943) resulting in a complete nervous breakdown which required long hospitalization.

He finally telephoned a representative of the Alcoholics Anonymous group in Indianapolis, Indiana, on his thirty-ninth birthday, on November 10, 1943, and began going to A.A. meetings in that city. He never drank again. In a talk given fourteen years later, in 1957, Fr. Pfau talked about his role as “the first priest-member of Alcoholics Anonymous.”<sup>3</sup> As the first Roman Catholic priest to openly attend ordinary Alcoholics Anonymous meetings on

a regular basis, and to get and stay sober via that route — he confessed even before large groups at major A.A. conferences that he too was an alcoholic just like them — he played the role of the pioneer who broke the trail for numerous other Catholic clergy and religious to follow.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to his publications, Fr. Ralph also traveled all over the United States and Canada speaking to A.A. groups and conventions, and running weekend A.A. spiritual retreats, with an energy and enthusiasm which would have daunted most human beings. In the autobiography which he wrote in 1958, he said that over the past ten years, “I have traveled nearly 750,000 miles .... I have spoken before nearly two hundred thousand members of A.A. at retreats, meetings and conventions, and personally discussed problems with more than ten thousand alcoholics.”<sup>5</sup> That was an average of two hundred miles a day or 1,400 miles per week simply spent on the road traveling, in addition to all of his speaking and writing.

Fr. Ralph was also the founder in 1949 of the National Clergy Council on Alcoholism, today called the National Catholic Council on Addictions, which served for years as one of the most vital and important American Catholic organizations dealing with the problem of alcoholism. The NCCA’s annual publication, the *Blue Book* (whose 58th volume came out at the end of 2008), also provides, through a host of articles by leading figures, a detailed historical record of Catholic thought about alcoholism and recovery through the course of the past six decades. There was no body of literature even remotely equivalent coming from Protestant or Jewish sources during that period.

***Writings and recordings:*** Fr. Ralph was especially famous for a popular series of fourteen short books, each of the booklets averaging around 50 to 60 pages in length, called the Golden Books, which he wrote (under the pen name “Father John Doe”) on a variety

of spiritual topics: *Spiritual Side* (1947), *Tolerance* (1948, originally entitled *Charity*), *Attitudes* (1949), *Action* (1950), *Happiness* (1951), *Excuses* (1952), *Sponsorship* (1953), *Principles* (1954), *Resentments* (1955), *Decisions* (1957), *Passion* (1960), *Sanity* (1963), *Sanctity* (1964), and *Living* (1964).<sup>6</sup> These were read and studied by A.A. members all over the United States and Canada, and still are being used and treasured today.

In addition, Fr. Ralph published two long books of essays — *Sobriety and Beyond* (1955) and *Sobriety Without End* (1957)<sup>7</sup> — and his autobiography, *Prodigal Shepherd* (1958), a shorter version of which appeared as a two-part article in *Look* magazine.<sup>8</sup> That article made his name known to people all over the nation: of the four major general interest large-format magazines in the United States at that time, *Look* (which would have had a circulation of at least four million by that time), was second only to *Life* magazine, and had a greater readership than either *The Saturday Evening Post* or *Collier's*.<sup>9</sup> So Fr. Ralph's article reached more people than the 1941 Jack Alexander article in *The Saturday Evening Post*.

He also published a little book called *Contact with God*,<sup>10</sup> and issued a set of thirty recordings in which he spoke on various issues, including such titles as No. 11 "Father John Doe — Alcoholic," No. 22 "The Lord's Prayer," No. 2 "Alcoholism — Sin or Disease," and Nos. 23-26 "The Twelve Steps." He spoke on these recordings with a flamboyant old-time preacher's style: his high voice, with its sharp-toned southern Indiana accent, could penetrate to the back of a church without benefit of microphone, and knock any drowsy parishioners on the back pews out of any tendency to go to sleep.<sup>11</sup>

As A.A. has spread to countries like Ireland, Fr. Ralph's writings have been found to speak with a clarity and sense surpassing most other A.A. literature to alcoholics from Catholic backgrounds.

***Fr. Ralph in the Spanish Catholic world:*** Juan Rodriguez in California, who has carried out extensive research in this area, has found that Spanish translations of Fr. Ralph's writings were used as the basis of Spanish-language A.A. in both North and South America during the years before there was a widely available Spanish translation of the Big Book. Ricardo Perez in Cleveland, who worked for the Mexican consulate, had translated the Big Book into Spanish by March 1946 (some said that it was his wife who did most or all of the translating). But the Perez translation does not seem to have been widely available until a printing was done in 1959.<sup>12</sup>

The translations of Fr. Pfau's works were in the form of small, inexpensive booklets, about one-third to half the length of the Golden Books, giving individual sections from his writings. So the twenty page booklet entitled *La Vida Emocional y el Mito de la Perfeccion* ("The Emotional Life and the Myth of Perfection") was taken from *Sobriety Without End* (1957) and the twenty-four page booklet on *Resentimientos* ("Resentments") was taken from *Sobriety and Beyond* (1955). The thirty-six page booklet entitled *Sano Juicio* (literally "Sane Judgment") was a translation of *The Golden Book of Sanity* (1963).

Fr. Ralph has continued to be a great hero among Spanish-speakers in the United States as well. There is a beautiful memorial to him on a hill top called Serenity Point at the St. Francis Retreat Center just outside of San Juan Bautista, California, which is regarded with special reverence among Spanish-speaking Californians.



## CHAPTER 2

### Early Life

*Birth and early years:* Ralph Sylvester Pfau was born on November 10, 1904 in Indianapolis, Indiana,<sup>13</sup> to Charles Pfau and Elizabeth Smith Pfau (his father was of French background and his mother of German background). He was baptized on December 4 in the old Holy Cross Church in that city,<sup>14</sup> which was a rather modest brick structure, for the parish had only been founded nine years earlier by Irish immigrants (the present large stone church was not built until 1922, when Ralph was eighteen).

Ralph's father, who made his living doing sales with a horse and buggy, was a heavy drinker, almost certainly an alcoholic. He died when Ralph was only four, probably as a consequence of his drinking. But he left his family with a building on North Rural Street in Indianapolis, with a place for them to live upstairs and a downstairs that could be rented out for commercial purposes, so Ralph's mother was able to stay home and spend her full time taking care of her children. Ralph was the youngest of the six (all of them boys). Ralph's brother Jerome ("Jerry"), who was six years older, seems to have acted as a father figure (and sometimes deeply frustrated would-be caretaker) to him on numerous occasions through the years, even after they were both adults.<sup>15</sup>

There was a strong tradition in the family of service to the church. Ralph's Uncle George was a priest and his Uncle Al in

particular was the sixth Bishop of Nashville, Tennessee. This was the Most Rev. Alphonse John Smith (November 14, 1883-December 16, 1935), who during his early career established the parish of St. Joan of Arc in Indianapolis (where Ralph was appointed as an assistant pastor in 1943 when he finally hit bottom and telephoned A.A.). When Alphonse Smith became bishop of Nashville in 1924 (the year Ralph turned twenty), the uncle found that there were only a few priests in his diocese who actually came from Tennessee, and only ten Tennessee seminarians preparing to enter the priesthood. Within two years he had recruited sixty young Tennesseans to enter seminary, and was busy building churches and schools all over Tennessee.<sup>16</sup> This was the kind of standard of distinguished and noteworthy accomplishment towards which the members of Ralph's family were expected to devote themselves.

The family (and particularly Ralph's mother) had decided when Ralph and his brother Jerry were little boys that the two of them were also going to become priests, and continue the family tradition of clerical greatness. Jerry, who was six years older, was ordained around 1923, when Ralph was eighteen; he was then sent to Rome to earn a Doctorate of Sacred Theology, and was already back in Indiana, teaching at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College near Terre Haute, when Ralph was ordained deacon on May 29, 1928.<sup>17</sup> This was the nation's oldest Catholic liberal arts college for women, founded by Mother Théodore Guérin, Indiana's first saint. It was a quite distinguished place to be teaching for a Catholic academic at that point in history, and in particular, it was firmly linked into the ruling circles within the Archdiocese of Indianapolis.

But one can see the problem which this represented for the young Ralph. In most Catholic families of that period, having a son in the priesthood was in and of itself an accomplishment of enormous note, even if he never rose beyond the parish ministry. But in Ralph's

family, one was expected to be not only a capable priest, but also a great scholar or administrator, who could earn yet further renown for the family.

There was an additional difficulty here. Jerry was an alcoholic just like Ralph. But Jerry managed to last quite a few years longer than Ralph as what is sometimes called a “functioning alcoholic,” meaning that he did not lose his job because of it, or get arrested for drunken driving, or encounter any other kind of major public difficulties because of his compulsive drinking. In addition, Jerry had Ralph convinced for many years that one was not an alcoholic as long as one did not drink before noon. So Ralph would use drugs (barbiturates and sedatives) to endure painfully through the mornings, keeping his eye on the clock at all times, and would force himself to wait until noon (on the minute) before throwing down his first desperate drink of the day.

Jerry however did not escape the consequences of his drinking forever. He ended up a tragic figure, finally dying in June 1957 when he was around 59 years old, because of problems which were at least partially brought on by his alcoholism. He was hospitalized in Louisville and still trying to bribe the nurses to bring him a bottle as he lay there dying.<sup>18</sup>

Putting all of these pieces together, we can see how Ralph, during his childhood and adolescence, was put under a great deal of psychological pressure by his family background. Furthermore, as not only the youngest child (the baby of the family), but also as the boy “who was going to become a priest,” young Ralph was given enormous privilege. According to what his brothers said later on, he was totally spoiled. At breakfast time, if the yolk of a fried egg was broken, his mother would cook him another egg. That sort of treatment created in him a sense of entitlement where — even after he was an adult, and even though he knew better intellectually — a

part of him down at the subconscious level believed that people around him were supposed automatically to give him whatever he asked for.

On the other hand, he was simultaneously put under enormous pressure to behave like a little plaster saint instead of like a normal small boy, and to end up at the top in every sphere of activity into which he entered. As Ralph's niece commented, many years later, "Uncle Ralph felt like he never came up to [his mother's] expectations," no matter what he accomplished.<sup>19</sup>

**Seminary:** In 1922, at the age of seventeen, Ralph graduated from Cathedral High School in Indianapolis and began studying for the priesthood at the seminary at St. Meinrad Archabbey down in the hills along the Ohio river. Indiana was still a largely rural state at that time: young Ralph was able to make most of the journey by local trains, but the last stage was by horse and buggy — a one-horse shay with a fringe on top — down crude dirt roads. The abbey church at St. Meinrad was set on top of a hill, surrounded by green woods and rolling fields. The Benedictine monks who lived in the abbey also ran the seminary. The boys slept in a sixty-bed dormitory, where each boy was given a bed, a chair, and a row of hangers on the wall. The outside toilets were sixty yards away.<sup>20</sup>

**Scrupulosity and perfectionism:** Ralph got through his first six years at St. Meinrad with no notable problems, but then fell into a long period of debilitating psychological turmoil which continued with greater and lesser degrees of severity from the Spring of 1928 to the Spring of 1929. The onset came when he was scheduled to be ordained deacon on May 29, 1928. Young Ralph, now twenty-three, could not eat. He could not sleep, he could not think straight, and torrents of thoughts circled around and around in his mind as he grew ever more frantic. His obsessive perfectionism was so great that he did not feel morally "worthy" to be a priest.

The two advisors whom he went to both said the same thing. First Fr. Anselm told him, “This is just a matter of scruples.” Then he went to talk about his fears with Monsignor Joseph E. Hamill, the Chancellor of the diocese, who likewise told him, “This is just scruples.”<sup>21</sup>

Ralph made himself go through the ordination service, but afterwards, he said, “I was so depressed I wished I were dead.” The summer which followed was a nightmare. Doctors in Indianapolis finally put him on barbiturates and powerful bromide compounds.

When he returned to St. Meinrad in the fall for his final year of seminary, he once again was unable to eat or sleep, and by the middle of October was in the depths of total depression. He tried all the traditional methods of prayer and meditation, including everything described in the recommended Catholic spiritual literature of his era, such as Louis Blossius’s *Comfort of the Faint-Hearted*, but none of this seemed to help much. Fervent prayers to the Blessed Virgin Mary finally seemed to lift him out of the worst of his distress, but then the night before his ordination to the priesthood, he came down with a 104° temperature and had a complete physical collapse. The next day, May 21, 1929, he was ordained priest while sitting on a chair instead of standing and kneeling through the course of the service like the other ordinands.<sup>22</sup>

As was noted, the priests whom he had consulted had all diagnosed Ralph’s problem as one of scrupulosity, using the old traditional technical term from Catholic moral theology. A *scrupulus* in Latin was a small pebble, and hence by extension, could be used to refer to worries over tiny things, such as anxiety over something small which nevertheless nagged continuously like a pebble in one’s shoe. In the modern English metaphor, it was a pathological compulsion to turn molehills into mountains.

Scrupulosity traditionally meant a kind of hypermoralism involving, perhaps, the insistence that even quite innocent things which devout people commonly did were nevertheless totally sinful, or it might take the form of constant unfocused anxiety about sin without being able to tell why. It might drive people, for example, into repeatedly asking their priest whether a particular action was sinful even when he kept assuring them that it was not. They might find themselves repeatedly confessing the action as a sin anyway, each time they went to confession, refusing to believe their priest and perhaps going to a series of different confessors in an attempt to find one who would agree with them about the sinfulness of their actions.

The traditional Catholic answer to scrupulosity, as we see for example in Alphonsus Liguori, the eighteenth century Neapolitan saint, was strongly authoritarian. The person concerned should choose one confessor, and then obey all of that priest's decisions and rulings absolutely and without question.

The modern literature on scrupulosity tends to view it as a form of OCD (obsessive compulsive disorder),<sup>23</sup> which I believe is a mistake, at least in most cases. OCD is a disorder which drives people to compulsive hand washing, counting ceiling tiles, repetitive fears over simple actions, and so on. In about 2% of the cases of clinically diagnosed OCD, it does involve some religious elements, but these are of a different sort from the things which were disturbing Ralph so much at the end of his seminary career.

To give a typical example from the modern literature, Joseph Ciarrocchi describes treating a priest who, after conducting his weekly outdoor mass, would compulsively crawl around on the ground trying to make sure that no tiny pieces of communion wafer had fallen to the earth. Another case of this kind of OCD which is recorded in the literature is that of a man who would think

obsessively, while bathing his small children, about the Devil trying to compel him to hold them underwater and drown them. The therapist reported that this man would have similar horrific thoughts about the Devil when he was holding a knife or pizza cutter in the same room as his children. If a person suffering from this kind of OCD obsesses too much on the task of trying to avoid all food and beverages for one hour before receiving communion at mass, the sufferer may be driven frantic with questions such as: Is it breaking your fast if (as a woman) you accidentally chew on your lipstick? Or if a particle of food stuck between your teeth is dislodged and you accidentally swallow it? One should also probably include in this category, cases like that of the nine-year-old girl who kept on obsessing about being damned to hell because she had forgotten to capitalize the word God once when she was writing it.<sup>24</sup>

That sort of OCD, whether religious or nonreligious, can usually be treated fairly well with medication (especially serotonin re-uptake inhibitors) and cognitive-behavioral therapy, particularly by desensitization via ERP (exposure and response prevention).

***Feeling unworthiness and shame:*** Ralph's fears however as he faced the ordination ritual were of a different sort from what we see in religiously-focused OCD. He tells us that he kept on asking himself questions such as this:

Can a child who told fibs grow into a man with priestly qualities? Can a child with a quick temper, a child who talked back to his mother and disobeyed his teachers grow into a man with priestly qualities? Can a child who once stole an apple off a passing pushcart grow into a man with priestly qualities? Can a child who made his mother weep because she could not afford to buy him a sled grow into a man with priestly qualities? Can a child who had fist fights with other

children grow into a man with priestly qualities? How can I go through with this? A priest must be a holy man, and I am not a holy man.<sup>25</sup>

And then he would start worrying about his mother's role in his life. "Did I really want to become a priest? Was this, after all, meant for me? Wasn't it all my mother's idea?" "Didn't she choose it for you? And don't you resent her for choosing it? And don't you show your resentment whenever you see your mother? Does this make you worthy?" And these latter questions raised yet another problem, which he continued to worry over for years afterwards: was he in fact damning his soul to hell every time he said mass or performed similar priestly duties? For he had become obsessed by the neurotic fear that his ordination was not valid if the proper *intent* had not been present.

Perhaps part of what was going on in Ralph's case could be included under the category of scrupulosity, but I think it is useful to look at two of Ernest Kurtz's books, *Shame & Guilt* and *The Spirituality of Imperfection*,<sup>26</sup> for a different kind of perspective on Ralph's spiritual problems. It is interesting how these two Catholic thinkers, Pfau and Kurtz, albeit in slightly different ways, nevertheless considered the resolution of some of the same spiritual problems as central to the process of healing from alcoholism. In the workings of Ralph's inner thoughts, it was as much, or more, a matter of what Kurtz referred to as "shame" — a sense of personal unworthiness, of a failure to accomplish what he felt he "should" have done — as it was of guilt over any particular sins committed. And at an even deeper level, there was Ralph's inner conviction that because of his having failed to achieve perfection — which was what he believed, down in his gut, the Church's teachers had required of him — he was totally and irrevocably doomed, and



beyond any possible redemption. For perfection, Ralph was convinced, was what had been required of him: a priest must be a *sanctus*, the Latin word for “saint” (that is, someone whose way of life was holy and sacred). It was this failure which tortured him: he was so far lost in his shame and failure as a person, that no *sanctification* — no return to complete holiness and approval in God’s eyes — could ever be possible for him. He could never be a good priest.

It was when Ralph finally figured out (after he came into A.A.) a way of speaking to this soul-destroying dread, that he discovered that he was not alone in believing that God had irrevocably rejected him for his sins. He found himself in the role of prophet for a joyous message of freedom from divine condemnation and the re-hallowing of human life, not only for numerous frightened Catholic alcoholics, but also for many equally tormented Protestants in A.A. One of the frequent effects of long-term chronic alcoholism is the belief that one is such a bad and evil person, that it is fruitless to even think of turning to God. Opening one’s eyes to the light of God’s holiness is the most frightening thing that one could possibly imagine. Ralph gave hope and the chance of new life to these terrified souls.

***Teaching and graduate studies:*** In September 1929, Fr. Ralph was sent to his first post, to serve as assistant pastor at the Old Cathedral in Vincennes, Indiana (the oldest church in Indiana, first established a quarter century before the American Revolution), and with the additional responsibility of teaching four Latin classes and one religion class daily at Gibault High School. The following summer (1930), he was sent to Fordham University in New York City to begin work on a master’s degree in education. The course work was so undemanding and lacking in intellectual challenge, that he found himself purchasing half a dozen books on the Latin of Caesar, Cicero, and Virgil and spending most of his time studying

them instead. It is significant that it was not the medieval Catholic world of St. Thomas Aquinas, nor the world of the French and Spanish saints of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which ended up at the focus of Ralph's intellectual interests, but the classical world of ancient Rome. It was therefore not totally surprising that it was St. Augustine, the last great thinker of the classical Roman world, who was later going to provide Ralph with a route out of scrupulosity and neurotic perfectionism which was going to finally make sense to him.

Doing a master's in education and teaching high school was hardly the same as doing a doctorate in Rome and teaching at the college level — he had failed to measure up to the standards set by his older brother Jerry — but it was all he had. Significantly, this is when Ralph first started to drink — bourbon mixed with ginger ale — even though only moderately at first. It was bootleg liquor of course, because it was the Prohibition Era. The sale of beverage alcohol, outlawed in the United States in 1920, was going to continue to be illegal until December of 1933, when the prohibition amendment was finally repealed.<sup>27</sup>

When Ralph returned to Indiana, the head pastor at the Old Cathedral told him that all the teaching at Gibault High School was now going to be done by teaching brothers instead of priests. Ralph was now out of his teaching job, the only thing which he loved, and the only thing which had seemed to give much meaning to his life. His immediate response was to phone a lawyer friend in Vincennes, and ask him to help Ralph start drinking the case of illegally imported bourbon he had brought back with him from New York City. After that ran out, he found himself driving down to Jasper, the town which was the bootleg headquarters of southern Indiana, to buy unaged corn liquor from one of the many local folk who ran illegal stills back in the hills surrounding the town. He was eventually up to

almost a quart a day.<sup>28</sup> His resentment ate at his soul, and he could find no rest.

Why was Ralph unable to solve his drinking problem with the spiritual tools which had been given him by the Church? The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous said quite bluntly that resentment was the number one killer of alcoholics,<sup>29</sup> and this, Ralph discovered, was the key to finally unlocking the mystery of his own obsessive drinking. The problem, he said, was that the Church in which he had been brought up had never adequately warned him of just how destructive obsessive resentment could be to the spiritual life.

If I might rephrase the basic issue here in my own terms, traditional Church teaching tended to concentrate on the question of whether what I was doing (or was thinking of doing) at any given time was or was not a “sin” according to all the rules and doctrines of the Church. The Big Book on the other hand only used the word sin once in its first 164 pages (on page 13). It refused to lay out complicated rules and doctrines defining what was and was not sinful, and instead told us to focus on preparing a written list of the obsessive resentments which dogged our minds. Even if we could, by focusing on an overly selective assemblage of the data, convince ourselves that we were totally in the right and that the other people were totally in the wrong, that would not make the resentment go away. We would still be left filled with the fires of that particular resentment nagging at our thoughts — for hours, days, weeks, month, and years — and producing an unceasing burning pain which we would eventually find ourselves trying to numb with alcohol or drugs. And we were involved in self-delusion here anyway, since the presence of the obsessive resentment, which never went away, guaranteed the presence of some underlying, still unrecognized character defect — *something in fact still wrong with us* — at one

level or other. And in actual practice, discovering why we were being filled with so much resentment enabled us to identify our most important moral flaws a good deal more precisely than trying to figure out, in the various situations, who was “at fault” and who was “the innocent victim.”

What then did this important term “resentment” mean, in the A.A. sense of the word? *Sentire* meant to feel, Ralph noted in one of his writings (using his priest’s knowledge of Latin), so *re-sentire* meant to re-experience the same feeling again and again. Resentment meant taking a negative feeling, like anger or self-pity or some feeling of being injured, and falling into a compulsive cycle of rehearsing that bitter feeling over and over in our minds, without being able to break ourselves free from its hold. Where it became especially deadly was when the person who was feeling the destructive resentment had convinced himself that the resentment was justified.

And as far as Ralph was concerned, during the many years of his out-of-control drinking, was he not in fact justified in feeling resentment at being denied the opportunity to do anything other than the most routine parish work? Was this not an outrageous rejection of what were his obvious talents and abilities? Or so his mind would tell him. But the alcoholic’s mind can never forget the other possibility: that this was the proof — indisputable evidence of what everyone except himself could see — that he was totally unworthy of the priesthood, and that he was in fact lucky that they were even allowing him the trivial jobs which he was now being given. Either side of that dilemma was too painful to handle without the aid of alcohol or drugs to dull his mind.

***A series of further breakdowns:*** The next eleven years were grim ones. He rapidly went through seven different parishes and had to be sent off to a sanitarium three times, as he plunged into yet another

total mental breakdown.<sup>30</sup> The repeal of Prohibition had taken effect on December 5, 1933, which made it easy to obtain as much liquor as he wanted.

The last of these assignments — he was sent to serve as assistant pastor at St. Joan of Arc's in Indianapolis in October 1943 — must have been a particularly bitter pill to swallow, for this was a parish, as we have noted, which had been founded by his notably successful uncle, Bishop Alphonse John Smith. The contrast between the accomplishments of his notable uncle and his own failure as a priest must have been extremely painful.

***A.A. in Indianapolis:*** Indianapolis was one of the first twenty-seven American cities where A.A. groups were established. The group was founded on October 28, 1940 by Doherty “Dohr” Sheerin, a retired businessman in Indianapolis, who was an Irish Catholic and a devoutly religious man.<sup>31</sup> In desperation over his inability to stop drinking, Dohr had written to Cleveland, where Clarence Snyder was the great A.A. leader; they sent Irwin Meyerson to Indiana to make a twelfth-step call on Dohr and teach him how to set up an A.A. group in Indianapolis.<sup>32</sup>

In many cities, A.A. still had a strongly Protestant cast in 1940, deriving from its early roots in a Protestant evangelical movement called the Oxford Group.<sup>33</sup> New York for example only had one Catholic member during these early years. But Mitchell K. tells us (based on his interviews with Clarence Snyder) that Cleveland was quite different, even as early as April 1939:

The majority of people from Cleveland who were attending the Oxford Group gatherings at T. Henry's home in Akron were Roman Catholic. According to Clarence (and I see no evidence to the contrary) that was one of the main reasons they started the group to be called AA in Cleveland. The

Catholic members were being told by their respective churches that since several of the practices of the OG went against what the RC church preached, they shouldn't or even were forbidden to go.

Clarence Snyder went to Dr. Bob in Akron and finally persuaded him to sever the connection between Alcoholics Anonymous and the Oxford Group in that city in October 1939. Since the New York alcoholics had already broken away from the Oxford Group meetings in August 1937, and Cleveland had declared its independence on May 10-11, 1939, Dr. Bob's decision to stop meeting with the Akron Oxford Group was the breaking of A.A.'s last official linkage to Protestantism.

Clarence said that he went to the Archbishop at the time after they had broken off from the OG to show that there was no longer any connection with the OG and asked that there no longer be any problems. Clarence's letter to Hank proves that the Golrick group was not as evangelical as Dick [Burns] claims and that once AA broke off from the OG in Cleveland, the practice of surrendering by accepting Jesus wasn't used so that AA would be open to ALL who sought recovery.<sup>34</sup>

It was this kind of upper Midwestern pro-Catholic A.A. which the Indianapolis group came out of. And Doherty Sheerin, the group's leader, was Catholic himself, making Indianapolis A.A. even more Catholic-oriented than Cleveland A.A. It should also be noted that Irwin Meyerson, the Cleveland alcoholic who made the twelfth-step call on Dohr, was Jewish, so that it was made especially clear that Indianapolis A.A. was not a Protestant indoctrination center which was attempting to lead people away from the basic principles of the Catholic faith, but a genuine interfaith movement.

When Fr. Ralph finally decided to reach out to Alcoholics Anonymous for help on November 10, 1943 (the evening of his thirty-ninth birthday), it was Doherty Sheerin whom he telephoned. Dohr had put A.A. pamphlets out in the vestibule of the rectory at St. Joan of Arc's; he was well known by the Indianapolis priests and greatly respected by them. Dohr took Ralph under his wing, and he never drank again.<sup>35</sup>

## CHAPTER 3

### **The Myth of Perfection, Natural Theology, and St. Augustine**

*Perfection and St. Augustine:* Once he was going to A.A. meetings, Ralph had to start working on his own inner issues, some of the most important of which centered on the problem of his scrupulosity and perfectionism, and his conviction that he was a failure because he had never produced the kind of accomplishments which others in his family had achieved. He eventually turned to the writings of two important saints to find spiritual answers to these issues: St. Augustine and St. Thérèse of Lisieux.<sup>36</sup>

The first saint made good sense, once one thought about the basic underlying issue and when it had first emerged in Catholic history: one of the key questions in the famous fifth-century dispute called the Pelagian controversy had to do with the possibility of Christian perfection. During the early 400's A.D., Pelagius and his supporter Celestius, who were absolutists and perfectionists, fell under attack from St. Augustine and St. Jerome, who defended the Christian faith as originally taught by Jesus and the Apostle Paul.

As St. Jerome noted in his *Dialogue Between Atticus, a Catholic, and Critobulus, a Heretic*, the Pelagians tried to defend their positions by arguing that "God commands us to be perfect, and he does not command impossibilities." We did not need the help of God's grace in order to do this, the Pelagians said. Salvation had to



be earned by us human beings by our own hard work and will power, and we could only win it by achieving absolute perfection. The Pelagians held that sin arose only as a *peccatum habituale acquisitum*, an acquired sinful habit or disposition. By using their natural will power, and carrying out the proper ascetic exercises, human beings could eliminate all sin from their lives and become perfect.<sup>37</sup>

This kind of Pelagian perfectionism was nonsense of course, and totally in opposition to the Catholic faith. St. Augustine<sup>38</sup> joined St. Jerome in condemning the Pelagians and wrote a series of works against them, one of the most important of which was his work *On the Spirit and the Letter*. This was most likely the principal work upon which Ralph relied in working out his own position, particularly chapters 65 and 66 of that work, although he could also have studied works like Augustine's *Concerning Man's Perfection in Righteousness*, where chapter 19 was especially relevant.

My note: Lutheran theologians have traditionally cited Augustine's *On the Spirit and the Letter* as a defense of the Protestant statement of the central gospel message which proclaims that we are justified by faith alone and not by works of the law, but we must be careful here. St. Augustine taught that we were saved *sola gratia*, by grace alone (a doctrine he emphasized very strongly indeed). But St. Augustine (and Father Pfau) were Roman Catholics, not Protestants, and neither one taught that we were saved *sola fide*, by faith alone, as good Protestant theologians had always taught.

Ralph interpreted St. Augustine's work in Catholic fashion, which meant not as a call to have faith, but as a description of *the kinds of actions* which we must perform in order *to perfectly strive*

*after the highest perfection* in a world where we will never arrive at that ultimate goal in this life, but can nevertheless *completely fulfill* what God actually wants us to be doing, which is continually striving in that direction.

***The Myth of Perfection:*** Ralph first gave a long discussion of his new understanding of the issue in *The Golden Book of Resentments*,<sup>39</sup> which he published in 1955, twelve years after joining Alcoholics Anonymous. He gave that section of the booklet the provocative title “The Myth of Perfection,” and began it with a quote from St. Augustine: “*Let us admit our imperfections so we can then begin to work toward perfection.*”<sup>40</sup> Then he explained what that statement meant in the simple Hoosier language of the small towns and countryside of Indiana: “*There ain’t nobody perfect in this world.*”<sup>41</sup>

“There ain’t nobody perfect in this world” . . . . All of our lives we expected perfection, and when we again and again found instead imperfection, faults, failings, even serious ones, we became “disillusioned” — which in reality was only a vicarious form of self-pity . . . .

We first thought our parents were perfect. Then we found out they weren’t! Frustration number one. Then we met the gal (or guy) of our dreams. And think we to us: here is perfection. And then we married her (or him)! Frustration number two . . . .

Then along came our children. And without doubt they were perfect. “Isn’t he the most perfect thing that ever lived?” And then the policeman brought T. Jonathan home one day . . . . Our child? Never! But it was our child. More frustration . . . .

But we held on to the mirage to the very last: We were perfect, and if you didn't believe it, all you had to do was to ask us! . . .

The truth? No one is perfect . . . Like a little Scriptural proof? "If anyone among you says he is without sin, he is a liar and the truth is not in him."<sup>42</sup> Just a longer way of saying: There ain't nobody perfect.

Perfection is a myth based on spiritual pride. But in fact we will never have a perfect family, perfect friends, perfect business associates, or a perfect body. Sometimes we will get sick, or have aches and pains. We will also never have perfect emotional lives. Fr. Ralph comments:

How many come to us and complain: "I have been trying so long — for years — to control myself and I still get upset, I still get jittery, I still get angry, and I still get nervous." Well, what did they expect? Perfect control? Perfection?

This is the alcoholic mind at work, Fr. Ralph says, the "persistent struggle to reach that smooth feeling." When alcohol stops doing it, some people then turn to drugs. Ralph tried to use combinations of alcohol, barbiturates, and bromide compounds to help him get through each day — never too keyed up, never too depressed, never upset or disappointed by anything that happened — but just sailing along, as it were, on a waveless sea under a cloudless sky. But that was not the way the real world ever worked, no matter how hard we tried to make continual microadjustments in our mood with alcohol and other chemicals:

There will be days when we will be feeling wonderful and there will be days when we will be feeling lousy; and there

will be days when one is quick to anger and days when nothing upsets; and there will be days when we feel mean as all get out and days when we feel like doing a good turn even for our worst enemy. But then, life and emotions are like that, very uneven and imperfect, even in the best of men.

We also need to remember that perfection is a myth when we get too worried about the wandering thoughts running through our heads. We may even be kneeling in church and trying our best to maintain a worshipful and prayerful state of mind, when a wildly inappropriate train of thought suddenly pops into our heads and threatens to lead us into total distraction. Angry thoughts, envious thoughts, sexual thoughts, the yearnings of worldly ambition, and temptations of every other sort may erupt without warning in the minds of even the holiest of us, and throw us into at least a brief spiritual struggle before we can lay them once more to rest. Even Jesus himself was not exempt: the story of his active ministry began with the story of the temptation in the wilderness and ended with the story of his temptation in the garden of Gethsemane.<sup>43</sup> And as for the rest of us, as Fr. Ralph pointed out, “We may live to be a hundred, but we shall still have distractions, and ‘bad’ thoughts, and ‘screwy’ thoughts, until we’re dead.”

Ralph was speaking partly to his own spiritual problems of course: his tendency to scrupulosity, the sense of personal failure which he had when he first entered A.A., and so on. But he found that this message also spoke to a central spiritual problem found among large numbers of Catholic alcoholics. It is amazing how many newcomers to A.A. who are of Catholic background are initially terrified by the spiritual dimension of the program because of their belief that they have sinned so wickedly against God — not just by their out of control drinking but in many other ways — that

God would never hear their prayers for help. Most of them need, not being scolded and berated for their wickedness and supposed lack of will power and ordinary responsibility, but constant reassurance that God loves them and is going to keep on helping them recover, even if it takes months and years to begin getting their lives back in order again. And then Ralph discovered to his amazement, that up to sixty per cent of the people attending his weekend spiritual retreats were Protestants. They were just as terrified of God (and of the demands of real holiness) as the Catholics were!

***Father Dowling and St. Ignatius:*** The story is often told of how the Jesuit priest Fr. Edward Dowling, S.J., paid a visit to Bill Wilson late in 1940 after reading the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous. It seemed to Fr. Dowling that the twelve steps were so closely similar to the teaching of St. Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*, that Wilson must have had some kind of contact with Ignatian spirituality, the basis of the Jesuit order's special spiritual training.

In Fr. Dowling's interpretation, the Big Book's twelve steps formed a complete *ascetic system*, as he termed it, that is, a detailed program of *Catholic spiritual development* which led people from (a) the horrifying vision of their own personal hell, then (b) to the realization that the self as out-of-control ego was the underlying problem and had to be totally denied, and finally (c) to the culmination of the twelve steps in "the imitation of and union with Christ." It was a very Catholic understanding of the spiritual life: the A.A. third step for example, in Dowling's interpretation, made clear that the route to freedom lay in learning to use the rational will to make decisions, rather than allowing oneself to be totally ruled by emotions, feelings, and the destructive passions of those who are controlled by blind and uncritical devotion to ignorant and misinformed beliefs. The fourth step was an inventory of one's sins, which had to be followed, in good Catholic fashion, by a *general*

*confession* in the fifth step. These sins left us with a two-fold liability or obligation (*reatus*). The task of the sixth and seventh steps was to heal the *reatus culpae*, the liability of *guilt* which arose from those sins, where God's forgiveness had to be sought. The sixth step, Fr. Dowling said, was "love of the cross." Then in the eighth and ninth steps one dealt with the *reatus poenae*, which was the obligation to provide *punishment, penance, compensation, or restitution* (for the word *poena* in church Latin could mean any or all four of those things). Practicing the eleventh step then led to continual growth in our conscious knowledge of God. All this, Fr. Dowling said, was an accurate description of the second, third, and forth weeks of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius. Finally, in the twelfth step, our growth "toward Christ-like sanity and sanctity" allowed us to become full apostles and instruments of God.<sup>44</sup>

The twelve steps were a divinely inspired spiritual program, Dowling believed. Bill Wilson reported that it took him only twenty minutes to write them down: it was one of the best and most impressive examples in A.A. history of the Oxford Group's technique of automatic writing, where God himself used our minds and hands as instruments to write out his messages to us. Now if it had taken Bill W. twenty weeks, Fr. Dowling said, one might argue that he worked out the twelve steps by the use of his natural reason. But the fact that they had simply been jotted down in merely twenty minutes, could only seem "reasonable under the theory of divine help."

Fr. Ed Dowling was important because he was Bill Wilson's sponsor, spiritual director and confessor from 1940 all the way down to Fr. Ed's death in 1960.

***Spiritual catharsis and the via purgativa:*** But Fr. Ralph Pfau, as one of the four most published early A.A. authors, was by that fact a very important figure too — and of course also a Roman Catholic

priest, even if a diocesan priest instead of belonging to the Jesuit order — and he strongly disagreed with Fr. Dowling's interpretations. Alcoholics Anonymous, Ralph insisted, only dealt with a small portion of the spiritual life — the Purgative Way or Way of Spiritual Cleansing — and in addition, A.A. was certainly not divinely inspired. To understand what Ralph was saying, we first need to remember the distinction frequently made in traditional Catholic spirituality between what were called the Three Ways:

**THE *VIA PURGATIVA*** — the Purgative Way, called in ancient Greek the Way of *Catharsis* or Spiritual Cleansing — was comprised of the first set of activities involved in the spiritual life, where our work consisted of repentance for our past sins, cleansing ourselves of our character defects, and amending our lives. That was where beginners started the spiritual life, working at first (as we see in the first part of St. Teresa of Ávila's *Interior Castle*) only on their most obvious and gross sins.

**THE *VIA ILLUMINATIVA*** — the Illuminative Way, *Phôtismos* or Enlightenment — represented a more advanced stage, in which souls were progressively enlightened by a series of insights into the things of the spirit which transformed these people's lives at the deepest level.

**THE *VIA UNITIVA*** — the Unitive Way or *Henôsis* (which meant achieving Union with God), also called *Theôsis* (Divinization, the process by which the soul became divine), and also — this is very important — sometimes referred to as *Teleiôsis*, that is, Christian Perfection in the sense of arriving at full spiritual maturity and wholeness. In this third and last stage, the soul achieved union with God and was filled with

the divine holiness. This was the culmination of the spiritual life, which St. Teresa of Ávila referred to as the spiritual marriage.

Fr. Ralph argued that the Big Book and the A.A. program taught only the first of these three ways, and most certainly did not teach the higher forms of mystical spiritual Enlightenment, let alone Union with God, Divinization, and entering the Spiritual Marriage.

My note: I believe that Fr. Ralph, when he thought of the latter two ways (the Way of Enlightenment and the Way of Union with God) may have had an image in his mind of extraordinary experiences like the spiritual state portrayed in the famous Bernini sculpture of the Ecstasy of Saint Teresa in the church of Santa Maria della Vittoria in Rome. St. Teresa of Ávila, who has her eyes closed in total bliss as the angel prepares to pierce her breast with his dart, is quite possibly levitating six inches to a foot off the ground — or so some of her nuns believed that she could do! I think that Fr. Ralph is quite right, if he is arguing that the A.A. Big Book did not work at teaching alcoholics how to feel as though they were being immersed in orgasmic waves of the greatest of all human pleasures as they seemed to float several inches off the ground.

But I believe that, when Ralph argued in 1955 that A.A. did not talk about the latter Two Ways, he was not thinking about all of the issues. When he spoke of God in some of his other Golden Books as the power of Truth Itself, this was in fact part of the Illuminative Way. Divine illumination did not necessarily imply being totally swept away by ecstasies of overpowering divine light, like an out-of-body near-death experience. It could also refer to any insight in which we



suddenly saw ourselves and the world around us “in a different light” so to speak.

And although Ralph argued, in his little piece on “The Myth of Perfection” that “there ain’t nobody perfect in this world,” he was glossing over the fact that the Apostle Paul’s famous Hymn to Love in 1 Corinthians 13:9-11 did say that we could become *teleioi* (perfect, complete, whole, mature, adult) in the sense of having the fragmented, crippled, and broken parts of our lives healed and made whole again, and in the sense of taking the childish and infantile urges that used to dominate us, and teaching us how to bring these under control and start acting like mature adults.

Fr. Pfau went even further in his disagreement with Fr. Dowling when he argued that the twelve steps should not be regarded as the product of divine inspiration. As he said when interviewed by Ted Le Berthon for *Catholic Mind* in 1955, the twelve steps gave detailed teaching only about the *purgative way*, where they showed us how to make a little bit of significant *progress* in eliminating character defects which any rational person could identify without having to read any more advanced religious works. But true *higher religion*, which was based on divinely inspired religious texts, went much further than that, and taught us how to attain *teleiôsis*, which meant Christian *perfection*, that is, becoming *teleios* or “perfect” in the sense of arriving at full spiritual maturity and wholeness. I have underlined the key words in this statement which Father Ralph made in 1955:

Those spiritual laws always existed thus long before St. Ignatius formulated them in a particular way. They still exist. Adherence to them can still help any human being, whatever his or her problem. The fact that A.A.’s twelve steps coincide

with St. Ignatius' delineation of the purgative way is significant. For persons, while in the purgative way, are making spiritual progress, but are far from having attained spiritual perfection. That is why contrary to the implications of some shallow writers, A.A. is not a religion, for a religion is a program of perfection in its ultimate object. The A.A. program is only a program of spiritual progress, and then only for one unique kind of person, an alcoholic, a compulsive drinker.<sup>45</sup>

So in Ralph's interpretation of the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous, it was a work which dealt only with the Purgative Way. It did not formulate a complete ascetic system describing the entire course of the Christian spiritual life.<sup>46</sup> But equally importantly, in Ralph's interpretation, the Big Book was a work of *natural theology* and *natural law moral theory* only, teaching requirements for good human behavior which had been recognized for thousands of years all over the earth by all human beings who thought logically and rationally about the world. These universal truths included even the twelve steps themselves, which stated truths, he believed, all of which could be demonstrated by human observation and reasoning.

***Natural theology:*** Fr. Pfau believed that, as a work on natural theology, the Big Book (if I may put this in my own words) was like St. Thomas Aquinas's *Summa contra Gentiles* as opposed to his *Summa Theologica*. That is, the Big Book made no appeal to revealed truths. It made no major use of scriptural quotations to prove points. It never cited church dogmas as a rule of faith. It based its teaching about the nature of God and the difference between right and wrong solely on rational inquiry and empirical observation. It only talked about issues at the level of natural theology, or at least

for the most part. And it should be noted that Fr. Ralph also wrote his Golden Books in the same way, likewise for the most part.

***Bill Wilson's vision of light:*** To the extent to which the A.A. Big Book was simply a work of natural theology, Ralph did not believe that participating in the A.A. program, all by itself, could lead to eternal salvation, not without also obtaining access to the Church's store of grace. And in his belief, it certainly could not lead non-Catholics to the higher visions and ecstasies reported by the Catholic saints. Mel B., the primary author of *Pass It On* (the official biography of Bill Wilson), interviewed Fr. Ralph at one point in his researches, and was a bit taken aback when Ralph insisted that Bill W. could not have had a genuine vision of divine light at Towns Hospital in December 1934, because Bill was not a Catholic.<sup>47</sup> But Ralph's position was consistent with a good deal of the traditional Catholic theology of that time.

As a side note: in particular, Ralph's belief that Bill Wilson could not have had a genuine vision of the divine light was in line with what many Roman Catholic theologians thought back when he was in seminary (which was forty years before the Second Vatican Council). At that time, Roman priests did not read works on Protestant theology or history during their seminary training.

But in fact, if we look back at the early eighteenth century, at the writings of the two co-founders of modern evangelical Protestantism (just to give examples of good Protestant thought), we see Jonathan Edwards describing this vision in detail (in his famous sermon on "A Divine and Supernatural Light") as something which sometimes occurred in a genuine Protestant conversion experience, while John Wesley's whole theology was built around the concept of obtaining *teleiōsis* (Christian Perfection, the fruit of the Third Way) in this world

and this life, a concept of salvation which Wesley interpreted in terms of the writings of early Christian fathers like Macarius the Homilist (with his vision of the Man of Light and his meditation upon the Throne Chariot), Clement of Alexandria, and Ephraem Syrus.

In the sixteenth century, John Calvin, who was strongly influenced by St. Bernard of Clairvaux, spoke of saving faith as a vision of the divine light in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 3.2.19, while Martin Luther famously spoke of the book called the *Theologia Germanica* (with its powerful concept of the soul's mystical union with God) as a work second only to the Bible and the writings of St. Augustine in forming his own understanding of spirituality.

It is clear from all of Father Ralph's writings that he knew nothing about the more advanced study of Protestant theology, and I would suspect that it was mostly for this reason, that he did not believe that Bill Wilson had had one of the extraordinary visions which he knew that some of the great Catholic saints had had.

***Bill Wilson's writing of the Twelve Steps:*** And likewise, Ralph believed, no matter how excellent the twelve steps were, "God did not write these steps."

Nevertheless, Ralph said, "He did use those early members of A.A. who did write them as 'instruments' to bring His message to us alcoholics."<sup>48</sup> The twelve steps provided a road map leading morally bankrupt alcoholics out of the worst of their mortal sins and vices, which was a morally good thing to accomplish.

The Church therefore could not forbid Catholics to join Alcoholics Anonymous on the claim that it was "a merely 'naturalistic' program" in the negativistic sense. Good A.A. teaching certainly did not take the kind of negative, hostile, secularizing

approach in which the use of any resources except reason and natural science were attacked and forbidden. A.A. not only allowed but in fact encouraged Catholics to go beyond the bare bones of the spiritual life presented in the Big Book and start making use of the Catholic sacraments and reciting the traditional Christian prayers and calling upon the Church's store of grace.

***The eleventh step as a path to union with God:*** In 1964, some nine years after he wrote "The Myth of Perfection" and let himself be interviewed by Ted Le Berthon, Father Ralph seems to have possibly changed his position slightly. At this point, he stated that A.A.'s eleventh step provided a link between the mostly beginner's spirituality of the Big Book, and the higher religious teachings of the Catholic Church, for that step said: "Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out." As Father Ralph wrote there in 1964 (I am underlining the key words and phrases):

How can anyone read this step and miss the Finger of God in it? Naturalistic? If any member would ever achieve this step perfectly every day — their name would probably be Therese! Of Lisieux! For all in all, perfection ... *must* be brought about by perfect union of wills — the human and the Divine. And when that union is uninterrupted and constant — that is heroic sanctity [i.e. the fullness of sainthood in the tradition of the great Catholic saints of the past].<sup>49</sup>

So by 1964, Father Ralph was telling people at his A.A. retreats that if we truly work the eleventh step throughout every waking hour by "praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out," we can obtain the goal of the Third Way, which is

that blessed state of sobriety, serenity, and joy which is Union with God.

This statement from 1964 sounds like a more positive appreciation of the full spiritual benefits which could potentially be gained from the A.A. program and the twelve steps. I think that Fr. Ralph had definitely moved away from what he was saying in 1955, when he saw the twelve steps as teaching only the Purgative Way, and that alone.

Why might he have changed his position on this issue? By 1964, the Second Vatican Council (which ran from 1962 to 1965) was well under way, and Roman Catholic theologians and seminarians all over the United States were starting to open up to the rest of the religious world, and greet outside ideas with a new openness and appreciation. It no longer seemed so startling to suggest that a program devised by non-Roman Catholics might nevertheless contain higher religious insights.

And also, A.A. in Indianapolis had been started in 1940, and Father Ralph himself had come into the program in 1943, and had traveled around the country meeting people who had come into A.A. during the latter 1930's, which meant that by 1964 he had been able to get to know lots of alcoholics who were not Roman Catholics, and were oftentimes not even church goers, but who had obtained twenty to twenty-five years or more of sobriety. And some of these would have achieved impressive levels of serenity and love of God.

So by 1964, I believe, Father Ralph began to realize that he had to stop arguing blindly that only Roman Catholic alcoholics were ever able to achieve the higher levels of religious experience.

***But those who desire the higher spiritual gifts must nevertheless recognize that reading only conference approved A.A. literature is usually not sufficient.*** If I may put a comment of my own here at the end of this chapter, one of the things that most worries me about

present A.A. practice, is the enormous number of A.A. people who have foolishly convinced themselves that they can best achieve the highest levels of the spiritual life by only reading and studying books which bear the words “conference approved literature” — a newfangled phrase devised in 1994 to replace the circle and triangle logo — which at the practical level means books that are printed by the New York A.A. headquarters, which means books from which the New York office receives all the royalty payments.

I believe that Father Pfau was saying — clearly in 1955, but also probably in 1964 — that the literature printed by the New York A.A. office was not adequate *by itself* to explain and train men and women in all the things they needed to know in order to walk the *higher spiritual paths*. The Big Book’s generalized command to “seek through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God” pointed us in the right direction, but it did not tell us how to do this *in sufficient detail* to do us much real good, if that was the only spiritual book we had access to. An attempt to achieve the highest goals of the true spiritual life while reading only so-called conference approved literature and nothing more, could usually produce just a very weak sort of spirituality which contained only a pale and emaciated version of the deep serenity and steady courage and joy and gratitude of the real saints.

I think Fr. Ralph was exactly right, if we read him as warning us that, if alcoholics read only so-called conference approved literature, they will find that the kind of natural theology taught there will not usually take them very far in the direction of the higher spiritual goals of enlightenment and illumination, where we learn to live every moment in the continual awareness of God’s presence in us and around us, and learn to feel our souls being totally absorbed into the divine light and the outpouring streams of energy which flow

within the great ocean of divine love which surrounds us and fills us at all times.

For that we need teachers (like the biblical authors and the great Catholic saints of the patristic and medieval period) who are filled with divine grace and inspiration, and shine with an inner light which transforms them into the true God-bearers.

With a footnote for the non-Catholic: Can the higher spirituality also be learned from the Jewish tradition? Of course — the Mishnah and Talmud, as well as the teachings of the Kabbalah, and the tales of the Lamed Vavers (or Lamed Vavniks) for whose sake alone this present wicked universe is spared from destruction. And from the Hindu Vedanta authors, and Buddhism, and the Sikh religion, and other great religious traditions of that sort.

But if you are of Christian background, for heaven's sake start with the spiritual tradition which is founded in the inspired, grace-filled teachings of St. Augustine, St. Thérèse of Lisieux, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Ignatius Loyola, and the like. Father Ralph continually talked about these Christian figures in his writings, because he wanted us to read them, as well as other gifted spiritual teachers, that we might become filled with the highest possible spiritual power and grace, and become of the greatest benefit to the struggling alcoholics who walked into A.A. meetings desperately seeking help.

And also remember the help we can achieve from the larger A.A. tradition itself, if we start looking at all of the great works which have become widely recognized parts of traditional A.A. teaching, including the writings both of A.A. authors (like Richmond Walker's *Twenty-Four Hours a Day* and Ernest Kurz's *The Spirituality of Imperfection*) and of non-A.A. authors (like Emmet Fox's *Sermon on the Mount*,



William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, and Richard Maurice Bucke's *Cosmic Consciousness*).

***Perfection — a total myth? or the proper goal of the higher religious life?*** The careful reader of this chapter will note that Father Pfau in his famous essay on “The Myth of Perfection” seemed to say in 1955 that human beings were incapable of ever being perfect, but in his interview with journalist Ted Le Berthon that same year, did seem to assert that a truly saintly Catholic could achieve Christian perfection. On the other hand, Father Pfau told Le Berthon that A.A.'s twelve steps in themselves did not lead us to Christian perfection and the kind of union with God which saints obtained. That was Pfau's position in 1955, which already contained perhaps some inconsistency.

But then in 1964, Pfau said that an A.A. member who carried out the eleventh step perfectly would achieve that perfect union of wills which was the mark of the truly great saint.

I have argued here at the end of this chapter, that even then, Pfau did not actually claim that A.A. conference approved literature alone could provide us with all the detailed information, prayers to recite, and so on, which would take us to that point, and that he was assuming that the eleventh step simply reminded A.A. members that they were going to have to seek out additional resources if they wished to learn how to attain Christian perfection and a perfect union with God.

But this still does not remove all the contradictions and inconsistencies in Father Ralph's comments about Christian perfection. In one place he says that nobody is perfect, while in another place he portrays perfect union with God as the highest religious goal obtainable by truly saintly human souls. I think it is best to regard what he says in this matter as an excellent statement of

the basic issues, but not a final resolution of all the theological problems involved.

## CHAPTER 4

### **Abraham Low and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy**

***Abraham Low:*** Fr. Ralph turned to the work of the Chicago psychiatrist, Dr. Abraham Low (1891-1954), in his search for a modern philosophical and psychological system which would help him to better interpret, for today's world, the theological issues with which he was struggling. Low, who began developing his ideas in the 1930's, should probably be considered as the real founder of the kind of cognitive-behavioral therapy which was later associated with the names of Albert Ellis and Aaron T. Beck in the 1950's and 60's (Ellis took pains to give Low credit for developing many of the basic concepts).

Abraham Low, who obtained his medical degree from the University of Vienna, came to the United States in 1920 and ended up in Chicago at the Psychiatric Institute of the University of Illinois Medical School, where he was associate professor of psychiatry and neurology and assistant director. He eventually turned against the underlying philosophy of Freudian theory, with its pessimistic view of the human will and its denial that human beings could achieve mental health through learning to act rationally. "Life is not driven by instincts," Low said, "but is guided by the will." He began developing his own theory of will and decision-making, where he not only rejected Freud but especially set himself in opposition to

the kind of continental European pessimism represented by Arthur Schopenhauer's notorious work, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* ("The World as Will and Representation").

Low's theories had a strong influence on Fr. Ralph, as we can see throughout his writings. So for example, in *The Golden Book of Decisions* (1957), we can see Ralph emphasizing the way in which we need to find the solutions to our problems in fully conscious decision making.<sup>50</sup> Ralph makes little or no reference in his writings to unconscious psychological forces, and makes it clear that the principal route to sanity must lie in the use of our conscious will power to overcome the blind, primitive instincts (involving sex, violence, and so on) which can erupt from our lower selves.

Low was strongly influenced by the modern study of semantics, which had been founded by the philologist Michel Bréal in his book *Essai de Sémantique* (1897). The same external thing could be described using different sets of words, each set conveying a different semantic connotation, that is, a different emotional state, feeling tone, moral judgment, set of associated ideas and beliefs, and so on. I could describe someone as "arrogant" and create a totally different impression of the person than if I described the person as "filled with healthy self-confidence." I could describe someone as "over-emotional" and create a negative image, or instead characterize the person as "sensitive" and give my comments a positive tone.

What Low pointed out was that if I could train myself to change the semantic loading of the words I used in my inner self-talk — replacing demeaning, exaggerated, negativistic language with objective and more positive descriptions which led towards constructive solutions to my problems — I could change my whole emotional and feeling response to the world. If I could avoid calling myself "ugly," "lazy," "a failure," "a born loser," and other hateful

and spiteful terms like this, and practice using neutral and even praiseworthy terms instead, I could change the whole tone of my life — as I saw myself in my own eyes — and begin healing my psyche from all its traumas. This was one of the major themes that Pfau worked into the *Golden Books* and his pastoral counseling.

***Recovery, Inc.*** In 1937, Low founded a mental health self-help organization originally called Recovery, Inc. (now called Recovery International), to help patients deal with a wide range of different psychological problems, such as anxiety and panic attacks (including phobias), depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and bi-polar disorder. It could even help in anger management and make it easier for patients to manage schizophrenic symptoms. There are over six hundred groups meeting today in various parts of the United States and abroad. Low publicized his ideas in two important bodies of work, which came out in 1943 and 1950 respectively.<sup>51</sup> The *Saturday Evening Post* also published an article on Recovery, Inc., in its December 6, 1952 edition, which gave the group enormous national publicity.

Fr. Ralph drove down regularly to Recovery, Inc. group meetings in Louisville, Kentucky, in addition to his participation in Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. He also recommended Recovery, Inc. in his writings, see the *Golden Book of Sanity* for example.<sup>52</sup> Fr. Ed Dowling likewise recommended Recovery, Inc. in his speech to the NCCA in 1953.<sup>53</sup> One of the modern experts on Recovery, Inc., is Catholic A.A. historian Ernest Kurtz's wife, Linda Farris Kurtz, DPA, who is now Professor Emeritus at Eastern Michigan University's School of Social Work, and who also highly praises the group.<sup>54</sup>

Low teaches us — to give one example — that when I enter a restaurant (let us say) and someone else rudely pushes past me and grabs the seat where I had been planning to sit, causing me to feel an

explosion of anger, anxiety, depression, or some other kind of strongly negative feeling, that I should repeat to myself the phrase “this is average.” This is the kind of thing that happens to everyone on occasion. My having an emotional reaction is also the sort of thing that just about anyone would feel, a commonplace happening. The best way to handle this is to analyze my negative reaction, and then take steps to calm myself down instead of plunging into out-of-control rage, hysterical anxiety, or the deepest pits of depression. And part of the way I do this, is to change the semantic loading of the words I am using in the self-talk going on inside my head, by culling out the exaggerated and hyperbolic language by which I tend to catastrophize problems and turn everything into “the end of the world” (using terms like “totally outrageous,” “absolutely unacceptable,” “a criminal act,” “a menace to society,” and so on) and replacing words like these with less hysterical and more objective descriptions of what is going on. Anyone who studies Fr. Ralph’s Golden Books carefully can see this kind of basic approach coming out in Ralph’s calming pastoral advice over and over again.

A.A. people all over the United States and Canada studied the Golden Books and came to Fr. Ralph’s weekend spiritual retreats because he did in fact help people calm down and start dealing with their life problems in more constructive and successful ways — even if (like Fr. Ralph himself) they had continuing neurotic problems and psychological disorders which caused them to feel greater anxieties, angers, fears, phobic reactions, and panic responses than the average person, which in turn sometimes forced them to work harder than normal people at quieting their tendency to explode emotionally in out-of-control feelings and behavior.

## CHAPTER 5

### Forgiveness and Acceptance: Receiving God's Sanction

***God's approval and sinner saints:*** In his musing on the nature of perfection and sainthood, Ralph made an interesting word play. A "saint" in Latin was a *sanctus* or *sancta*, which was usually taken to mean a *holy* man or woman. But that same Latin root also gave us the word *sanctio*, which could mean "sanction" in the sense of giving something one's *authoritative approval*. Our first goal in life, Ralph said, should be sanctification in the sense of *being approved by God* — that is, sanctioned by God — NOT *acting like a flawless plaster statue of a saint*.

To begin walking the road which led to the fullness of sanctity in this sense, one had to have three things: (1) weakness, (2) willingness, and (3) grace. That is, to obtain God's approval — his divine sanction — we had to (1) admit our total powerlessness in the first step, then (2) become "willing to grow along spiritual lines" as the Big Book says on page sixty, and then (3) turn to God's grace. Since number one and number three — our weakness and God's freely offered grace — were always there, our responsibility was to supply the part in the middle, that is, to provide the *willingness*.

But we must remember here that "the perfection which God expects is in the willing, not in the fulfillment." As long as we keep on picking ourselves back up, over and over again, and doing the

best we can, we will retain God's total approval. We become that greatest of all paradoxes, "*sinner saints*." We learn to pray the prayer of the Pharisee (which we remember is also the basis of the Eastern Orthodox Jesus Prayer) — "O God be merciful to me a sinner" — and then we keep on trying to do what God wants us to do, in our own best understanding of what he wants.<sup>55</sup>

And it was at this point that Fr. Ralph did provide a more positive place in his theological system for Protestants and Jews by further radicalizing his teaching on the divine sanction:

We must *accept ourselves as we are — today*: good or bad, sinner or saint, ignorant or educated, screwball, or alcoholic (or both), or rich, or poor, Catholic, Protestant, Jew, agnostic, single, married, working, or out of work — and on and on: *exactly whatever we are now*. Then we do the best we can to *fit in* this place in life as we *are* — *with what we have*, not what some pious theorist tells [us] we *ought* to be or have. Let us never forget that one thing sanctity is *not* — it is *never objective*. This is precisely the error made by many spiritual writers. "To be a saint," they tell us, "we must do this and that and follow this rule and that and obey this law and that — perfectly" .... All rules and regulations and laws — human or Divine are to be obeyed *in so far as one is capable of so doing* .... The old Romans used to say "Omnes leges secundum capacitatem." (All laws are to be obeyed according to the capacity of the individual.)<sup>56</sup>

Unlike the Protestants, Fr. Ralph does NOT see *having faith* as a necessity for obtaining God's sanction or approval, at least not in the case of beginners in the twelve step program. "Sanctity in an agnostic?" Fr. Ralph asks. "Hmmmmmmmm, could be!" Faith is a gift of grace. On the matter of when faith is given, and how much faith is



given, that is God's decision. Even if our will is hesitant, rebellious, skeptical, or fearful, it is the only will we have here and now, today. We turn that flawed will over to God in the third step, and God will "*clean up our will*" so that we can become ... completely willing — and with that comes complete approval, sanction."

*Sanctity is sanction.* We aim our will at God as it is; He strengthens and remakes it; they *join* to each other — the human and the Divine. That is perfection, that is sanction, that is approval, that is sanctity; the union of wills, not the perfection of action!<sup>57</sup>

Ralph totally rejected that version of popular evangelical Protestantism which seemed to think that one could have a single ecstatic faith experience in which one took Jesus as one's personal savior, and then became totally and permanently cleansed of all sin and character defect as soon as one had confessed these wrongdoings. Instead he turned to the Catholic understanding that the spiritual life is a *process* taking days, weeks, months, and years. This was the ancient patristic Christian doctrine of *teleiōsis*, of going on to perfection. As Ralph put it, "a seed of corn will eventually become a stalk of corn if it *grows*."<sup>58</sup> That is our task, if we wish our activities to be sanctioned by God.

## CHAPTER 6

### Simple Sanctity and the Little Way of St. Thérèse

*St. Thérèse of Lisieux:* Fr. Ralph found a model of the higher forms of sainthood in an interesting figure, the young French girl St. Thérèse. At first glance this might seem a highly unlikely kind of place to turn, when preaching to a group of tough and pugnacious drunks. But let us remember the influence of St. Thérèse and the Carmelite tradition — including also St. Teresa of Ávila and St. John of the Cross — on Dorothy Day (1897-1980) and the rough and tumble world of the Catholic Worker movement. In fact, a thorough study of the literature on St. Thérèse can be extremely eye-opening for those who wish to understand better what Ralph Pfau was trying to do, and why.<sup>59</sup>

St. Thérèse, the Little Flower, was a young French girl who, at the age of fifteen, entered the Carmelite Monastery at Lisieux in Normandy, where she spent the rest of her short life. She had dreams of doing great things for God — when she was a child, for example, she had been fascinated by St. Joan of Arc, and actually obtained an invitation at one point to join a group of Carmelite missionaries in French Indochina — but all of this came to naught because she developed tuberculosis. She died at the age of twenty-four on September 30, 1897.

She was a very modern saint: at the time of her death, Bill Wilson was almost two years old, Sister Ignatia was eight, and Dr. Bob was eighteen. And she represented an approach to the spiritual life which was in direct opposition to a great deal of the Catholic piety of her time, an approach which spoke directly to Fr. Ralph's struggles with scrupulosity and obsessive perfectionism. The fine article by the Carmelite author Vilma Seelaus, OCD, entitled "Therese: Spirituality of Imperfection," expresses this aspect of the saint's teaching extremely well (this article, we should note, shared a title with one of the Catholic A.A. author Ernest Kurtz's best known books, the one which he and Katherine Ketcham wrote on *The Spirituality of Imperfection*). As Seelaus notes:

Even the smallest sin is unbearable when the self needs to be perfect and the goal is self-sanctification. Through years of struggle with her own fragility, Thérèse finally comes to the graced conclusion — extraordinary for her time — that her daily faults are not important in her life with God. Such an attitude was virtually unheard of in devout French circles. Her lack of illusions in regard to what it is to be human, allows her to come to such freedom that she can assign her imperfections no more importance than they deserve. She awakens to the truth that God is not concerned about the limitations of being human, but about love.<sup>60</sup>

St. Thérèse also had to deal with another of the great spiritual issues which Kurtz wrote about: the problem of shame which Kurtz focused on in his beautifully done book on *Shame & Guilt*.<sup>61</sup> There is a great difference between guilt and shame. We feel guilt for having crossed the line into behavior which we should not have engaged in — we broke the commandments and the laws set out by

the Church (or whoever else sets the rules), and did forbidden things. But we feel *shame* for an entirely different reason, for *not having met the goals which we had set for our lives*. As St. Thérèse's health grew worse and worse, she felt an increasing sense of having failed to do anything at all worthy or important in her life, in spite of her love for God and her desire to give herself totally to him. In her spiritual quest, she had to learn how to overcome this pervasive sense of shame — the same kind of feeling of total failure as a person, which had so dogged Fr. Ralph's life, along with the lives of most of the alcoholics who came into the A.A. fellowship only after making a complete shipwreck of their lives.

There was no reason to feel this way, St. Thérèse eventually realized. She used the colorful biblical metaphor of the flower of the field (Isaiah 40:6, Matthew 6:28) to explain what God had shown her about the goal she should actually have been striving for, which was to enjoy and glory, not in becoming a grand prize rose, but in simply being one of the many little flowers which make the world so beautiful:

Our Lord .... showed me the book of nature, and I understood that every flower created by Him is beautiful, that the brilliance of the rose and the whiteness of the lily do not lessen the perfume of the violet or the sweet simplicity of the daisy. I understood that if all the lowly flowers wished to be roses, nature would lose its springtide beauty, and the fields would no longer be enameled with lovely hues. And so it is in the world of souls, Our Lord's living garden. He has been pleased to create great Saints who may be compared to the lily and the rose, but He has also created lesser ones, who must be content to be daisies or simple violets flowering at His Feet, and whose mission it is to gladden His Divine Eyes when He deigns to look down on them.<sup>62</sup>

The route which St. Thérèse discovered toward becoming one of the little saints, was to practice love and service towards all the other people around her, in all the little ways that she could discover.

Great deeds are not for me; I cannot preach the Gospel or shed my blood .... But how shall I show my love, since love proves itself by deeds? ... The only way I have of proving my love is to strew flowers before Thee — that is to say, I will let no tiny sacrifice pass, no look, no word. I wish to profit by the smallest actions, and to do them for Love .... I will sing always, even if my roses must be gathered from amidst thorns; and the longer and sharper the thorns, the sweeter shall be my song.<sup>63</sup>

It was the same basic message of love and service that Dr. Bob gave later on in his last speech in Cleveland, the call to be continuously kind and thoughtful to even the least of the souls around us, in every small way that we could think of.<sup>64</sup>

***Ralph's adaptation of St. Thérèse:*** We can see Fr. Ralph drawing directly on St. Thérèse's ideas and adapting it to A.A. purposes, in his *Golden Book of Sanctity*.<sup>65</sup> There are three different kinds of sanctity, Ralph says: three different (perhaps partly overlapping) types of saints. We see *Heroic Sanctity*, he observes, in men and women like "St. Paul, the Apostles, the Martyrs, and the like: all of whom accomplished great deeds perfectly both in view of God and man." These are analogous to the great roses and fine lilies of St. Thérèse's metaphor.

Then Ralph adds a category not found explicitly in St. Thérèse's writings, to accommodate saints like Thérèse herself, who received

formal canonization in spite of not being a great Catholic academic scholar, or missionary, or martyr, or the founder of a religious order:

In this class we find the long list of canonized saints ... who performed ... through the grace and call of God heroic virtue but did not accomplish outstanding tasks, or deeds in public life .... St. Therese of Lisieux in her own autobiography emphasized the fact that great deeds are not necessary to qualify for heroic virtue — perfection in simple daily life also takes heroism — a special vocation. She simply did all things each day in her ordinary life — as a Nun — perfectly.

Ralph's third category is what he calls *Simple Sanctity*: "here we find or should find the rest of the vast human race — you and you and you and me! It is not a *special* vocation, it is a universal vocation to *all* mankind." That is what the rest of us are called to accomplish, to become the cheerful and happy little flowers scattered about the meadow. This is not a matter of neurotic, compulsive perfectionism, or authoritarian slavery to rules and regulations, but a simple commitment to treating everyone around us with love and compassion and tolerance, and helping every person we come upon with little acts of service. There is no shame in being one of the Little Flowers of St. Thérèse, to becoming one of the shower of blossoms which she promised she would let fall from heaven after her death.

## CHAPTER 7

### **Winning Acceptance for A.A. within the Catholic Hierarchy**

*National Clergy Conference on Alcoholism:* The NCCA — the important national organization dedicated to helping Catholic alcoholics and providing a forum for the interchange of ideas among Catholic leaders working with alcoholics — honors Fr. Ralph Pfau as its great founder.<sup>66</sup> The modern NCCA leader Monsignor William J. Clausen quoted from a talk which Ralph gave in 1957 in an account he gave of how the group was created:

In talking to Father Dowling in St. Louis in 1948, Father Pfau said: “You know . . . it would be a nice thing if we could find out who else among the clergy are in AA, because I think that priests in AA feel the need to know if there are other priests in AA.” Father Dowling suggested, “Why don't you have a retreat of some kind?”<sup>67</sup>

Mary Darrah says that more detailed planning began as part of “an informal discussion among four priests eating hot fudge sundaes at an Indiana soda shop in 1949” — Ralph Pfau, John Dillon, Raymond Atkins, and John C. Ford.<sup>68</sup> Ralph gave special credit to Fr. Dillon in particular in the foreword to the first *Blue Book* (the volume published by the NCCA every year, containing the text of

the talks given at that year's conference). We should also note the reference to four important bishops and archbishops, about which we will comment further along:

Early in 1949 plans for a seminar for the Clergy who are active members of Alcoholics Anonymous were made by Fr. Ralph Pfau of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis and Fr. John Dillon of the Diocese of Lafayette, Indiana .... From Aug. 23 to 25, 1949, more than 100 priests gathered at St. Joseph's College, Rensselaer, Indiana. Their Excellencies, Archbishop Schulte, Bishop Bennett, and Bishop Cody (representing Archbishop Ritter) were in attendance.<sup>69</sup>

The conference has continued meeting annually since that date. Originally called the National Clergy Conference (and/or Council) on Alcoholism, it is now referred to as the "National Catholic Council on Addictions." In 2008 it became a service arm of Guest House (the treatment center for Catholic clergy and religious), using Guest House's Lake Orion, Michigan, address.<sup>70</sup>

***Gaining acceptance of A.A. among the Catholic hierarchy:*** At the time the Big Book was being written, the A.A. movement had only one Catholic member whom we know of — only one at least in Akron or the general New York City area — an Irishman named Morgan Ryan from Glen Ridge, New Jersey, who had just gotten out of the asylum and had not participated in the actual writing of the book. Morgan gave one of the multilithed manuscript copies to the Catholic Committee on Publications of the Archdiocese of New York, which gave it a positive review.<sup>71</sup> But this small committee certainly did not speak for the Catholic Church as a whole. Later on, Bill Wilson became friends with Monsignor Fulton Sheen. But Sheen, even though a popular radio (and later television) figure,



could not have spoken for (or influenced the opinions of) the Catholic hierarchy vis-à-vis the young A.A. movement.<sup>72</sup>

***Opposition from Cardinal McIntyre:*** Although the official conference-approved A.A. literature tries to give the impression of warm and widespread Catholic support for Alcoholics Anonymous from the beginning, in fact there were some members of the Catholic hierarchy who were strongly opposed to A.A. Cardinal McIntyre in Los Angeles, for example, told Fr. John Ford that he would not allow him to speak at the 3rd A.A. International which was to be held in Long Beach, California, in 1960. Fr. Ed Dowling said that when he wrote asking whether the Cardinal would permit him to speak, McIntyre wrote back saying that he would allow him to do so since he was not an alcoholic, but only provided that he follow the ideas set out in the pamphlet “Help Your Alcoholic Friend” by Rev. William Kenneally. In his letter to Fr. Dowling, Cardinal McIntyre said that he did not want an alcoholic priest talking; and that he objected to the disease theory of A.A.<sup>73</sup>

James Cardinal McIntyre, who was Archbishop of Los Angeles from 1948 until 1978, was an arch-traditionalist, as we know, who later deeply opposed many of the changes made by the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), especially the changes in the liturgy. After he retired as archbishop and took on the duties of a parish priest at St. Basil’s Church in downtown Los Angeles, he celebrated the old Tridentine Mass on its side altars as a rebellion against the new liturgy.

***Fr. Ralph brings in Archbishops Ritter and Schulte to support A.A.*** But Fr. Ralph was a superb ecclesiastical politician, who managed to get some other very powerful members of the hierarchy on the A.A. side. He served under three bishops in Indianapolis: Bishop Joseph Chartrand, who had died in 1933, but more

importantly, Bishop/Archbishop Joseph Ritter (1934-1946) and his successor Archbishop Paul Schulte (1946-1970).

It was Schulte who on Christmas Day of 1947 had released Ralph from his parish duties at Holy Cross parish in Indianapolis, and had given him a special mission where he was allowed to spend his full time as a priest working with A.A. The archbishop also inscribed his official *Imprimatur* on the inside front page of Fr. Ralph's first three Golden Books: *The Spiritual Side* (1947), *Tolerance* (orig. titled *Charity*, 1948), and *Attitudes* (1949).

By appearing at the first meeting of the NCCA, Archbishop Schulte helped give the participants confidence that important members of the hierarchy would give them backing in their mission.

Archbishop Ritter had been transferred to St. Louis in 1946, three years after Ralph got sober, but had been impressed so favorably by the way Ralph's life had been turned around by A.A., that he sent his then Auxiliary Bishop, John Cody, to represent him and convey his blessings also upon the NCCA. Ritter was later one of the leading reformist bishops at the Second Vatican Council in 1962–1965, and a very powerful and respected figure in the American Catholic hierarchy.

(Cody was not a negligible figure himself. He later became Archbishop of Chicago and a Cardinal, of course, and although he eventually became involved in a good deal of controversy and strife, he was nevertheless an important figure within the hierarchy to have on one's side.)

It is important here therefore to give adequate recognition to what Fr. Pfau accomplished in starting the NCCA (and keeping it going), and in bringing in, by the power of his charm and hard work, some extremely high-powered ecclesiastical supporters who continued to support the organization. A.A. was certainly not going to be automatically accepted by the Catholic Church, once theologians

and bishops began looking carefully at some of its more unconventional principles (unconventional by conservative early-twentieth-century American Catholic standards at any rate). Alcoholics Anonymous could easily have ended up being officially condemned by a combination within the church of moralistic and authoritarian forces who wanted to believe that chronic alcoholics could get sober by simply using more will power, and that alcoholism should be publicly condemned by the American Catholic Church as blatant and open sin — the voluntary behavior of people who had a clear-cut moral choice, but deliberately and willfully insisted on continuing to drink to excess — rather than as an illness or disease. The reason this did not happen was in part because Ralph got such a number of powerful figures supporting the A.A. cause.

## CHAPTER 8

### Later Life

***Society of Matt Talbot Guild.*** The SMT Guild was the group which published and distributed Fr. Ralph's books and recordings and helped support the NCCA through the work of Marge Klemm, Pat Worrell, Josephine Pfau, Mary Pfau and her husband Ralph, and their dear friend Marge McMahon.<sup>74</sup> The first printing of the first Golden Book (1947) had a photo of Matt Talbot at the back along with a description of his work and a "Prayer for the Canonization of Matt Talbot."<sup>75</sup> Praise for Talbot's example as a Catholic alcoholic who used prayer and worship to get sober and stay sober, is a theme which continues to be important in the Catholic tradition of the treatment of alcoholism down to the present day, as one can see in the many articles on the website which John R. Blair maintains for the Venerable Matt Talbot Resource Center.<sup>76</sup>

***1950 — Third Covenant Controversy.*** At the first International A.A. Convention in Cleveland in 1950, A.A. was just embarking on a five-year trial period of using the General Service Conference as its central governing body. The Twelve Traditions were approved, and in various other ways the basic rules and understandings were being worked out for giving A.A. its long-term permanent organization. Any major statements or positions taken would have shaped the course of the twelve step movement from that time on.

At the Sunday morning session, one of the speakers was apparently trying to set up a theological scheme in which the first covenant (according to his rather wild theory) was the one received by Moses on Mt. Sinai, the second covenant was the one which came through Jesus Christ, and the third covenant had Bill W. and Dr. Bob as its co-messiahs. His intention seemingly was to proclaim Alcoholics Anonymous as the new world religion.

A.A. historian Nancy Olson got an eye-witness account of this session from Tex Brown, one of the great oldtimers from the Chicago area:<sup>77</sup>

At the Spiritual Meeting on Sunday morning the main speaker's topic dealt with the idea that the alcoholic was to be the instrument that God would use to regenerate and save the world. He expounded the idea that alcoholics were God's Chosen People and he was starting to talk about AA being "The Third Covenant," when he was interrupted by shouted objections from the back of the room. The objector, who turned out to be a small Catholic priest, would not be hushed up. There was chaos and embarrassment as the meeting was quickly adjourned. I was upset and in full sympathy with the poor speaker. I did not realize it at the time, but I had seen Father Pfau in action and Father Pfau was right. I had heard the group conscience and I rejected it.

Nancy also found Bill Wilson's account of that same event, in a talk which he gave at the 1950 Convention later on:

On Sunday morning we listened to a panel of four A.A.'s who portrayed the spiritual side of Alcoholics Anonymous — as they understood it .... A hush fell upon the crowd as we paused for a moment of silence. Then came the speakers,

earnest and carefully prepared, all of them. I cannot recall an A.A. gathering where the attention was more complete, or the devotion deeper.

Yet some thought that those truly excellent speakers had, in their enthusiasm, unintentionally created a bit of a problem. It was felt the meeting had gone over far in the direction of religious comparison, philosophy and interpretation, when by firm long-standing tradition we A.A.'s had always left such questions strictly to the chosen faith of each individual.

One member rose with a word of caution. [Apparently he was referring to Fr. Pfau.] As I heard him, I thought, "What a fortunate occurrence." How well we shall always remember that A.A. is never to be thought of as a religion. How firmly we shall insist that A.A. membership cannot depend upon any particular belief whatever; that our twelve steps contain no article of religious faith except faith in God — as each of us understands Him. How carefully we shall henceforth avoid any situation which could possibly lead us to debate matters of personal religious belief.

Fr. Ralph had single-handedly taken the situation in hand and prevented a major catastrophe from occurring by sheer force of his personality and leadership, a disaster which Bill Wilson and the other conference planners do not seem to have recognized in advance (which is also rather amazing, to say the least). If the Third Covenant theory had become A.A. policy, every Jewish and Christian religious group in the entire world would of course have immediately distanced themselves from the twelve-step movement, and would have advised their members against joining it. On that one occasion at the very least, Fr. Ralph saved the entire A.A. organization from itself!

**1955 — *A.A. Comes of Age.*** At the Second International A.A. Convention in St. Louis in 1955, an important decision had to be made. The system of governing A.A. through an annual General Service Conference had been set up in 1950-51, for an initial five-year trial period. Now the A.A. members assembled in St. Louis were going to have to decide whether to make this governmental scheme permanent.

Attendance at the convention was very small. Clarence Snyder in Cleveland, along with Henrietta Seiberling, had formed an “Orthodox Group” to organize opposition against this kind of bureaucratic structure, which to their minds left the officials of the New York General Service Office in control of all of A.A. in between the annual meetings of the Delegates, and gave them a dangerous amount of arbitrary authority. These officials would quickly become tempted, they feared, to act as a sort of all-powerful papal curia, with the Delegates never assembled in New York for long enough to be able to truly control them. Clarence and Henrietta and their supporters had decided to boycott the St. Louis gathering.

Fr. Ralph had also been one of the people who had opposed the General Service Conference structure as Bill W. had designed it. On the basis of comments he made at various points, it seems that he believed that the structure was too rigid and authoritarian, and feared that it would degenerate into a body which overreached its real purpose, and that it would soon be attempting to pass hundreds and thousands of rules governing everything A.A. members said and did and read. Fr. Ralph did go to St. Louis however, and was present at four o’clock on Sunday afternoon, July 3, 1955, when the matter was called to a vote:

“From today’s perspective,” recalls Nell Wing, Bill’s longtime secretary, “it’s hard for people to realize what a

momentous decision was made that Sunday morning 30 years ago. It was dramatic and very moving to us who knew what an effort of Bill's this was, over a lot of opposition." Bill had pushed through the idea of a Conference largely by campaigning for it vigorously and personally. One of the members who opposed the idea, the influential and controversial Father P[fau], had announced he was going to rise and speak against it. "So after Bill had presented his resolution and Bern Smith asked for the vote of approval," Nell continues, "we from the office sat with bated breath." But Father P. remained silent [and the resolution was carried unanimously by a show of hands].<sup>78</sup>

**1958 — *falling out with Bill W. over anonymity.*** Ralph and Bill Wilson seem to have immediately become good friends when they first met in San Diego in 1948. The two of them traveled from southern California to Ensenada, Mexico together, and later appeared on the same speaker's platform in Austin in June of that same year.<sup>79</sup> After ten years of friendship, however, a dispute over the anonymity principle put them at odds with one another for a long period of time — seven years — from 1958 to 1965.<sup>80</sup> It was not until the end of their lives that Ralph and Bill W. met at the Toronto International in July 1965, where they finally patched up their quarrel and became friends again.<sup>81</sup>

It was not just animosity coming from Bill Wilson: Ralph had also had other detractors within A.A. for some time. Letters in the New York A.A. Archives complained because Ralph would give A.A. groups an up-front charge to speak at conferences and conventions (\$75.00 to speak at a meeting in Philadelphia in 1962 for example) and he also asked them to allow him to sell his books at places where he spoke.<sup>82</sup> He did this to cover his travel expenses but



also to pay his yearly living expenses. Under his arrangement with the Archbishop, he received no salary from the Archdiocese of Indianapolis. He may have received room and board free from Sister Austin and the Magdalen nuns at the Convent of the Good Shepherd in Indianapolis in return for acting as their confessor, or he may have had to pay them a nominal amount for that. This is unclear, but we do know that his overall expenses were in the neighborhood of \$600 a year when he first began devoting his full time to his A.A. work. He was eventually able to purchase a fairly nice automobile towards the end of his life, to use in traveling about giving talks, but continued to live in the three rooms which the convent allowed him to use (using one room as an office during the day and as a place to sleep during the night), in monastic austerity.

But the issue that actually caused the break between Ralph and Bill W. seems to have been a different one, the anonymity issue. Ralph had headed the NCCA openly and under his full name from the time of its founding in 1949. His niece said he felt he could do a lot more good by breaking his anonymity in that fashion, no matter the consequences to his own priestly career. *A priest in A.A.? Ralph wanted people to stop and realize, well why not, and of course!*<sup>83</sup>

Bill W. did not openly criticize Ralph's role in the NCCA, but finally became angered by Ralph's breaking of his anonymity in the publication of his autobiography in *Look* magazine in 1958. It not only gave his full name, but there were also a number of photographs showing Ralph's face, portraying him in full ecclesiastical vestments celebrating mass, and so on. In Bill Wilson's letters, he linked this with Lillian Roth's publication four years earlier of her autobiography, *I'll Cry Tomorrow*, in which she also broke her anonymity and spoke of her A.A. membership in print in public. Bill W. roundly condemned both of them to the rest of the A.A. fellowship.<sup>84</sup>

It should be said, however, that Bill Wilson himself had been on the road promoting A.A. all across the country during the 1940's, and allowing his photograph to be taken and printed in the local newspapers with great regularity. See for example his full face photo in the August 9, 1942 issue of the *Knoxville Journal*.<sup>85</sup> Bill had changed his mind by the 1950's, but not everyone in A.A. believed that the newly devised and far stricter rules about anonymity were wise or good.

**1965 — *making peace in Toronto.*** At the Fourth A.A. International Convention in Toronto in 1965, Ralph and Bill W. restored their friendship. A Canadian Catholic priest, Father Pete W., was present when Ralph and Bill W. met and made their peace with one another. He told me the story in a long telephone conversation. Pete (who was a relative newcomer to A.A. at that time, and had not become a priest yet) was one of the A.A. people posted on guard duty in the hotel hallway on the floor where Bill W. had his hotel room. His instructions were to let no one disturb Bill, with one exception: if Father Ralph Pfau came up, he was to immediately take him to see Bill. Ralph did in fact come, and went into Bill's hotel room where the two of them talked for a long time, an hour and a half or two. Pete says that it was very clear from the expressions on their faces when Ralph came back out, and from the way the two men said good-by to one another, that they parted the best of friends once again. Both these great A.A. leaders were near the ends of their lives by that point: Ralph died only a year and a half later and Bill passed away on January 24, 1971.

***Death — February 19, 1967.*** Ralph died of hepatitis early Sunday morning, February 19, 1967, at Our Lady of Mercy Hospital in Owensboro, Kentucky, on the south bank of the Ohio river, separated by just the river's width from his own beloved Indiana. Ralph's niece told me that he was already in poor health, and was

considering visiting Lourdes or one of the other great Catholic healing shrines in Europe. But the immediate cause of death was an anti-nausea shot for airsickness given him by a physician who used a needle that had been improperly sterilized (this was back in the days when doctors reused hypodermic needles over and over again). Apparently the person on whom the doctor had used the needle the previous time had hepatitis. They rushed Ralph to the hospital in Owensboro, Kentucky, where one of the doctors was an A.A. member, and the only physician whom Ralph trusted by now. But it did no good.

He did not last long. Ralph was sixty-two years old, and had been sober for twenty-three years. A Pontifical Funeral Mass was held for him at St. John's Church in Indianapolis four days later, on February 23, 1967, and he was buried in Priest's Circle at Calvary Cemetery.<sup>86</sup>

He was one of three good priests who, through their work together over the years, particularly set their mark on early Alcoholics Anonymous: the other two were Fr. Ed Dowling, S.J. (who had already died in 1960), and Fr. John C. Ford, S.J., who was now the only one left alive. It fell to him to write the epilogue at the end of Ralph's autobiography, for a new printing was issued shortly after his death. Ford concluded his postscript with the simple words:

The accomplishments of his life's work .... live on ... in the countless lives of those who found sobriety and peace, under God, through Ralph Pfau. May his courageous soul rest in peace.

## CHAPTER 9

### Seeking Balance among the Natural Instincts

Father Ralph had been plagued from as far back as his seminary days by near-paralyzing scrupulosity and perfectionism. We cannot fully diagnose the psychological causes — he never wrote any detailed reminiscences about his childhood home or his parochial school religious education — but this is a common consequence of viewing the moral life *legalistically*. Legalism or “works righteousness” means the assumption that virtuous behavior involves mechanically following hundreds of moral rules and laws, all of which have to be obeyed perfectly and absolutely. And Ralph spends so much time in his Golden Books trying to counter legalism and replace it with a different kind of vision of the truly virtuous life, that I think we can safely assume that legalistic assumptions dominated many of his own ideas about virtuous behavior from an early age, and that on this issue, he was preaching to himself in his Golden Books as much as he was preaching to his fellow A.A. members.

*The Big Book and Twelve and Twelve.* Now the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous, which had saved Ralph in 1943 from the alcoholism and drug addiction that was destroying his life, was notably free of any lists of detailed moral rules and rigid, unbreakable laws. In the Big Book, Bill Wilson had already pointed

in the direction of a totally different kind of ethic. But in that work, it was not explained clearly enough for Father Ralph to fully grasp where Bill W. was pointing, and it was not until the *Twelve Steps & Twelve Traditions* was published in 1953, that the priest began to fully understand the nature of this new and different kind of ethical system, as we see eventually reflected in Father Ralph's *Golden Book of Resentments* in 1955 and his *Golden Book of Passion* in 1960.<sup>87</sup>

When the section on pages 64-65 of the Big Book described how to do a Fourth Step moral inventory, it set up three columns. The first column gave the name of the person, institution, or principle at which I held a resentment, the second column gave a brief account of the cause, and the third column specified the area of my life which I felt was being harmed. Bill W. gave us several choices to choose between in that third column, which could be more or less divided up as follows:

- (1) our pocketbooks, our security
- (2) our personal relationships
- (3) our self-esteem, our ambitions
- (4) our sex relations

But Bill W. did not truly explain why the items in that third column needed to be in our moral inventory, and what we were supposed to do with that information.

It was not until he published the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* in 1953 that he fully explained what that third column was about. In that book, in the chapter on Step Four, Bill W. referred to those drives as “the natural instincts,” and subdivided them more or less as follows:

- (1) The survival instinct, the need for material security. People's efforts "to be secure in their persons," including the need "to harvest food [and] construct shelter."
- (2) The social instinct, the need for companionship. If human beings "cared nothing for the society of one another, there would be no society."
- (3) Our desire "for an important place in society."
- (4) The sex drive: if human beings "didn't reproduce, the earth wouldn't be populated."

As Bill W. explained in that chapter of the Twelve and Twelve,<sup>88</sup> there was nothing evil about any of these natural instincts, in and of themselves. So we could never draw up a rule stating that "good boys and girls never ever act on the basis of number two," or that "people who act on the basis of number one will be damned to eternal hellfire." Where we got into trouble was when we allowed one of these natural instincts *to fall out of balance*. And it could become unbalanced in either direction: *too much* or *too little*.

Instead of taking the form of a rule-based, legalistic ethical system, this produced a different kind of ethical teaching. But it was a way of understanding moral obligation which was also ancient and in fact went back over two thousand years, most notably to Plato and Aristotle, back in the days of the great Greek and Roman classics.

In his seminary days, Father Ralph had been introduced of course to Aristotle, whose philosophical vocabulary ran through all the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas, the *fons et origo* of pre-Vatican II Roman Catholic theological instruction. To read Aquinas at all, a student needed a fairly thorough understanding of Aristotle's technical language. And as an additional part of the standard Catholic seminary curriculum of that time, Ralph had also been taught a smattering of Plato. This was necessary in order to make an

intelligent reading of the great Catholic authors of the first thousand years, nearly all of whom understood Christian spirituality in terms of Platonic philosophical concepts.

And even after he graduated from seminary, we remember that in the summer of 1930, when the 26-year-old Ralph went to Fordham University in New York City to work on a master's degree in education, he found the course work so undemanding and boring, that he bought a stack of books written by various ancient Roman authors and began turning to the world of pagan antiquity for greater intellectual stimulation. He had a real love for the classical Greco-Roman world, and knew how to think in ancient philosophical terms.

So when Ralph began studying the *Twelve and Twelve* and began reading Bill W.'s more detailed theory of the natural instincts in the chapter on Step Four, he had already been primed in advance, so to speak, and quickly began to realize where Bill Wilson's ideas had originally come from. His reaction was not only to embrace them eagerly but — as we shall discuss later in this chapter — to radicalize them even further.

***Plato: the tripartite division of the soul and the four cardinal virtues.*** The great Greek philosopher Plato (born between 429 and 423 B.C., died between 348 and 347 B.C.) laid out a theory of the human soul and its proper functioning which became the basis of what the Roman Catholic Church later called the four cardinal virtues.<sup>89</sup>

In the *Republic*, Plato said that the human soul was divided into three parts, and in the *Phaedrus* he went on to liken it to a chariot which was guided by a wise charioteer and pulled by two winged horses:

The *logistikon*: The wise charioteer was the rational part of the soul, who always tried to think before he acted. He had to

ask, “What will be the consequences of doing this?” But he also had to ask, “Even if doing this will be very painful, would the consequences of not doing it be even worse?”

The *thymoeides*: One of the two horses was a fine thoroughbred race horse, who represented a part of the soul that (when out of control), erupted in uncontrollable rage and murderous temper tantrums, but that (when balanced properly) produced courage. That was where all real courage came from, from the proper channeling and focusing of our aggressive impulses. That was the only horse with the guts to keep at it, no matter how bad it got, and still win the race.

The *epithymêtikon*: The other horse was a lazy old nag who refused to get upset about anything, and kept on telling the other horse, “calm down, don’t get in such a sweat!” The important things in life, he insisted, were food, drink, sex, sleep, physical comfort, and mindless entertainment. Translating his recommendations into modern American idiom: “Go bowling,” he would tell you, “eat a pizza, get a bag of popcorn or pretzels and a half gallon bottle of cola, and watch a basketball game or a rerun of an old comedy on TV.”

All three parts of the soul were in fact equally important and equally necessary to the good life. But you got in big trouble in your life if you let any one of these three totally take control. This included the rational part, which (if it was allowed to suppress everything else in your life) could turn you into a futile, helpless, unworldly bookworm.

To Plato, the virtue of “justice” (*dikaiosunê*, right thinking), meant the proper balance between the three parts of the soul, neither too much nor too little. Now the opposite of being balanced is being



unbalanced, which even today in modern English is just another word that means insane. So when Plato said that the good life was the just life, in which I practiced *dikaiosunê* at all times, a very good translation of that Greek word would be sanity.

The way I live the good life — what has to be my principal goal at all times — is to stay sane. Let us imagine what it would be like if I (although sane myself) got accidentally locked in an insane asylum, where everyone else there was hopelessly insane. My best hope of survival would not be to become as crazy as they were — to get even with them? to show them how tough I was? to let myself act as crazy as them because none of these crazy people cared how I acted, so it didn't make any difference anyway? — no, my best hope of survival would be to stay as sane as I possibly could.

Now it should be noted that the ancient Greek word for virtue, *aretê*, came from the name of Ares, the god of war, and originally meant the qualities of the good warrior. We should never forget this when reading ancient pagan Greek discussions of the virtues, particularly in Plato. If our interpretation is coming out too “Sunday schoolish,” then we have lost the point they were originally trying to make.

Looking at it this way, then, according to Plato, the four virtues of the good warrior were:

**PRUDENCE** (Greek *phronêsis*, Latin *prudentia*): planning ahead, thinking about the consequences before I acted. But let us remember, warriors (soldiers in battle) who thought too little would quickly get themselves killed by doing foolish things, but warriors who thought too much would fail to take action when an immediate response was required.

**COURAGE** (Greek *andreia*, Latin *fortitudo*): Here too, I could fail in either of two directions. I would destroy myself if I let myself become so paralyzed with fear that I was unable to act even to save myself. But I would also destroy myself if I started acting out of blind rage and out-of-control temper tantrums, or letting my actions be guided by obsessive resentments instead of thoughtful purpose.

**SELF-CONTROL** (Greek *sôphrosunê*, Latin *temperantia*): using my will to bring myself back in line whenever I became tempted to turn the guidance of the chariot completely over to the lazy old nag, who would soon have me slacking off and loafing too much. Using my will to keep going when I had to, in spite of heat or cold, physical pain or tired muscles or lack of sleep. But again, I could err in the opposite direction, and suffer burnout because of failure to realize when I had driven myself too long and too hard, and absolutely had to stop and rest for a while.

And of course **JUSTICE** (Greek *dikaiosunê*, Latin *justitia*): “right thinking” in the sense of preserving my mental balance at all times, and staying sane.

*Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics: seeking the Golden Mean between the two extremes.* The philosopher Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) developed Plato’s ideas further in his work called the *Nicomachean Ethics*.<sup>90</sup> In that work, Aristotle explained on good philosophical grounds the impossibility of devising any set of mechanical rules or moral laws which in fact adequately defined virtuous behavior. It was, however, easy to describe extremely *bad* behavior, and to explain why extremely bad behavior was so destructive. We therefore had to take this as our starting point.

The reason why virtuous behavior was so difficult to define was because it was in fact simply the mean (the middle point) between two extremes of undesirable behavior. The formula which we therefore needed to follow in describing ethical behavior was quite simple in terms of its basic principle: in order to lead the good life *we should seek the Golden Mean*, the balance point between those two extremes.

Aristotle used the virtue of courage as one of his examples. It was impossible to design a set of rules, where merely following those rules would automatically make a person courageous. If only it were so simple and easy! We could however say that courage was the mean (the middle point or balance point) between two extremes: cowardice and foolhardiness. In a life and death situation, cowards let their fear drive them into doing things which made it far more likely that they would be killed. They totally froze with fear, or they turned and tried to run away, in situations where their only possible hope of survival was to stand and fight. At the other extreme, foolhardy people dove into situations which any rational person could see were too dangerous to attempt, just in order to show off to other people or for some other equally foolish motive.

It was easy to identify behavior that was totally cowardly or totally foolhardy. We could identify it above all by its obvious real world consequences, which in a particularly dangerous situation would end up with the person being seriously injured in some way or even killed, in a manner which could have been avoided. In the case of truly courageous people, on the other hand, we could look at their track record in dealing with dangerous and frightening situations, and see far better survival skills at work.

And Aristotle showed that this same kind of analysis could be applied to all the different kinds of behavior which were regarded as virtuous. Generosity in the praiseworthy sense, for example, was the

midpoint between the two extremes of being a hopelessly selfish skinflint and being a foolish show-off who threw money away stupidly in grandiose attempts to appear important.

***Where and how did Bill Wilson learn about this Aristotelian approach?*** The answer to this question requires speculation on my part, but to start with, I do not believe that this kind of Aristotelian philosophy would have been part of Bill Wilson's schooling in small town New England during the early 1900's. I think that at the time the Big Book was being written (1938–39) he had come to the conclusion that human beings were not intrinsically bad. Our character defects were produced by natural instincts which were good and necessary in themselves, but had somehow gone astray. A lot of the modern psychiatrists and psychologists whom he knew at least a bit about, held positions much like this. But at that time, Bill W. did not know how to explain this more clearly.

When he started writing his book on the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* some years later (it was published in 1953), he had had a Jesuit priest (Father Ed Dowling, S.J.) as his sponsor and personal spiritual guide since 1940. He had also had spent a year (in 1947–48) studying the traditional Roman Catholic faith with then Monsignor Fulton J. Sheen (later made a bishop and then archbishop).<sup>91</sup> Sheen had two doctorates, one in theology from Rome and another in philosophy from the Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium. And then Bill W. had a second Jesuit priest, Father John C. Ford, S.J., read through the first draft of his book on the twelve steps and twelve traditions.

Now in studying for the priesthood, as noted earlier in this chapter, Roman Catholic seminarians had to learn a good deal about Aristotle in order to read the writings of the thirteen-century theologian St. Thomas Aquinas, whose works still formed the basis of all Roman Catholic theological education during the first half of

the twentieth century (and in fact down to the time of the Second Vatican Council in 1962–65). Aquinas cited Aristotle’s ideas on just about every page of his *Summa Theologica*, where the saint was apt to refer to him simply as “the philosopher,” that is, as the authority you went to in order to find (almost one hundred percent of the time) the correct answer to all questions philosophical. References to the ideas in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* formed a regular part of that Catholic seminary curriculum.

So although this is only speculation on my part, I believe that one or more of the three Catholic priests whom I have noted helped Bill Wilson understand how to use Aristotelian concepts to phrase his idea about the natural instincts in clearer terms.

***Bill Wilson’s idea of achieving balance among the natural instincts:*** We see this Aristotelian approach coming out clearly in the chapter on Step Four in the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*. In that part of the book, Bill W. showed how each of the natural instincts could produce a deeply ingrained character defect by getting out of balance in either direction — either too much or too little. We eliminated the character defect by moving back toward the middle ground, and seeking what Aristotle called the Golden Mean.<sup>92</sup>

We might take the instinct for material security as an example. At the one extreme, some of the alcoholics who came into Alcoholics Anonymous were very well-to-do people (or at least once had been). They had not been content however with decent food to eat and clothes to wear and an adequate roof over their heads, but had been driven to seek money, money, and more money, in order to have fancier and fancier things to eat and clothes to wear, and bigger and bigger houses to live in, in fancier and fancier neighborhoods. The pressure drove them into becoming more and more frantic and anxious, and any obstacles they encountered began producing more

and more rage and resentment. Then they started drinking alcohol in order to self-medicate all of this anxiety and resentment.

At the other extreme, some of the alcoholics who came into Alcoholics Anonymous had never shown any responsibility in their lives. They had always had excuses for not working, and had never had an honest job for very long at any point in their lifetimes. Yet they somehow expected other people (or society) to supply them with food and clothes and a place to live, without them having to do any real work for it. They refused to work and be responsible, but were nevertheless consumed with jealousy towards the people who were better off materially than they were. They were also filled with resentment towards bosses who had fired them for laziness and not showing up. In addition, they always ended up living with continual worry and anxiety over having the water or the electricity cut off because they had not paid the bill, and other problems of that sort. They also continually drank more and more in an attempt to self-medicate the ever-increasing resentment and fear.

In the one case, we had the character defect of worrying too much about material things. In the other case, we had the character defect of not showing sufficient responsibility for our real material needs. Too much or too little, either one, got us in trouble.

The same principle applied to our use of all the other natural instincts. So for example, in our desire to have respect and recognition from the other people around us, there was nothing evil per se in working hard at a job in order to obtain salary raises and promotions. It was all a matter of achieving balance. Either too much ambition or too little ambition would create resentment and self-pity and all sorts of anxieties and worries and shame and guilt in the long run. We could err in either direction, either by falling into grandiosity and setting our sights too high, or by falling into so

much self-loathing and failure to see our own talents that we set our sights far too low.

***Resentments and fears as the red warning flags:*** When doing a fourth step, how did we decide whether one of our natural instincts had gotten out of balance? As the Big Book said on pp. 64–66 and 67–68, we needed to see what kind of *resentments* and *fears* had dogged all our thoughts for years. We looked for repeating patterns of behavior, using these two emotions — resentment and fear — as red warning flags telling us where to look more carefully at our attitudes and behavior.

***Father Ralph’s radicalization of Bill Wilson’s theory of the natural instincts:*** Bill W.’s *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* came out in 1953, and Ralph seems to have realized very quickly what Bill W. was doing in the chapter on Step Four. Already in 1955, in his *Golden Book of Resentments*, Ralph had come to the conclusion that the theory of seeking the Golden Mean would work even better and answer even more questions about the nature of moral behavior if one replaced Bill W.’s list of what were basically four natural instincts with a list of what were traditionally called the Seven Cardinal Sins, which Father Ralph renamed the Seven Passions.<sup>93</sup>

What Ralph said in the *Golden Book of Resentments* was very provocative and very radical indeed:<sup>94</sup>

Many people in this world wrongly think that they can “eliminate” various of their passions, e.g. pride. Or as the story goes, a certain teacher of the spiritual life was teaching her proteges to “slay” one passion a year! This can’t be done! We have seven basic passions, seven basic “drives to action,” seven basic “human tendencies.” It is “the law of the flesh fighting against the law of the spirit” mentioned by Saint

Paul. But they *cannot be eliminated*. They are necessary for life, for action. They are *good* in themselves, but *tend* to get out of control. It is our job to *CONTROL* them. Closing our eyes to them is what psychiatry calls “repression” and is responsible for many neuroses. Let’s take an example or two.

We all have the passion of lust: sex. To deny we have such drive or desire is “repression” — it is not healthy, and leads to neurotic behavior. *But* that does not mean we should therefore *indulge in sex*. *Sex indulgence never cured a neurosis*. But it does *mean that we must admit consciously that we have the sex drive*, and then *either* 1) use it according to reason in lawful marriage as indicated by our Maker *or* 2) *abstain willfully* in the single state. These two [methods both involve] “control” — *by* 1) reasonable use *or by* 2) total abstinence. *Both are healthy practices*, for “abstinence” is *not* “repression.”

Likewise we all tend to “get angry.” (They say there are people in this world who *never* get angry or irritated. But then they also say there are people in this world who are too *dumb* to commit sin! But we ain’t in that class, Bud!) That is a *good* tendency. It gives “drive” and “push” and “initiative” and all those things that go for successful living. *But* when it is *indulged in as a door to frustration, and vindication, and self-pity*, then it has gone “against reason” and also leads to neurosis — and in the alcoholic to *resentment and drinking*.

So we never even try to *rid* ourselves of these “tendencies.” They will be with us until we are dead. *But* we can gradually *control and direct them by the practice of the opposite virtue*.

In Father Pfau’s radicalized version of Bill Wilson’s ethical theory, the natural instincts were now seven in number — pride,



anger, covetousness, lust, gluttony, envy, and sloth — and they were good in themselves, he insisted, and necessary for life and action.

Some people called them the Seven Deadly Sins, but as he argued in the *Golden Book of Passion*, which came out five years later in 1960,<sup>95</sup> the proper Latin term for them was the *capita peccati*, which in fact meant, not *sins* necessarily in and of themselves, but the major *sources of sin*, the parts of our life where sin was able to arise. Although it was true that the old term *capita peccati* which was traditionally applied to them was regularly translated into modern English as “capital sins” — and although it was true that this did in fact sound like it meant “the big sins” or “truly major sins” — that was a misleading translation, he argued. The Latin word *caput* (plural *capita*) meant “head” or “source,” as used in traditional Latin phrases such as “*caput fluminis*,” meaning the source from which a river flowed.<sup>96</sup> Nevertheless, Father Ralph said,

... personally we have never thought that the term capital sin [is] an appropriate name. We like the term ‘*passion*’ much better even though passion is a broader term *per se*; we feel in modern language connotations, it makes much better sense. And we feel that calling them the *seven basic passions* of the human *personality* is far more accurate and understandable than calling them *capital sins* ....

[They are] seven basic drives often very disturbing, but which we must suffer and put up with, ever alert lest they lead us to sin, to wrongdoing, to problems of every type and kind .... [But] call them what you may, *all* human beings have them; *all* human beings have them *all* of their lives; *all* lead to sin if not controlled: but *all* are controllable presuming the grace of God; and *all* are *good* in themselves.<sup>97</sup>

**Pride:** As an example of the way Father Ralph understood the seven passions, let us look at his treatment of the concept of pride.

*Pride* in itself is a good and necessary drive in life. Without it there would be no self-improvement; there would be no family improvement; there would be no work improvement. And so long as pride is *reasonable* and *justifiable* it is good. It is *not* wrong therefore to be proud of a job well done .... *But* when this pride goes beyond the limits of reason and truth — then we have a pride that is wrong and sinful .... Humility, the opposite of pride, is assuming “I am what I am”; pride [in the sinful sense] is assuming “I am what I ain’t.” Then comes egotism, vanity, frustration, resentments, self-pity, and what have you ....

[Pride in the sinful sense] is based on a falsehood — a lie. It is simply pretending to be what we are not; or pretending not to be what we really are. For this reason all alcoholics have become so proud [in the bad sense]; they have become such liars! And since “pride goeth before a fall,” our falls were frequent; our problems were many; our remorse great; our guilt deep; our repentance short-lived.<sup>98</sup>

When our prideful impulse gets out of hand, we start falling into behaviors like trying to take all the credit, willfulness, refusal to follow advice, looking down on others, boasting, denying or minimizing our faults, refusal to admit defeat even when it is clear that we have been totally beaten by something, and so on.<sup>99</sup>

**Anger:** Father Ralph likewise points out that the passion of anger is capable of being put to positive purpose. Like Plato, he sees the same basic emotion underlying both forceful good actions and out-of-control destructive behaviors. But it *feels* very different inside our

heads and our hearts when this impetus to action is put to good purposes, instead of exploding in a frenzy of crazed rage.

Without *anger* there would be little drive to action. For this reason the person of action is often the one who tends the more quickly to anger .... *Anger* controlled by reason is good; and even at times necessary and useful in maintaining discipline. But *uncontrolled* anger, anger which dictates action beyond reason, becomes wrong and leads to many troubles and sins. So it was that Christ Himself was *justifiably* angered by the money-changers in “His Father’s house,” and in anger dictated by reason, He drove them out of the Temple [Matthew 21:12, Mark 11:15, John 2:14-15].

Likewise the parent who is angered justifiably at the wrongdoing or disobedience of their children and *reasonably* and *with reason in full control* of that anger, justly punishes the child, is doing a *good* deed; they are practicing reasonable and therefore good discipline. But on the other hand, the parent who ‘*flies off the handle*’ and then in anger which has shunted all reason aside ‘*whales the daylights*’ out of the poor child, is doing wrong — and maybe a serious wrong, particularly if the punishment is unjust or serious.

It is all very simple: *anger is good if reason controls it; anger is bad if it controls reason.*<sup>100</sup>

***The Pancake Principle:*** In his *Golden Book of Passion*, Ralph spends most of his time talking about cases where we fall into bad and destructive actions by pushing one of these seven passions to its excess. In counseling people, I sometimes put this into my own words by referring to it as the “pancake principle.”<sup>101</sup>

I tell the people I am counseling the story of a woman who came to see a psychiatrist, and told him that her family had sent her to him

because she liked pancakes. The psychiatrist said, “Well, I don’t see anything wrong with that. I like pancakes myself.” The woman replied, “Oh, you must come visit me at my house, I have fourteen big trunks and footlockers stuffed with pancakes in my living room.”

We get into trouble when we start doing things to extremes in ways that are ridiculous or dangerous or destructive. Setting up long lists of complicated rules does not in practice keep people from doing this. In fact, legalists can use their lengthy sets of moral rules and absolute prohibitions to fall into even greater excesses of behavior.

So passing a rule, for example, saying that people who eat pancakes at all are going to hell, does not speak to the real problem which was ruining the life of that poor woman with her living room filled with thousands of pancakes. It was not loving pancakes in the ordinary sense, but being obsessed with pancakes in truly crazed fashion, which was the mark of her insanity.

The next person to walk in that psychiatrist’s door might have been a woman who was anorexic, who was literally starving herself to death in an out-of-control urge to remain in control of herself. For that patient, salvation would lie in the opposite direction, through learning that if she felt like eating two or three pancakes with syrup on them, that she should go right ahead and thoroughly enjoy eating those pancakes.

Mechanical rules (loving pancakes is always evil, or loving pancakes is an absolute requirement for all good boys and girls) do not speak at all to the real issues. Furthermore, if the rules we draw up allow us anything at all that we can still do without breaking any of those commandments, alcoholics will figure out some way of doing that one thing to excess and leaving a long path of destruction in their wakes. And *any* system of moral rules, no matter how carefully drawn up (and even if the rules are taken from books which

we believe to be divinely inspired) will *always* provide loopholes for out-of-control, excessive, and extremely destructive behavior of some sort.

***The Bicycle Principle:*** In his *Golden Book of Passion*, Ralph had spent most of his time talking about situations where we were indulging in one of the seven passions too much. But in fact, whatever we call them — the seven passions, the natural instincts, or what have you — we can get into just as much trouble by *too little*, as we can by too much.

So when I am counseling people, I sometimes remind them of what I call the bicycle principle.<sup>102</sup> It is possible to fall off of a bicycle in either direction, on the left hand side or on the right hand side. Passing a rule which tells bicycle riders always to lunge towards the right as hard as they can whenever they feel themselves falling will produce disaster, and vice versa. In fact, there is no way a beginner can learn to ride a bicycle by memorizing any kind of system of mindless mechanical rules.

We will fall if we lean either direction too much, either to the left or to the right. So people learn how to ride bicycles by learning “what it feels like” when they are beginning to lean a little too much toward either side. Being in balance means learning how to make corrections while they are still possible. If I am falling out of control and in the process of hitting the pavement with great force, this means that I have *already* gotten totally out of balance and will not be able to save myself from that painful fall. It does not take a complicated theory to figure that out. When I collide with the street and am lying there all scraped and bruised, I will have a good practical definition of what it means NOT to be in balance.

The bicycle principle is a good way of illustrating the point that Aristotle was making. In attempting to act ethically, I will always know when I have fallen into moral disaster, totally out of control,

because it will create great destruction, and will usually end up hurting very badly. Once I have learned how to sense when I am beginning to lean too far, in one direction or the other, and have learned how to make the appropriate correction, *before* I am falling totally out of control, I will be able to journey through life without leaving a trail of destruction behind me. This is the goal in the twelve step program, because it is an achievable goal, and will make our lives a thousand times happier and more successful.

## CHAPTER 10

### The Hierarchy of Spiritual Values

As Father Ralph traveled around North America speaking to A.A. conferences and leading weekend spiritual retreats, he discovered over and over that A.A. people were having enormous difficulty in working out a good relationship with God or developing lives filled with any steady sense of inner serenity, because they had developed what were in effect self-torture systems based on trying to follow hundreds of mechanical, legalistic rules, which they coupled with a neurotic perfectionism and a fanatical absolutism.

“Scrupulosity” was the old Catholic term for the extreme version of that obsessive and compulsive zeal, and Pelagius was the name of the ancient Christian heretic who taught an early version of that kind of cult-type religious approach back in the fifth century, and gave his name to that type of religious extremism (theologians still refer to it as “Pelagianism”). It was the great St. Augustine who singled Pelagius out as one of the great enemies of true spirituality.

Ralph as a young priest used obsessive and compulsive perfectionism to torture himself with guilt and shame, as he fell deeper and deeper into a dark spiritual pit in which his mind and heart were filled with a hopeless sense of rage-filled futility or black and bottomless despair. Over and over again, he would try to escape these feelings by turning to drugs in the morning and alcohol in the afternoon and evening. As a result he suffered four total

psychological breakdowns (in 1928-29, 1933, 1939, and 1943) and had to be institutionalized on three of these occasions.

But in 1943, he found A.A., and the practice of the twelve steps finally taught Ralph a way in which he could not only stop drinking and drugging, but also escape his continual sense of overwhelming guilt and shame, and find a loving and caring God. During the years that followed, A.A. people by the thousands would flock to hear him speak, because they found in him the teaching that would give them the peace and sense of God's love which they had always sought.

***The dangers of treating spiritual values as though they were all equally important at all times and places:*** Ralph discovered that one of the factors which could plunge people into such a dark spiritual place was creating a set of ethical rules and moral obligations and then treating them as though they were all of equal importance. We would be overwhelmed by this task if we failed to establish some way of distinguishing between our more important moral duties and our less important ones.

***The Order of Love:*** Ralph first talked about setting up a hierarchy of values in 1948, in a short section in his *Golden Book of Tolerance*,<sup>103</sup> where the issue was brought up in a question he had been asked by a man who was being criticized by his wife for spending too much of his time doing A.A. twelfth step work.

That particular Golden Book had originally been titled the *Golden Book of Charity* when it first came out, where it must be remembered that charity in old-fashioned theological terminology did not mean giving money to a charitable organization but was instead simply the old English word that meant ***Love***.

So the famous passage at the end of 1 Corinthians 13 in the New Testament, which says "So now there remain faith, hope, love (*agapê*) these three, but the greatest of these is love (*hê agapê*)" was translated in the old King James version back at the beginning of the



1600s as “now abideth faith, hope, *charity*, these three; but the greatest of these is *charity*,” and translated in similar fashion in the Roman Catholic Douay-Rheims version from the mid-1700s (the version of the Bible which Father Pfau used), again using the word *charity* instead of love.

When it is suggested that we place A.A. first in our lives .... the twelve steps themselves teach us to practice charity [i.e. love]; charity demands that we love our neighbor *as* ourselves. This gives us an indication that in practice, in the law of charity [love] there exists a certain order of love: God, ourselves, our neighbor.

[1] Hence our primary concern is the welfare of God, i.e. His Will ....

[2] Next in the order of charity comes *ourselves*. Because unless we are concerned with and seek first our own welfare, we shall not for long be of any good to either God or our neighbor. Failure to realize this one factor is also often the case of difficulty when individuals, though this is very sincere, practice twelfth step work to their own detriment [which eventually] brought about a case of over-tired nerves, irritations, conflicting thinking, wrong thinking, and — as a result — drinking again ....

[3] And then *our neighbors*. And even in the doing of good to our neighbor we must follow the order of charity which dictates that

- [a] *our family comes first*;
- [b] then our friends,
- [c] then all the rest — our enemies.

.... we must, if we want to follow the order of charity, choose our family's welfare before that of our neighbor in general.<sup>104</sup>

Then six years later, in 1954, Father Ralph wrote a much longer and more detailed account of what he regarded as the proper hierarchy of spiritual values in his *Golden Book of Principles* under the title "First Things First."<sup>105</sup>

When the alcoholic was running in a wild frenzy down the intoxicated pathway (or should we say alleyway?) of life, everything was helter-skelter. *First* things were not necessarily first. The moment and its pleasure was first. Alcohol was first. Money was first. Success was first .... *We wanted what we wanted when we wanted it* [putting our own will first] *and if we didn't get what we wanted when we wanted it we were "mad"* — or we got drunk.

[But when we came to A.A.] we learned that there exists an over-all *set order of things and values in life*. We learned that this over-all order of values, if consulted, would *most* of the time tell us what should be first. And ... we would have *order* and not *chaos* which had seemed to dog us through the years. What is this order of things? ... They are:

1. *God* and His will.
2. The *common good*.
3. *Our* welfare.
4. *Other* individuals.
  - a. Our family.
  - b. Our friends.
  - c. Our enemies.<sup>106</sup>

1. First comes God. Now by 1954, when this was written, Father Ralph had learned by experience that at least seventy percent of the

A.A. people who came to his spiritual retreats were going to be from Protestant backgrounds, not Roman Catholic.<sup>107</sup> So he explains that we discover the will of God through biblical laws like the Ten Commandments, through our own consciences, through prayer and meditation, and through the teachings of our church if we are church members. So this means “God as we understand Him,” but however we conceive of our higher power, God must always come first.<sup>108</sup>

2. Next comes the common good. This category did not appear in Ralph’s original 1948 version of the hierarchy of moral obligations, but was included now in the 1954 version. He explained this second ranking set of duties by simply quoting verbatim the first of A.A.’s Twelve Traditions, giving the 1946 Long Form instead of the 1949 Short Form (presumably because the longer wording made it clearer why this particular moral obligation was so important, and also how it related to the next item in the hierarchy of duties):

Each member of Alcoholics Anonymous is but a small part of a great whole. A.A. must continue to live or most of us will surely die. Hence *our common welfare comes first*. But individual welfare follows close afterward.<sup>109</sup>

Ralph expanded this however in the pages that followed, to include the common good of our family as a whole in our home life, the common good of all the employees at the business in which we are employed, and so on.

3. But our own welfare comes in third place, and has a very high level of precedence. This was an extremely important level of obligation to Ralph. Neglect of this area of moral responsibility had been a major problem in his own life back in the past. So for example, during his early days in the A.A. program, he had at first continued to drive himself unmercifully, in what eventually became

quite dangerous fashion. After a wildly successful talk in Wichita Falls, Texas, in the Spring of 1948, followed by invitations to speak in Austin, Texas, and Hollywood, California, Ralph set up a nationwide itinerary of speaking engagements which kept him traveling constantly for five months, from November 1948 down to April 1949: California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Louisiana, North and South Carolina, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, and Tennessee. He gave twelve talks in fourteen days in southern California alone; seventeen speaking engagements in Texas alone. He spoke to an audience of six hundred in Rome, Georgia, and then at the A.A. anniversary dinner on St. Patrick's day in Miami, Florida. Then after just a brief rest back home in Indianapolis, he was back on the road again in the summer of 1949. He spoke at the anniversary celebration in Montreal up in Canada, and at the Southeastern A.A. convention in Richmond, Virginia.<sup>110</sup>

As he kept this up, Ralph eventually became so exhausted that he almost had a fifth total psychological breakdown. A psychiatrist told him at that point that he absolutely had to give himself regular breaks where he could rest and restore his energy. The only alternative would be to placed once more in a mental institution, as had happened to him before.

To explain why he put this duty in third place, Ralph referred to the wording of the second of the two great biblical commandments — the commandment which says “love your neighbor as yourself” — to argue that this necessarily implied we had to learn to love ourselves first, before we could then learn how to love other people:

We never in the past really had our *welfare* at heart. If we had, we certainly would not have given ourselves such a beating! But the law of love tells us that we must *love ourselves first*, **then** our neighbor. So putting first things first

means that *we must first take care of ourselves: body, mind, and soul*. If we don't, eventually we won't be any good to God, to our neighbor, or to ourselves. So if it is a decision affecting either *our* welfare (*not* feelings!) or our *neighbor's* welfare — *we come first*.

This happens so often: the twelfth-step call that might throw us, morally or alcoholically; the A.A. activities that keep us keyed to a dangerous pitch; the person whom we might hurt if we avoid but who is a source of temptation to us — morally or alcoholically. *We come first*.<sup>111</sup>

***Codependency and the self-hate syndrome:*** My own observation has been that a large number of alcoholics in recovery — once they have been in the program for one or two or three years — begin suffering from a new problem, from *codependency*. In certain kinds of situations, they let other people take advantage of them and abuse them. In these contexts, they have difficulty saying no and standing up for themselves, and can easily turn into enablers who actively help other addicts and alcoholics (and toxic and destructive people in general) continue down their path to destruction. And A.A.'s sister fellowship — Al-Anon — is filled with numerous codependents, and with men and women who suffer from other forms of the *self-hate syndrome* (even though we should note, of course, that codependents and men and women who are filled with self-hatred are not by any means the only kinds of people who might need the Al-Anon Family Group recovery program).<sup>112</sup>

With its strong emphasis upon learning to love ourselves, Father Ralph Pfau's Hierarchy of Values deserves praise as one of the early recognitions within the twelve step movement of the importance of combatting the self-hate syndrome. This particular Golden Book — the *Golden Book of Principles* — came out in 1954, only three years

after Lois Wilson and Anne Bingham held their April 21st luncheon at Stepping Stones where the Al-Anon Family Group fellowship got its first tentative formal start.

*My own comments on Father Ralph's overall Hierarchy of Values:* I would like to include a small critique here of his organizational scheme. I would point out that he in fact moved back into a certain amount of legalism of his own, in his attempt to sort the problem out in this particular way. His hierarchy provided a neat, mechanical set of rules for determining, in numerous situations, which of two conflicting moral duties was the most important to fulfill — but perhaps too neat and too simple. In practice, there were too many exceptions to his rules.

A good mother, for example, might well feel in certain kinds of situations that her duty to her small baby (a fourth-tier responsibility according to Father Ralph) took precedence in part over her duty to take care of her own physical welfare (which he categorized as a higher level, third-tier responsibility). And a careful person would discover numerous everyday moral obligations where a *very important* duty, even though it ranked relatively low on Father Ralph's hierarchy of values, would nevertheless (because of its seriousness) rank *far higher* than some fairly trivial requirement, even though that trivial obligation, technically speaking, ranked higher on the list of values. So for example, I might break off a telephone conversation with my spouse (even though my spouse got hurt feelings) in order to telephone the police to come and stop a murder that was about to be committed right in front of my eyes, and this in spite of the fact that the person who was about to be shot and killed was a personal enemy to me, an individual with whom I had quarreled verbally in the past, and someone whom I regarded as hostile to my best interests.

So a thoughtful person can easily figure out numerous kinds of situations in which Father Ralph's categories are too mechanical and too lacking in the ability to make important and necessary distinctions.

And yet, *Father Pfau spoke with a good deal of wisdom at the fundamental level. We must recognize the need to distinguish between different levels and degrees of moral obligation, or we will end up doing great harm both to ourselves and to others, in the effort (paradoxically speaking) to act morally at all times.* So Father Ralph's discussion of this hierarchy of values is both very helpful and extremely useful, and more than that, *any decent ethical system has to recognize that some moral responsibilities are far more important than others, and that trying to cover every tiny little minor issue at the expense of our broader responsibilities can lead us into doing great harm to other people.*

When wise old A.A. sponsors speak calmly to their anxious and distraught sponsees, and advise them to ask themselves, "How important is it, really?" this can frequently be the best moral advice in the whole world.

***Jesus' attacks on the Pharisees:*** In Biblical times, Jesus continually attacked a group of people called the Pharisees on this issue. Against the Pharisees, Jesus regarded recognition of a real hierarchy of obligations as crucial to any good moral system.

The word Pharisee, I might note, meant "the separated ones," and referred to certain kinds of small cult-like Jewish sects in Palestine during that period.<sup>113</sup> They held themselves separate from most of their fellow Jews, because they did not believe that the majority of Palestinian Jews were religious enough and scrupulous enough about following all of the hundreds of Jewish laws which Jewish rabbis at that time had first begun assembling and devising and codifying. The word Pharisee was employed in a manner similar to the way the

term “Puritan” was used later on to refer to some of the extremely rigid and rule-bound Protestant sectarians in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (who believed that they were much “purer” than all the other Christians around them), and in a manner similar also to the way the term “Fundamentalist” was used in the twentieth century to refer to a number of Protestant cult-type movements that stressed the literal interpretation of the entire Bible as a book of thousands of rules (and argued that all the other people who called themselves Christians had sold out the faith and were not real Christians at all).

Jesus healed people even on Saturdays, and the Pharisees promptly accused him of violating Biblical law by doing work on the Sabbath. When Jesus was doing missionary work, and someone invited him for dinner in a home which did not follow the kosher regulations closely enough for the Pharisees, they accused him once again of violating Biblical law, this time by “eating with sinners.” Jesus in turn mocked their scrupulosity by accusing them of doing the equivalent of going through their spice jars and pouring out ten percent of each jar to give to the priests at the Temple in Jerusalem — trying to carry out the Old Testament laws and provisions to the point of total absurdity. In Jesus’ words:

Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; because you tithe mint, and anise, and cumin, and have left the weightier things of the law; judgment, and mercy, and faith. <sup>114</sup>

***Bill Wilson on bleeding deacons:*** In the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, in the chapter on Tradition One, Bill W. set the theme for his explanation of the twelve traditions by telling the story of Eddie Rickenbacker. A fighter pilot during World War I, Rickenbacker was America’s top ace, shooting down twenty-one German warplanes and five of their heavily defended observation balloons.



Later on, in the 1930's, he became the head of Eastern Airlines, which eventually became one of America's largest commercial passenger airlines. During the next great war, Rickenbacker found himself in October 1942 flying on a B-17 Flying Fortress bomber, which was forced to ditch in a remote part of the Pacific Ocean. Those on board floated on life rafts for twenty-four days before they were rescued.

The Alcoholics Anonymous fellowship, Bill Wilson said, was the life raft, and the only way the alcoholics on board were going to survive was to learn how to work cooperatively with one another. If they fell into too much fighting, quarreling, and arguing — each person trying to boss or browbeat or put down the others, and trying to snatch a larger share from the others for himself or herself — in the long run, none of them would survive. In the history of A.A. up to that point (1953), it had been clear that some of the people who were most likely to start tipping the raft over were (1) a group of people whom Bill W. referred to as the “promoters” who were hungry for personal power and public fame, (2) a second group who were prejudiced and intolerant and tried to discriminate against others and block them out of their A.A. meetings, and (3) a third group whom Bill called “the bleeding deacons.”

The bleeding deacons were such a major source of disruption that Bill W. put his account of them close to the beginning of his discussion of the twelve traditions, in the chapter on Tradition Two. It was a phrase which went back to the world of small town and rural American Protestant churches, where every little congregation was apt to have some hyper-moralistic know-it-all who went around continually scolding the other members of the congregation for what the bleeding deacon regarded as some kind of moral lapse. These bleeding deacons took a sick, neurotic delight in devising nit-picking

interpretations of the church's rules which carried this moralism to ridiculous extremes.

AS A FURTHER NOTE: In the world of early twentieth-century small town American Protestant churches, the term "deacon" was a loose term usually meaning a layperson who tried to play the role of a kind of unofficial leader within that particular congregation, ranking below the ordained pastor (the pastor was called an "elder"). The slang term "bleeding deacon" was then a pejorative phrase generally understood, across a broad range of Protestant denominations, to connote a church member who was a busybody, a hypocrite, a bossy know-it-all, and an intolerant bigot who went around continually attacking other people.

In A.A., these bleeding deacons wanted to run everything and tell all the other members how to run their lives. If they failed to get elected to office, they would show up at group meetings and take out their anger and resentment by bitterly criticizing and attacking the leaders. Bleeding deacons, by their nature, tended to lose all understanding of what the rule had originally been devised for, so their narrow and picky interpretations of the rules would often end up paralyzing the group and preventing the group from doing anything worthwhile. Their goal in life, in other words, seemed to be to prevent anything from ever being done about anything at all, instead of being conceived in terms of positive and *possible* goals.

They could not see the forest as a whole, but instead worried themselves to death (and everyone else) fussing around about whether a single branch on a single tree was really straight enough, or other trivial matters. As a result, a forest fire could burn down the whole forest while the bleeding deacons were standing around doing

nothing but arguing for hours about whether a bird's nest in a single tree was or was not currently being occupied by a nesting pair which had two freshly laid eggs in the nest, and whether the mother bird should be officially scolded for not laying more eggs, or for laying one of the eggs without first whistling the correct bird song.

Alcoholics characteristically trip, not over mountains but over molehills. Once again, let us remember how a wise A.A. sponsor will sometimes turn to one of his or her pigeons — a sponsee who is in the process of becoming frantic and almost hysterical over some relatively minor problem — and ask, in a quiet and calming tone of voice, “How important is it, really?”

A man named John Shaifer was a great early black A.A. leader from Gary, Indiana, who journeyed every year to Father Ralph's weekend spiritual retreat at Gethsemani Abbey in Kentucky, and eventually did his Fifth Step with Ralph.<sup>115</sup> John told a story once from his early days in the A.A. program: he was developing an enormous resentment over the fact that his wife and children, when squeezing toothpaste out of the tube, would squeeze the toothpaste tube in the middle instead of from the end. He finally had to be told to quit driving himself (and his family) crazy over something so trivial, which simply did not involve any great moral issue. This was something which sensible people could take care of by simply exercising a tiny bit of personal responsibility of their own: “John,” he was told, “go buy your own private tube of toothpaste. They only cost thirty-five cents. Then take one of the drawers in the bathroom and put a lock on it if necessary, and keep your toothpaste there.”

***Hierarchies of moral responsibility: the extremely important vs. the far less important.*** So in discussing Father Ralph's ethical teachings, once again (giving my own critique of his system) I believe that it must be stressed that any attempt at setting up hierarchies of moral duties needs to include, not just the relative

ranking of different categories (duty to God, duty to the common good, duty to self, duty to my family, and so on) but also some common sense awareness of the difference between extremely important things and far less important things. This may sound like an extremely simpleminded distinction, but I think Ralph needs to be criticized here, just a little bit, for leaving out this part of the moral calculation. I have seen all too many people doing great harm by failing to ask the question “How important is it, really?” This is the sin of the Pharisee and the bleeding deacon.

***Our human minds can always devise many more worthwhile moral pursuits than a single human being could possibly accomplish:*** This is another way of putting the underlying issue. Any man or woman could sit around listing hundreds of things which they could do which would help other human beings, or could work out a corollary to some preexisting general moral recommendation which would apply this rule to some additional tiny area of our activities. Our minds can easily, in fact, concoct literally thousands more religious and spiritual obligations and rules of this sort than we could possibly fulfill. If we do not figure out some way of pushing a large number of these over into the category of “if we try to do that then we won’t have time to do such-and-such which is far more important,” we will end up falling into either (a) serious clinical depression or (b) gross hypocrisy. Or (c) we might attempt to play the atheistic existentialist philosophical game (*à la* Heidegger, Sartre, or Simone de Beauvoir’s novel *The Blood of Others*) where we declare that everybody feels guilty all the time, so we can ignore all feelings of guilt. And then each of us can invent our own moral rules, where we just fulfill the ones that we ourselves want to, as a matter of purely subjective personal taste. But the existentialist evasion is not the proper kind of answer either. Father

Ralph is right, we have to set up a hierarchy of moral obligations based on sensible considerations of importance and centrality.

***Blessed are the peacemakers, not those who torture themselves and others unmercifully in their frenzied, pathological pursuit of legalism, scrupulosity, blind perfectionism, and moral absolutism:***

Past that, we need to remember the opening words of the St. Francis Prayer, “Lord, make me a channel of thy peace.” In our personal hierarchy of obligations, we need to give especially high priority to being the ones who help bring harmony where before only discord existed — this is far more important than continuing endless quarrels over trivial issues such as how to squeeze a tube of toothpaste. Instead of acting like bleeding deacons and quarrelsome Pharisees and Nathaniel Hawthorne’s witch-burning Puritans sewing damning scarlet letters of condemnation onto people’s clothing, we need to be the ones who do our best to follow the seventh in the list of the Eight Beatitudes at the beginning of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount:<sup>116</sup>

*Beati pacifici quoniam filii Dei vocabuntur.*

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall  
be called children of God.

***First Things First.*** But it is also true that Father Ralph’s teaching on the Hierarchy of Values in the *Golden Book of Tolerance* and the *Golden Book of Principles* points us towards some extremely important discussion of fundamental moral principles, and deals with issues which must be considered carefully in our attempt to set up an understanding of moral obligation that avoids legalism and scrupulosity. Some things in life are far more important than others, Father Ralph advises us, and the best people are the ones who realize this and then consistently put First Things First.

## CHAPTER 11

### Father Ralph's Understanding of God as Truth Itself

*The moment of truth, when prodigal sons and daughters are forced to come out from behind the shelter of their denial systems and face God.* In his *Golden Book of Excuses* which dealt with alcoholic excuses and alibis, Father Ralph looked at a fact of life which lay at the very heart of recovery from alcoholism and addiction. Men and women have to put away all their excuses and alibis — what psychiatrists call their denial system — and face the truth about themselves and the certain doom to which they are heading:<sup>117</sup>

Somewhere along the path of life of every human being there comes a dread moment when he suddenly sees himself for what he is. Minus all the sham, the surface and the show, he then stands face to face with truth. Minus the deception of his own self-seeking and selfishness, he sees himself clearly outlined in the aura of God's grace as it tears away all the foolish self-deceptions and shows a man for what he really is — selfish, deceitful, full of excuses, dishonest even to himself and full of faults and failings.

That moment of truth — produced by the direct act of God's grace — changes the person's whole world, so that the individual is now given the power to begin both *seeing* and *walking* the path of redemption. But the person must make an act of will, because a human being brought into that situation is given not only the power to accept that gift of grace, but also the power to reject it.

It is then that life's greatest decision must be made and then it is that it seems that an angel has him by the hands and a devil by the foot. And having caught, perhaps only for a fleeting instant, a vision of himself naked in the white light of truth and the piercing rays of grace — having seen the abyss that separates him from what he should be, from what he has believed or tried to believe himself to be — and having at the same time recognized his own complete helplessness, he can do one of three things ....<sup>118</sup>

*First*, the person might choose to dive back once again into the old world of excuses and fantasies. People in this group, as St. Augustine pointed out long ago, fled from the truth because they were too proud and vain to admit that they had been wrong all those years. *Second*, the person might be so crushed by the guilt and shame of having to look at the past truthfully, that the individual (with a different kind of destructive pridefulness) might attempt to commit suicide, whether slowly by the bottle or in some shorter, more direct way.<sup>119</sup>

But *third*, the person might choose to do as the Prodigal Son did in Jesus' parable as recorded in Luke 15:11–24. The young man who was the central character there in Jesus' story — the younger of two sons — failed to make anything of himself. After wasting his inheritance in a long-drawn, prodigal, and extravagant spending

spree, he was reduced to having to take a job feeding pigs. It was then that the truth of his stupidity and his catastrophic downfall finally came home to him, which caused him to make the decision to return home. And to the young man's total surprise, his father forgave him and restored him to his status as a son.<sup>120</sup>

Taking this third path, Father Ralph said in his *Golden Book of Excuses*, was the wise path:

This is the way of the Prodigal Son, who dropped on his knees in the swine pen and cried: "Father, I have sinned" or with its echo "I am powerless. . . my life is unmanageable" — and perhaps for the first time in his life that man *really* prays and begins to *meditate*. *This is the humble man*. And day by day he prays and he *meditates* on *truth* lest again he fall back into his former dishonesties, into his former self-deception, into his former life-long *habit of excuses*. For the *life of all is loaded with excuses — and systematic, persistent and consistent meditation alone will dissipate them*. "With desolation is the land made desolate because there are none who thinketh in their hearts." [Jeremiah 12:11]<sup>121</sup>

The story of the Prodigal Son was highly symbolic to Father Ralph. He had been called to the priesthood, where he was supposed to serve as a *pastor*, which we must remind ourselves, was the Latin word that meant "shepherd." Good pastors were supposed to totally devote their lives to following in the footsteps of Jesus, who was the supreme Good Shepherd, who went out looking for lost sheep to bring them back to safety, and was literally willing to give his own life to save them (see John 10:11–16 and Luke 15:4–7).

But instead of trying to imitate the supreme Good Shepherd, Ralph had gone the path of the Prodigal Son, in the sense that he had



given away his family inheritance of higher service to the Church as he sank deeper and deeper into alcoholism and addiction. And Ralph was a younger son, we remember, just like the Prodigal in Jesus' story; his older brother Jerry, who earned a doctorate in theology in Rome and held a teaching position at a Catholic college, was the one whom the world had regarded as successful.

But finally, on November 10, 1943, Ralph telephoned the A.A. contact person in Indianapolis and made his call for help, and the Prodigal returned home. In the Spring of 1950 (just two years before he wrote the *Golden Book of Excuses*), he took a position as chaplain to the Magdalen nuns at the Convent of the *Good Shepherd* in Indianapolis, where he remained until his death. The sisters allowed him to spend almost his full time traveling around to speak at A.A. gatherings, and writing books to help recovering alcoholics. They also supplied three of their number to serve as his secretaries and helpers. Was the name of the convent just coincidence? Or was it divine synchronicity? God loves symbolism, we remember.

At any rate, when Ralph wrote his autobiography in 1958, he entitled it *Prodigal Shepherd*. He was the prodigal son, who had returned home, and now lived at the Convent of the Good Shepherd, and was doing what God had called him to do: working as a pastor, a “shepherd of souls,” going out to rescue one particularly difficult group of wayward lambs and lost sheep: the alcoholics and addicts of the world.

This moment of truth — having our eyes opened to the *real truth*, which Ralph came to on November 10, 1943 (the day of his thirtieth birthday) — was one that every alcoholic and addict had to arrive at.

For it is then that he sees fully and clearly without ... excuse what he has so far made of himself and how he has done it.

He sees the great and the small failures — the great and the small successes. He for once now knows things for what they really are in themselves and not in their labels. He sees the total effect of what seemed to be little compromises — the little treasons, the little dishonesties, the little failures to live up to God’s plan. He sees himself and his life for what it is — an intricate tissue of choices in which the smallest choice has given direction to other choices — like the tiny strokes of the artist’s brush, in themselves meaningless — but in their union with others bringing forth the full portrait.<sup>122</sup>

*But then the great paradox appears — once divine grace has opened our eyes to the saving truth, we discover that we can now demonstrate the validity of this newfound understanding of the world on purely rational grounds:* we can now explain it all with carefully reasoned proofs, empirical evidence, and elaborate intellectual theories, with no need to appeal to acts of grace, or the need of saving faith or divine intervention on the part of some otherworldly power.

Why could we not understand these things before? Why could not someone have simply explained them to us rationally, without all the religious and spiritual claptrap? So goes the cry of many psychologists and others who complain that A.A. is too “authoritarian” and acts like the worst kind of religious cult with its “demands” that newcomers accept things “on faith.”

Father Ralph was aware of this apparent paradox, and spoke about it in a different kind of context in his *Golden Book of Principles* (1954). In that book, he was describing what I would call the maxims of the Perennial Spirituality: that is, major spiritual principles which we find repeated in the writings of good religions and great philosophers throughout history. In particular, on page 24

of that Golden Book, Pfau was speaking about the Serenity Prayer, which in its modern form seems to have been written during the early 1930's by a famous Protestant theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr, a contemporary of Pfau's who taught at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. But the Serenity Prayer, even though composed by a Protestant, was a statement of a profound spiritual truth which one can find set down in scores of different ways in the writings of Roman Catholic theologians and ancient Greek philosophers and a host of other great thinkers over the centuries:

There can be no such thing as a new truth. Truth is always truth — it is eternal and unchanging, but it constantly finds new expressions of itself.<sup>123</sup>

If there are no new truths, only discoveries and rediscoveries of things that have always been true, since the beginning of time, then of course the marvelous insights into the truth of things which we receive in moments of inspiration and grace will often be principles which we can now prove logically, once the blinders have been removed from our eyes.

## **CHAPTER 12**

### **A Historical Note on Truth Itself and Being Itself**

In this chapter, I would like to turn away from the analysis of Father Pfau's writings in order to make a more lengthy explanation of St. Augustine's doctrine of illuminationism (with its accompanying concept of God as Truth Itself), together with a brief account of St. Thomas Aquinas's closely parallel idea of God as Being Itself.

The concept of God as Truth Itself (and Father Pfau's use of that idea) needs to be discussed and explained in greater detail, because (as was explained at the end of the previous chapter) this is where a great and disturbing paradox seems to arise, the apparent puzzle which lies at the bottom of one of the most confusing aspects of the modern quarrel between those who believe in the existence of God, and those who regard themselves as atheists. The latter think that because they can often give logical and rational explanations of the new personal insights they receive while involved in something like the twelve step program, this fact proves that no God or Higher Power or act of divine grace is necessary to produce transforming and healing insights of this sort.

For the past two thousand years this mysterious and seemingly paradoxical idea of God as Truth Itself has formed the oldest and most important alternative to naturalism in the history of western philosophy. It was also the basis within the Christian tradition of

what was by far the most important approach to the question of who and what God was — I do not mean to imply here that it represents the only way the human mind can devise of trying to talk about our knowledge of God, and the only way for trying to talk about the manner in which we can be aware of God’s presence, and receive guidance and help from God’s hand — but the idea of God as Truth Itself (phrased in one form or another<sup>124</sup>) has probably been the single most important way in which scores of the very best Christian theologians have approached this subject down through the centuries.

A word of warning once again, however. Here in this chapter, we will be looking at my explanations on this topic, not Father Pfau’s. But most of us do need some of this background material in order to better comprehend what Ralph Pfau was teaching on this point, and in order to understand why this part of his thought was so very important.

***St. Augustine’s doctrine of illuminationism as the classic statement of the doctrine of God as Truth Itself.*** We need to begin with St. Augustine in order to grasp the basic underlying idea behind Father Ralph’s teaching. We discover that when we read good scholarly books on epistemology and the theory of mind, these authors usually turn to the writings of Father Ralph’s favorite theologian, the great African saint Augustine (354-430 A.D.), for the classic formulation of the concept of God as Truth Itself, which is referred to as the doctrine of *illuminationism*.

St. Augustine based his ideas here on the ancient Greek Platonic philosophical tradition, and the etymological implications contained in the word *alêtheia*, the Greek word for “truth.” That word was derived from the root word *lêthê*, which meant forgetting, forgetfulness, oblivion, or concealment. In Greek mythology, a stream called the River Lethe was said to run through the

Underworld, where the souls of the dead were made to drink from its waters before they could be reincarnated into new lives here on earth (this being done so that they would forget their past lives and who and what they were in their previous existences here on earth).

The word for truth was then created by putting the Greek alpha privative prefix on that word *lêthê* (the prefix a- in ancient Greek was the equivalent of the English prefix un-) to produce the word *alêtheia*, which implied that the most important truths which we could learn were only a *rediscovery* of things we had once known, but had forgotten or let slip from our minds — or perhaps had buried and concealed deep within our unconscious minds in what psychiatrists called denial. Discovering the truth therefore often meant *uncovering* and stripping the mask or veil off something that we had deliberately tossed a lid over, because it was too painful to look at.

Augustine used this kind of concept of truth to explain, in several passages in his *Confessions*, the way in which he as a young man had buried and distorted the truth about his own way of life, until God's grace finally broke through and stripped off the layers of denial. In Book 4 of that work, Augustine described his life in North Africa during his early to mid-twenties (from A.D. 375 to 381, age 20 to 27).<sup>125</sup> He was living in Thagaste, the little town where he had been born (the modern city of Souk Ahras in Algeria).

My additional note: St. Augustine (354–430 A.D.), whose ideas were so influential on Father Ralph's writings, was of mixed race, and was described in one ancient document as a "black man," that is, as having a fairly dark complexion. His mother St. Monica came from a family of Berber tribesmen, who had come in out of the Sahara desert to settle closer to the Mediterranean coast, while his father Patricius (a

determined pagan until almost the end of his life) had Roman roots. St. Monica had been a childhood alcoholic, but had stopped drinking by surrendering her life to God and asking God for help. Thagaste, the place where Monica and Patricius lived (and where Augustine spent his childhood) was a town far off the beaten track, tucked away thirty miles south of the North African seacoast. Once a person traveled from Thagaste to the coast, it was still about two hundred miles north by sea across the Mediterranean to the island of Sardinia, or two hundred and fifty miles east by sea to Sicily. But this ancient African saint, in spite of having spent most of his life there on the primitive outskirts of the Roman empire, far away from the big cities and the great universities and libraries and the profound philosophers and theologians, ended up becoming the most important Christian thinker outside the New Testament itself for all subsequent western Christianity, whether Roman Catholic or Protestant.

The young Augustine's mind there in his early twenties, was filled with obsessive dreams and fantasies of someday achieving great fame and worldly praise — a kind of character defect which he referred to in his *City of God* as that form of pride (*superbia*) which continually drove us to seek the *gloria mundi*, the glory of this world, at whatever cost. In addition, Augustine told us in Book 4 of his *Confessions*, he ignored God and thought only of his own selfish enjoyment in his loves and friendships with other human beings, and was already starting on his way to becoming the compulsive womanizer and sexual addict whom he had become by age 30.

There in Book 4 of the *Confessions*, Augustine went on to explain in one important passage, in simple but totally clear words, how and why our minds buried and denied the very truths that would save our lives and put us back on the correct path:<sup>126</sup>

Errors and false opinions contaminate our lives if the rational part of the mind is corrupted by moral defects.

*Errores et falsae opiniones vitam contaminant, si rationalis mens ipsa vitiosa est.*

By that he meant that the character defects which A.A. people discover in their Fourth Step moral inventories — the egocentrism, selfishness, control neuroses, envy, and lust which produce all the rage, self-pity, anxiety, and guilt — are the forces which push them into a world of fantasy and distortion, where they can no longer recognize what is really going on in their lives, or what would be truly meaningful and satisfying life goals to strive for. There is no way they can work out rational solutions to their life problems by the use of their own reason and intelligence, because their reasoning processes have all been corrupted. They run at full tilt, so to speak, into the same stone walls over and over again, where the more they are exhorted to try harder, use more will power, and think more rationally and creatively, the harder they hit the same stone wall still one more time.

Augustine went on in *Confessions* 4.15.25 to explain that he (like modern A.A. members) had to be saved from himself by a higher power external to himself, in an act of grace which came in from outside and illuminated his mind and his life with the divine light of new insight:<sup>127</sup>

My mind had to be illumined by an external light in order to share in the truth, because the mind is not in itself truth by its inherent nature. “For you will light my lamp, O Lord my God; you will illuminate my darkness.”



*Alio lumine illam inlustrandam esse, ut sit particeps veritatis, quia non est ipsa natura veritatis, quoniam tu inluminabis lucernam meam, domine. deus meus, inluminabis tenebras meas.*

This is the reason for the great apparent paradox which so confuses modern atheists. It is true that, once an act of grace has partly cleared our minds, we can often *then* give logical and rational explanations of the new personal insights which we received while working a twelve step program. The problem is, until an act of grace occurred, we were locked in our own distorted mental processes, and totally unable to think in truly rational fashion about either our problem or its cure. We were instead convinced in our own minds that we were totally rational and capable — exactly like a group of pitiful staggering drunks being convinced that they were perfectly competent to jump into their automobiles and drive themselves home from the bar. And this analogy is very exact, and needs to be paid attention to carefully. Drunks *do not know* that they cannot think straight, but assume that they are thinking rationally.

In the last three books of the *Confessions*, Augustine turned from autobiography to detailed analysis of the role of *memory* in the human mind, which included what we would today call the subconscious mind. He also laid out his ideas about time and eternity, and the way the universe was created, all of which also involved important parts of his doctrine of Truth.

So in *Confessions* 10.2.2, he pointed out another aspect of the apparent paradox involved in the Augustinian doctrine of Illuminationism and the concept of God as Truth Itself. Since my conscience lies naked before God at all times, God sees immediately when I suddenly discover the true nature of one of my own character

defects. This means that in fact I do not have to speak words out loud in order to confess my wrongdoing to God. My own awareness of the truth inside my mind is itself an automatic silent confession to God. If I then confess my wrong ideas and attitudes and deeds to another human being — perhaps my pastor or a twelve-step sponsor — nothing that I say at that point is new information to God. And in fact, Augustine says, it goes even deeper than that: this truth about myself, though new to me, is something that God already knew about me — something which I was able to learn about only when God, in an act of grace, caused that vital piece of truth to suddenly shine out in my mind, and free me from the crippling misunderstandings which had up to that point held me prisoner. So Augustine said to God:

For neither do I say anything right to other human beings,  
which you did not first hear from me, nor do you hear any  
such thing from me which you had not first said to me.

*Neque enim dico recti aliquid hominibus quod non a me tu  
prius audieris, aut etiam tu aliquid tale audis a me quod non  
mihi tu prius dixeris.*<sup>128</sup>

This saving truth came from God who — in an act of grace — placed it in my conscious mind in such a way as to enlighten me and make me *believe in that truth* with a high enough degree of motivation to enable me to actually start acting on it in my everyday life.

In *Confessions* 12.25.35, Augustine also pointed to yet another apparent paradox in this doctrine of God as Truth Itself: *I cannot ordinarily read other people's minds*, yet when God's grace illumines my mind, *I can in effect read God's mind* directly and with

no intermediaries, so that I know at first hand something which God is thinking about me and my life. That is, I cannot read other human beings' minds (at least in the case of most of us, not on any regular everyday basis), yet in the act of saving grace, what happens is the equivalent of a truth in God's mind being transferred in an instant into my human mind, where I suddenly become powerfully conscious of it in that moment of insight. When this happens, my human mind is as it were lit up by *ipsa domini dei nostri luce*, "the very light of the Lord our God."<sup>129</sup>

The important point is that this saving truth does not *first* start off as a conscious thought in *my own* mind. So my own mind and my own thoughts, all by themselves, are not going to be able to save me. But it is equally true that, when I am locked in total psychological denial, the thoughts and ideas of another human being outside myself will also be unable to save me. For nothing is true simply because in my mind, I think it to be true. But likewise, as all of us know, nothing is true simply because some other human being thinks it to be true, which means that I will discount it and toss it aside if it differs too much from my own ideas on that subject. The truth of things at the foundational level — what is really real, and really out there — exists in God's being, in God's role as the ground upon which the existence of everything else in the universe rests.

God IS the Truth, the sum of all the truths in the universe. Denying God's existence would of necessity imply that we could never know the truth about anything at all, not even in theory.

Augustine sums this up by observing that he would have to say the following to any of his fellow human beings:<sup>130</sup>

If we both see that something you say is true, and we both see that something I say is true, where, I ask you, is that which we see? Neither I in you, anyhow, nor you in me — instead, both

of us see it in that unchangeable Truth Itself which is above our own minds.

*Si ambo videmus verum esse quod dicis et ambo videmus verum esse quod dico, ubi, quaeso, id videmus? nec ego utique in te nec tu in me, sed ambo in ipsa quae supra mentes nostras est incommutabili veritate.*

***God as Truth Itself in medieval thought, from the fifth century to the thirteenth century:*** Augustinian Illuminationist theories continued to serve as the foundation for the leading theological understandings of God in the western Christian world for eight centuries after Augustine’s death — down through the Dark Ages which followed the fall of the Roman empire in the fifth century, and in fact all the way to the thirteenth-century — when major Franciscan theologians like St. Bonaventure (1221–1274) were still upholding this idea of God and his acts of grace.

***God as the act of Being Itself:*** But there in the thirteenth century, at the height of the High Middle Ages, St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) replaced the idea of God as Truth Itself with the idea of God as Being Itself.<sup>131</sup>

In that century, Western European philosophers and theologians began to switch from employing the classical Greek philosopher Plato (d. 348/347 B.C.) as the foundation of their thought, to using the philosophy of his famous student Aristotle (384–322 B.C.). Plato believed that the fundamental idea of a thing (its *eidos* or *idea*) had an existence of its own outside of our own human minds and thoughts, and also outside of the individual material things which made up the physical universe.

***Aristotle instead believed in the principle of hylomorphism:*** the “idea” or “form” (*eidos* or *morphê*) of an individual thing was

an inherent part of the thing, giving formal structure to the matter (*hylê*) out of which it was composed. This meant that in the real world, form and matter could not be separated. An individual duck swimming on the St. Joseph river near my house was made up of the idea or form of a “duck” structuring the matter out of which it was composed. But there was no such thing as an idea or form of “duckness” existing apart from all individual material ducks.

If the duck was a mallard and had a green head, then “green” was also a form or idea. Words like “big” and “little” were also ideas. Being located on the St. Joseph river was also an idea. But ideas did not exist all by themselves in some separate world of disembodied ideas. The only thing that existed in the real world was a big duck with a green head, floating on the St. Joseph river — a very solid, material duck.

Real things in the created world were material things, things that were shaped by formal structures, but nevertheless material objects which we perceived through the five senses. We did not learn what ideas like “duck” meant, or “river,” or “green,” or “bird,” or “warm blooded,” or “herbivorous,” by some insight coming in supernatural fashion from the divine realm, carrying a disembodied idea and planting it in our minds. Instead, we engaged in careful and deliberate empirical study of the topic we were trying to learn about, and formulated different theories, trying them out one by one until we discovered which one fit best.

So Aristotle himself worked out his ideas about politics, for example, by studying different actual governments in the Greek world, and in the process worked out detailed accounts of useful ideas like “tyranny,” “democracy,” and so on. In his ethics, Aristotle likewise made an empirical study of the behavior of individual material human beings, using his five senses, and after

exploring various possible theories, worked out his ideas about the meaning of terms like courage, cowardice, generosity, stinginess, self-control, and so on.

On the basis of this Aristotelian theory of knowledge, *St. Thomas Aquinas then formulated his correspondence theory of truth*, which was given its classic statement in *Summa Theologica* 1.16.1:<sup>132</sup>

*Veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus.*

Truth is a correspondence between the intellect and the thing.

St. Augustine's idea of God as Truth Itself would no longer work, given this new definition of truth. But St. Thomas Aquinas was totally aware that the basic Christian message, going back to St. Augustine, and before that, to the Apostle Paul in his letters to the Romans and Galatians in the New Testament, was that human beings who were being driven obsessively and compulsively down the path to moral and spiritual doom, could not save themselves by their own unaided human efforts. Only God's grace could intervene in their minds and souls, and turn their lives around, and put them back on the path to healing and recovery.

So Aquinas had to develop a new terminology for talking about this, and focused on the concept of Being instead of the idea of Truth.

Now the term "Being" was a complex concept which went back to the ancient Greek pre-Socratic philosophers in the seventh to fifth centuries B.C. It referred to any concept which could be attached to the verb "to be." A *duck* IS swimming on the river. The *leaves* on the tree in the front yard of my old home in Indiana ARE red with autumn color. The Athenian *soldiers* who fought at

the battle of Marathon WERE very brave. The *hills* which I can see from my new California home WILL BE brown when summer's heat dries up all the moisture. In those sentences, words like on-the-river, red, brave, and brown all refer to kinds of Being.

I am interpreting the concept of Being here after the fashion of modern twentieth century transcendental Thomism and the Nouvelle Théologie. A hammer for example has a different kind of Being depending on who is looking at it and holding it. To a skilled carpenter, it is a tool for building a house. To a talented sculptor, it is an implement for hammering on a chisel to carve a beautiful marble statue. To a young person who has just moved into his or her first apartment, who is confronted with the task of using a hammer and nails to hang some pictures on the walls, the hammer may at first be an object causing puzzlement, apprehension, and maybe even a little bit of fear. To a homicidal maniac, the hammer may appear as an ideal bludgeon to use in clubbing some other poor person to death.

Alcoholics who are drinking themselves to death often have a view of their own Being in which they see themselves as victimized, unappreciated, treated badly by everyone around them, and so on; or perhaps they understand their own Being instead in grandiose fashion as people who know all the answers to all the questions, who are incredibly sexually attractive to the opposite sex, able to defeat anybody in any bar in town in a fist fight, and so on.

In working the twelve steps — particularly in the Fourth Step inventory — in moments of sudden insight, God's grace grants these misguided alcoholics a new and more accurate view of their own Being. In that sense, it is actually no different in practice from St. Augustine's idea of grace as Truth Itself.

But one thing that was especially important about Aquinas's theory, was that he saw the pure act (*actus purus*) of Being Itself, that is, the moment of sudden insight in which we suddenly saw our fundamental Being through entirely different eyes, as a place where we were put in immediate contact with God. How could we describe most clearly and vividly who and what God was? God was the one whom we met in *the pure act of Being Itself* when our lives were suddenly transformed by God's touch on our souls and put on an entirely new path.

To Thomas Aquinas, most other statements we can know or make about God approach the issue in a rather more indirect manner.

- (1) the statement is sometimes symbol or metaphor.
- (2) or at other times it is an application of the *via negationis*, that is, we are not actually saying what God *is*, but saying what God is *not*: God is not a material object, God is eternal in the sense of not being in chronological time, and so on.
- (3) or otherwise it employs the analogy of being: God is love because when our lives have been full of hate, his grace creates love and causes it to appear in our minds instead of hate, and so on.

I am not sure I totally agree with Aquinas here — I believe that there are ways, other than the act of Being Itself, in which we can have real and valid firsthand contact with God — but a good many very competent theologians down through the centuries have supported Aquinas's position.

***Jonathan Edwards in the eighteenth century: illuminationism in a Lockean- and Newtonian-based empirical philosophy.*** The greatest native-born American philosopher and theologian was a



Yale-trained Protestant pastor named Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), who lived in colonial Massachusetts in the generation before the American Revolution. Edwards and an Oxford University theologian named John Wesley (1703–1791) were the founders of modern evangelical Protestantism and the American frontier revivalism which sprang from it, and accompanied U.S. expansion westward after the Revolution.

Although Jonathan Edwards did not refer to God as “Truth Itself” when he described the saving act of grace which transformed the human mind and soul, his teaching was fundamentally Augustinian in the way he explained this act of grace as an *illumination* of the human mind.<sup>133</sup> We see this in the very title of the most famous description of his doctrine: Jonathan Edwards’s printed sermon entitled “A Divine and Supernatural Light, Immediately Imparted to the Soul by the Spirit of God” (1734).<sup>134</sup>

In that little piece, Edwards expressed his belief that when the true divine light shone on the human soul, the impact was so enormous, that the human imagination might be overwhelmed with what seemed to be the sensation of a powerful physical light.

As a side note: this was what happened on December 14, 1934, to Bill Wilson, the co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, at Towns Hospital in New York City, when this experience enabled him to quit drinking for good.

But the visual part of the experience, to Jonathan Edwards’s empiricist and rigorously scientific mind, was purely imaginary. As Edwards put it in his words:

This spiritual and divine light does not consist in any impression made upon the imagination. It is no impression

upon the mind, as though one saw anything with the bodily eyes. It is no imagination or idea of an outward light or glory, or any beauty of form or countenance, or a visible luster or brightness of any object. The imagination may be strongly impressed with such things; but this is not spiritual light. Indeed when the mind has a lively discovery of spiritual things, and is greatly affected by the power of divine light, it may, and probably very commonly doth, much affect the imagination; so that impressions of an outward beauty or brightness may accompany those spiritual discoveries. But spiritual light is not that impression upon the imagination, but an exceedingly different thing.

In my own interpretation of all this, I would prefer to say that the human mind, when powerfully contacted by the divine realm in this fashion, attempts to make better sense of the experience by “translating” it into physical images and the physical sounds of human words (or rushing wind or angelic singers or whatever). Most of the time, we apprehend these “translations” in the form of *internal* images seen in “the mind’s eye,” or *internal* sounds which are heard “kind of like a voice inside our heads” (as Henrietta Seiberling once described her sense of inner divine guidance). But sometimes the images and sounds are so vivid and overwhelming, that we seem to see and hear them *in the external world*, as Jonathan Edwards notes above.

The real divine and supernatural light which saves our souls and remakes our character, in its real essence, is nevertheless not seen in itself. Jonathan Edwards also notes that it does not impart new information in the ordinary sense, or point out things in the Bible which we had never read before, or anything else of that sort. This is the apparent paradox at the center of the Augustinian illuminationist

theory of saving grace. Instead of conveying brand new information never seen or heard before, it is a sense that suddenly comes upon us, that all the important things that good religious leaders have been trying to teach us all our lives, are not only absolutely true, but are the most important things in the whole universe. Before we always ultimately brushed these things off. We might be emotionally titillated by them when we heard a particularly moving preacher talk about them, but their importance never sunk home in such a way as to actually change our continuing long term behavior in the real world.

A true conversion experience, therefore, had to pass the “Jonathan Edwards test.” In the small New England communities where he preached his revivals, Edwards was able to observe all the details of how people who *claimed* to have been saved at his revivals were actually acting in everyday life. People who claimed to have found God, but who continued to be completely dominated by all their old anger, fear, resentment, arrogance, dishonesty, violence, and so on, were simply deluded. But, Edwards said, those who had undergone a genuine conversion received

... a true sense of the divine and superlative excellency of the things of religion; a real sense of the excellency of God and Jesus Christ, and of the work of redemption, and the ways and works of God revealed in the gospel. There is a divine and superlative glory in these things; an excellency that is of a vastly higher kind, and more sublime nature, than in other things; a glory greatly distinguishing them from all that is earthly and temporal. He that is spiritually enlightened truly apprehends and sees it, or has a sense of it. He does not merely rationally believe that God is glorious, but he has a sense of the gloriousness of God in his heart. There is not

only a rational belief that God is holy, and that holiness is a good thing, but there is a sense of the loveliness of God's holiness. There is not only a speculatively judging that God is gracious, but a sense how amiable God is on account of the beauty of this divine attribute.<sup>135</sup>

***Eusebius of Caesarea and a life built on reverence.*** It should be said that belief in a highly personal God did not necessarily have to be present in situations in which sweeping changes in mental perspective took place in a brief period of time. It was recognized by many Christian theologians in the ancient world that a small number of people had deeply transformed their lives by the study of non-religious philosophical writings like those authored by Plato and the great Greek and Roman Stoic thinkers. It was only a very small number of people who had managed to do this, but on the other hand, the number was not completely negligible. These early Christian theologians asked the question, of course, as to how these men and women had done this without turning to Christ or the Bible or any kind of formal religious practices. Different explanatory strategies were employed by these early Christians in their attempts to account for this.

One of the most important theories was developed by the historian and philosophical theologian Eusebius of Caesarea (b. 260-265 – d. 339-340 A.D.), who was bishop of the city of Caesarea on the coast of Palestine during the formative period when the emperor Constantine took over the Roman empire, ended the Great Persecution, and turned Christianity into a licensed and legal religion.<sup>136</sup>

Eusebius was a rough contemporary of Augustine, the famous African saint. During the early Christian centuries, Eusebius was the great opposite number to Augustine, providing the only substantive

alternative to the Augustinian doctrine of history — Eusebius emphasizing free will while Augustine talked in terms of rigid predestination. Eusebius also wrote a narrative account of the first three hundred years of Christian history, called the *Church History*, which set the pattern for history writing in the western world for the next thousand years.

Eusebius came to the conclusion, based on his historical studies, that one could make use of the power of grace which transformed an evil and ultimately demonic existence into an enlightened way of living, by taking up a life marked by *eusebeia*. That word could be translated into modern English as “piety” (as in the Lutheran pietist movement in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries), or even better as “reverence.”

*But that did not necessarily mean devotion to any kind of highly personal God-figure*, and in fact the supreme power in Eusebius’s theology was a sort of combination of the Neo-Platonic “One” (which, like Brahman in Vedanta Hinduism, transcended all human concepts and descriptions) and the power of the Good and the Beautiful which Plato had represented symbolically in his Allegory of the Cave<sup>137</sup> as the true sun which we could see shining on all the world after we escaped from our imprisonment in the dark cave of shadows and illusions. So the kind of piety (*eusebeia*) which could produce enlightenment did not necessarily have to involve the worship of a highly personified God: it could be reverence for the moral dimension of existence, or for the overwhelming beauty of the universe, or for the transcendent Ground of Being from which the Big Bang had exploded some 13.7 billion years ago (an infinite and wonderful power which we could sense still underlying all things) — or perhaps it could involve a reverence (*eusebeia*) which was a combination of all three of these expressions of devotion and awe.

And in fact, Eusebius went even further, going so far as to say that some of the *pagan sun worshippers* of his era<sup>138</sup> were acceptable to God because, within the limitations of their knowledge, these pagans had chosen to give reverence to the highest object they were aware of in the material world: the material, physical sun shining up in the sky. These uneducated common folk had never read the Bible, and had certainly never read Plato or any other great philosopher. They could still be saved however, Eusebius argued, because God did not hold us morally responsible for that which we did not and could not know about (in terms of our own previous educational background), but only expected us to reach as high as we could.

***The Sacred and the Holy.*** The kind of reverence (*eusebeia*) which heals our minds and hearts is above all recognition of the Sacred and the Holy in the world around us, and in sacred places and rituals. What are still today two of the most important books on comparative religion were written 100 years ago and 60 years ago respectively: *The Idea of the Holy* by the German author Rudolf Otto,<sup>139</sup> and *The Sacred and the Profane* by the Romanian author Mircea Eliade.<sup>140</sup>

Rudolf Otto made a study of religions around the world, and discovered that there were religions without any kind of personal God (such as Zen Buddhism), but no religions which did not center around some kind of concept of the *sacred* or the *holy* or the *numinous* (he used all three terms as synonyms). I had a colleague — a Japanese Zen Buddhist who had come to the United States to study at the University of the South, and then at Harvard and the University of Michigan — who explained to me how he found his spiritual comfort in singing the sacred words of the Zen Buddhist chants while carrying out the holy traditional Zen rituals. And there are many other ways that we can experience the holy: I have

discussed Otto's ideas at length in two chapters of my book on *God and Spirituality*.<sup>141</sup>

I had my university students read Eliade's book on *The Sacred and the Profane* whenever I taught Greek and Roman mythology or ancient Greek and Roman religion. They repeatedly thanked me in later years for what they regarded as one of the most insightful and useful books they had read while they were at the university. I would also recommend this book to people reading the A.A. Big Book who were puzzled by Bill Wilson's reference to two different dimensions of reality (the merely material dimension vs. the higher spiritual dimension which was revealed when we discovered God). In Eliade, the two realms were called, in ancient Roman fashion, the sacred and the profane. *Sacer, sacra, sacrum* was the Latin adjective that meant sacred, holy, or consecrated. A *fanum* was a temple or sanctuary, so the word *profanum* originally referred simply to that which was *pro* (before, in front of) the *fanum*, i.e., the unconsecrated area which lay in front of the sacred temple ground itself. In ancient Latin, it was not necessarily a negative or pejorative term. But bringing unconsecrated objects (or behaviors) into a holy place was an offense against the sacred, of course, which was the origin of the modern common English use of the word "profane" to describe offensive behavior.

A "hierophany," Eliade said, was an event which established a sacred place here on this material plane, which then could serve as a sort of doorway between the two dimensions. When (in 1918) Bill Wilson visited Winchester Cathedral (a sacred space consecrated by centuries of holy rituals) and stood in the enclosed holy place, gazing up at the sunlight shining through the stained glass windows, he had a famous hierophany, as we remember.

Some people who come into the twelve step program regard themselves as atheists because they do not see how anyone other

than a small and very naïve child could regard many of the tales told in traditional religious writings as literally true. This problem is compounded when naïve Protestant fundamentalists try browbeating people into believing that everything said in the Bible is in fact literally true.

These people very much need to read Eliade's book. Traditional religious literature is filled with "myths," he says, by which he means not stories that are false and untrue, but stories which are set in Sacred Space and Sacred Time, where we cannot describe things in the literal language of the profane realm, but instead have to use symbolic language. These so-called myths tell profound truths about a realm which is much realer than anything in the profane realm. But these truths have to be understood at the figurative and metaphorical level. They tell tales which are archetypes in the Jungian psychological sense, communicating via the collective unconscious.

In the same way, in the Romanian Orthodox Church in which Eliade was brought up, the figures of the saints and holy mountains and so on in the painted icons covering the walls of the church were deliberately portrayed in unrealistic fashion, so as to make it clear to the church goers that no one could conceivably paint a picture of God or the things of God: the church building was a doorway into another dimension, and the holy images on the walls were intended to be signposts pointing our spirits toward that sacred realm. That holy dimension was real however, and was immediately "here" where our spirits could touch it and be healed by it.

Traditional Roman Catholics like Father Pfau understood things in much the same way. When Father Pfau celebrated the mass, he believed that his recitation of the sacred liturgy opened up the door between the earthly church building and the sacred realm, where Jesus's true sacrifice had taken place, in a manner transcending but also immediately available to all earthly time and space. If you asked



Father Pfau “Is the mass a sacrifice?” he would have responded in the same way as all good Catholic priests of his era: “It is the one eternal sacrifice made to save all our souls taking place here and now as I recite the words of the liturgy.” This is because in the hierophany, the events of the eternal world are equally present to all times and places.

## CHAPTER 13

### Quantum Change: Modern Psychological Theories

In this chapter, as in the preceding one, we will not be discussing Father Pfau's own interpretation of the illuminationist idea of God as Truth Itself but — in order to better understand the full genius of his use of this ancient theological description of how human beings come to salvation — we will describe some strikingly similar modern psychological theories of how people can learn to reframe and restructure the basic assumptions upon which their lives are built.

*In cognitive behavioral therapy: reframing all the structural members of a whole field of interconnected cognitive distortions in that individual patient's mind.* Pfau may have partially been led to revive the Augustinian idea of God as Truth Itself because of his admiration for the original classic form of cognitive behavioral therapy developed by Abraham A. Low during the 1930's and 40's (see the discussion of Low's psychological theories and their influence on Father Ralph back in Chapter 4). Cognitive behavioral psychology taught that it was not learning a single isolated fact or truth which saved us, or at least not with most patients. We were usually in fact involved in a whole complicated field of distorted and destructive ideas, all interrelated and intertwined, which led us into our continual self-destructive behavior. What we had to have

therefore was a far-reaching cognitive restructuring of our minds in which we changed the whole framework *en masse* of a significant number of our most important ruling ideas.<sup>142</sup>

Cognitive behavioral therapy was further developed in the United States in the 1950's by Albert Ellis in what he called Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy and by Aaron T. Beck in the 1960's and 70's.<sup>143</sup> Psychologists who used cognitive behavioral techniques would help their patients reformulate their old collections of beliefs and assumptions (which had been creating depression, anxiety attacks, phobias, poor anger management, and so on), and help them work out a new set of self-statements which they would practice over and over until they began to gradually internalize these new behavioral guides and drive them “inch by inch” (so to speak) deep down into their unconscious minds.

As a side note: to fit Pfau into this overall time line, he got sober in 1943, produced all of his various published writings between 1947 and 1964, and died in 1967. Abraham Low founded Recovery, Inc. in 1937, published *The Technique of Self-Help in Psychiatric Aftercare* in 1943, and published the first edition of *Mental Health through Will-Training* in 1950.<sup>144</sup>

There were similarities here between modern cognitive behavioral therapy and medieval Catholic illuminationist theories, but nevertheless, Father Ralph had to be getting his most important ideas from Augustine rather than from Abraham Low and the cognitive behaviorist tradition, because Ralph taught the concept of a single shift in perspective which, in one moment of radical change, dramatically altered the person's whole fundamental perspective on life.

***Quantum leaps of insight:*** The closest similarity in the modern psychological literature to the kind of doctrine of illuminationism which was taught by St. Augustine in the fourth century and Jonathan Edwards in the eighteenth century, appeared in an important book written just fifteen years ago by two clinical psychologists, William R. Miller and Janet C'de Baca, called *Quantum Change: When Epiphanies and Sudden Insights Transform Ordinary Lives*.<sup>145</sup> This book was composed of case studies of the psychological experiences of a number of ordinary people whose lives suddenly underwent a dramatic and lasting change for the better. In the space of an extremely brief time span, people who had long been held in the grips of sullen anger and sudden explosions of uncontrollable rage (or some other pervasive psychological problem of that sort) were transformed into people filled with a solid and enduring peacefulness, empathy, and acceptance.<sup>146</sup>

The phrase “quantum change” which Miller and C'de Baca chose was an ideal descriptive term for transitions of this sort. It was like the energy of the electrons surrounding an atomic nucleus: the energy of a particular electron could not be increased slowly, by gradual infinitesimal increments, but had to jump up or down between quantum states separated by large energy distances. When one looked at the spectrum of the atoms, the individual spectral lines represented the discrete energy levels which were the only ones allowed.

This phenomenon of the sudden, sweeping psychological change which totally remakes the person's character and behavioral patterns had long been observed by psychiatrists and psychologists, even though it had been comparatively little studied at the clinical psychological level. Stories of psychic changes of this sort, for example, had long been a commonplace in descriptions given by alcoholics of how they first got sober. In Miller and C'de Baca's

book *Quantum Change*, they quoted the famous lines from Chapter 2 of the A.A. Big Book, where Dr. William Silkworth told Bill Wilson back in the 1930's:

Here and there, once in a while, alcoholics have had what are called vital spiritual experiences .... They appear to be in the nature of huge emotional displacements and rearrangements. Ideas, emotions, and attitudes which were once the guiding forces of the lives of these men are suddenly cast to one side, and a completely new set of conceptions and motives begin to dominate them.<sup>147</sup>

The sudden psychological changes which Miller and C'de Baca studied sometimes had a religious component, they said, but this did not necessarily occur — they also included a number of case studies of quantum changes taking place quickly in the lives of people who reported no overt religious or spiritual component at all, at least not in the ordinary sense. On the other hand, many of the men and women whom they studied did have what seemed to be feelings of light and temperature changes, and alterations in other bodily feelings, associated with the shift in mental perception:

There may be strongly engrained sensory memories of the event: several people remembered a sense of brightness in everything around them; some remembered feeling cold or chills; others the feeling of incredible warmth. One woman found that “suddenly even the desert was pretty. I’m not trying to be poetic about it in any way. It was just like being given rose-colored glasses.” Another described a specific feeling in her chest of “pain, suffocation, death” that was at the same time both agonizing and joyous. Yet another said that “the coffee tasted better. My vision had been widened

considerably .... It was sort of like instead of walking on the ground I was walking several inches above where I had been before.”<sup>148</sup>

But sense perceptions of this sort did not at all have to be present. It not only did not matter whether phenomena of this sort were present or absent, it also did not seem to matter whether overtly religious imagery was present or absent — real personal transformations occurred both ways.

***Psychological disorders come in varying degrees of severity:*** In interpreting Miller and C’de Baca’s findings, it seems to me to be useful to remember that psychological problems can range from slight to severe. A mild bout of depression might cause a person to drag through the day feeling vaguely unhappy about everything; a truly severe attack of depression might cause that same person to commit suicide. Paranoia can be mild or severe. A phobic reaction to being in a small, confined space might render one person extremely uncomfortable when riding on an elevator, while it might throw the next person into a hysterical, screaming, totally out-of-control frenzy when caught on an elevator which suddenly stalled between floors.

Ever since the early days of Alcoholics Anonymous, one could find A.A. authors like Marty Mann emphasizing that everyone who drank too much for his or her own good was not necessarily a hardened chronic alcoholic in the A.A. sense. The standard test was to see whether these people could control the amount they drank (or stop drinking completely if necessary) simply by the use of their own will-power. If they could do this, they did not need A.A. and in turn, Alcoholics Anonymous was not interested in having them join the movement.

The American Psychiatric Association began putting out its *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* in 1952. The

fourth edition, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual IV*, referred to as DSM-IV (in use from 1994 to 2013) gave a more precisely defined version of Marty Mann’s distinction. It listed those who simply drank too much under the diagnosis of “Alcohol Abuse” and those who had become severely addicted under the diagnosis of “Alcohol Dependence.” But a major key to this distinction was still that, when those in the latter group attempted to stop drinking by the sole use of their own will power (or even just tried to reduce or control their drinking), they were unable to do so over the long run.

Then in 2013, a new version appeared, called DSM-5, and the American Psychiatric Association blurred this line slightly. In the new nomenclature, all those who drank too much on a fairly regular basis were included under a single category called alcohol use disorder (AUD), which was divided into three sub-classifications: mild, moderate, and severe. Eleven symptoms were listed.<sup>149</sup> Patients who had experienced 2 to 3 of these symptoms over the past year were categorized as mild, those who had experienced 4 to 5 were described as moderate, and those who had 6 or more of these symptoms were classified as severe. Most A.A. people, I believe, would regard those who come into their fellowship as, almost all of them, people who fell into the “severe” category.

The obvious conclusion to draw, it seems to me, from the DSM-5 version in particular, is that a particular therapeutic method might work on mild cases — but ALMOST NEVER on severe cases — of the same psychological disorder.

***Does a treatment program for severe alcoholism have to involve a strong religious or spiritual component?*** Father Ralph Pfau surely seems to have held that it was necessary to turn to a divine figure closely similar to the traditional Judeo-Christian concept of God, in order to be granted the kind of experience of the breaking in of Truth Itself, which could bring long term freedom from active alcoholism.

I helped write what still seems to be the best report which we have today, summarizing the statistical evidence for the average retention rate in Alcoholics Anonymous nowadays. Of people who were in their first year of attending Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, 26% of those who were somewhere in their first month would still be attending at the end of that year. More importantly, *of those who had been attending meetings for at least ninety days, 56% would still be coming to A.A. at the end of that year.* (It should be noted that this latter experimental finding was closely similar to the claim often made in early A.A. literature that *fifty percent* of “those who really tried” got sober in A.A. the first time around.)<sup>150</sup>

Unfortunately, we do not have hard data of this sort on the degree to which *meaningful spiritual commitment* affects those who get sober and those who do not. However, based on my own observations of thousands of alcoholics over the past twenty-five years, if we compiled a list of alcoholics here in the United States who had gotten sober and stayed sober (without any slips or relapses) for at least *five years* — i.e., measuring this in the same way as the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services NIH statistics for measuring cancer cures — then out of every 100 alcoholics who stayed sober for at least five years, it would be found that 97 to 98 believed in a Higher Power which was similar in at least some way to the traditional Judeo-Christian concept of God, even if referred to by some other name. And if we add to this Eusebius’s observation mentioned earlier — that serious commitment to something which the alcoholic can regard as a sacred cause for which to strive (or as a reality which can be regarded with a truly reverent respect) may work as well for some people as belief in a personal God — then I believe it to be the case that almost 100% of the alcoholics who get sober and stay sober by coming to



A.A. are people who have learned to feel true reverence for (and total commitment to) something they can regard as genuinely sacred.

***Ralph Pfau said however: if you really want to get clean and sober, then quit being needlessly difficult, and call upon the God who is Truth Itself, for this is the correct name of the power of grace which saves us.*** When men and women turn to the God who is Truth Itself, they thereby become willing to let quantum insights sent by this God give them the sobriety they need and totally remake their lives.

And my advice would be the same as Father Ralph's. Truly hardcore chronic alcoholics are people who would rather die than quit drinking, and those who are addicted enough to drugs would likewise go to their deaths rather than quit. This means that to quit drinking and using, these genuine hard cases must find *something* which they can regard with true reverence, and it must be something which is more important to them than life itself. Otherwise it will not have the power and clout to turn them away from alcohol and drugs. And God by one name or another is usually the only object of devotion powerful enough to win the battle against severe addiction to alcohol or drugs.

Are there a very few who are able to stop using alcohol and drugs and stay stopped, without (1) turning to some kind of divine source which is at least similar in important ways to the traditional Judeo-Christian concept of God (even if their higher power is not a personal God)? Or without at least (2) finding something for which they can feel a deep reverence, and to which they can make a total commitment of their lives? It is possible perhaps that a small handful of people who are only mildly addicted to alcohol or drugs might be able to get clean and sober while continuing to remain total atheists who feel reverence for nothing and regard nothing as sacred. But based on my own observations, it seems to me that only one-and-a-

half to two percent (at most) of the people who get clean and sober in A.A. and N.A. can get away with that.

Father Ralph at any rate made it clear that the method he taught for obtaining freedom from alcoholism and drug addiction involved turning to the power of a God who was presented in traditional Catholic form. And thousands of people traveled from miles away to hear him preach and teach, both at A.A. conventions and A.A. weekend spiritual retreats, because even the worst drunks and addicts — in fact perhaps especially those who had tried everything else without result — found that Father Ralph's God worked.

## CHAPTER 14

### Making a Decision

In his *Golden Book of Decisions*, published in 1957, Father Ralph began with a quotation:<sup>151</sup>

On the plains of desolation there bleach the bones  
of countless millions who at the very dawn of victory  
sat down to wait — and waiting died!

And he continued with a list of examples, drawn from the Bible, of people who doomed themselves because they would not go ahead and commit themselves, and make clear decisions and stick to them.

He began by telling the story of Adam and Eve, drawn from Genesis 3:1–6 at the beginning of the Old Testament. When the serpent came up to Eve, the first woman, in the Garden of Eden, the serpent gave her “a beautiful piece of rationalization” for eating the forbidden fruit, Father Ralph said. And then, he went on:

... she *hesitated*; for she evidently had never *made a full decision* to serve God and *only God* irrespective of what or who might endeavor to make her waver in this service.<sup>152</sup>

She hemmed and hawed back and forth, wavering this way and that way,

... she doubted God; she believed the serpent; *she ate the fruit*.  
 It is the story of every sinner since that time and is *prima facie* evidence that such a sinner ... has not yet made up his mind that God comes first ....<sup>153</sup>

Father Ralph then went on to tell the story of Lot's wife from Genesis 19:26. Lot and his wife had been told by God to flee the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and not look back. But as God destroyed the sinful cities with fire and sulfur from heaven, Lot's wife hesitated and stopped, and disobeyed, and turned around and looked back. She was turned into a pillar of salt. The real salvation which she had glimpsed had been undone before she could live in it and enjoy it and make satisfying use of it. "She couldn't make up her mind or hadn't made up her mind that what God had told them was absolutely true."<sup>154</sup>

Then Father Ralph told the biblical story of Moses in the desert hesitating when asked to strike the rock and bring forth a flow of water for the Israelites who were dying of thirst. And then he related the New Testament tale of the Italian political appointee Pontius Pilate (who had been appointed by the Roman government to watch out for Italian business interests in Jerusalem): Pilate tried to avoid being condemned by history for being the one who ordered Christ's execution, by washing his hands and pretending that this act of public hesitation and refusal meant that the death of Christ was not his responsibility any longer. But Pilate's refusal to make a decision was in itself a decision, and one that *de facto* sent Jesus to die on the cross.<sup>155</sup>

***St. Augustine and God as Truth Itself:*** And Ralph finished that first section by telling the story of the conversion of his great hero, St. Augustine, as the saint had related it in his *Confessions* (8.8.19 –

8.12.30). It was the late summer of 386 A.D., and Augustine was thirty-one years old. As Ralph described it:<sup>156</sup>

Augustine who ... was a man of indecision and sinned for so many years, by that same token became a saintly man and an outstanding doctor of theology *once he made up his mind to serve God* — no matter what the cost, nor what or who might try to prevail upon him to change his course ....

Augustine was walking up and down in his garden late one afternoon (probably trying to make up his mind about something and not being able to do so). Suddenly there came a voice saying softly, “Take and read, take and read.” Augustine glanced toward his table and there noticed a bible. He picked it up, opened it and the first words to meet his eyes were: “Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and impurities ... but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ and make not provisions for the flesh in its concupiscences.” And then once and for all Augustine finally made up his mind; and aided by grace *decided* once and for all to serve God rather than his flesh. *A full decision!*

If I might make an additional note of my own: Augustine’s *Confessions* was actually the story of three addicts, all of whom found freedom from their addiction by turning to God. Augustine’s mother Monica was a childhood alcoholic who had used the power of God to stop drinking many years earlier. His best friend Alypius had become addicted (this is the best way to put it) to attending Roman gladiatorial games, where he would become swallowed up in a kind of insane frenzy of madness and blood lust as he gazed with fascinated horror at the gladiators cutting one another down with swords, and dying men lying screaming on the floor of the arena as pools of blood spread out all around them. Alypius decided to

convert to Christianity at the same time Augustine did, and put aside all that obsession with serial killing (for the Roman gladiatorial games were just an institutionalized form of serial killing). Augustine had been what we would call today a sex addict, who could not make himself stop seducing one woman after another. The memories of the sexual pleasures he had taken from all these women crowded into his mind in vivid images, he said in his *Confessions*, as he sat in the garden debating in his mind on whether to convert to Christianity and leave all that life behind.

But the important thing was that the illumination of the mind by the power of Truth Itself was the power of grace — God in action in one of the closest and most vivid ways we ever experience the divine, the transcendent heavenly power acting on us immediately and directly, according to Augustine — but (in Father Ralph’s adaptation of Augustine’s ideas) I could throw away that precious moment of unadulterated truth by refusing to decide. I could instead fall into endless hemming and hawing and internal debates: “Well, I know I did such-and-such, like that person talked about in his story, but even then, am I *really* an alcoholic?” “Could this actually be God at work? or maybe it’s only my own mind *wanting* it to be true, in spite of all the powerful counter arguments which I have read over the years in books written by atheists?” And I could go on and on, taking that magic moment of truth and squandering it away with delays and excuses, until the opportunity it had given me to save myself had passed me by.

***Predestination vs. free will:*** Ralph changed one important thing about Augustine’s understanding of illumination and grace. St. Augustine was the one who invented the Christian doctrine of predestination, which he took over from the writings of the Roman Stoic fatalist philosopher Seneca (with perhaps a bit of additional influence from Valentinian gnostic theology). But the Roman

Catholic Church rejected this part of Augustine's thought after he was gone from the scene, beginning with the Second Council of Orange, held in Provence in southern France in 529, ninety-nine years after the saint's death.

Jonathan Edwards, who founded modern evangelical theology as he carried out his new method of conducting Protestant revivals in colonial New England in 1733–34, was however a strict Calvinist, that is, a member of that branch of the Protestant Reformation which had revived the doctrine of predestination. Edwards therefore defended the old Augustinian theory of predestination as part and parcel of his eighteenth-century empiricist version of the illuminationist doctrine of God as Truth Itself. He believed that the force and vividness of the insight which God gave us in the moment of real truth, was so strong that it would completely overpower our human wills. We would have no choice but to immediately act the way God showed us, and we would continue to walk in this path all the rest of our lives — there could be no relapse or backsliding if a genuine act of saving grace had filled a human mind with unforgettable truth.

***Father Ralph and A.A. went with free will rather than predestination:*** Ralph Pfau, as a good Roman Catholic priest, stuck with the traditional Catholic version, which acknowledged part of what Augustine had taught — that is, that we could not be saved without the aid of God's grace — but which also insisted that human beings could decide whether to accept or reject that grace. And it was this version (where divine grace and the cooperation of our human free wills were both necessary) which Alcoholics Anonymous generally upheld (along with large numbers of twentieth century American Protestants, including particularly the Methodist and Wesleyan denominations).

Father Ralph spoke about the free will side of this at much greater length in his *Golden Book of Excuses*:<sup>157</sup>

Somewhere along the path of life of every human being there comes a dread moment when he suddenly sees himself for what he is. Minus all the sham, the surface and the show, he then stands face to face with truth.

This moment may be brought about by the death of a loved one, the loss of worldly goods, or it may be directly occasioned within by the grace of God speaking to the depth of our soul. To most alcoholics it comes at the instant when they face the inevitable choice: death, insanity or absolute sobriety. It often comes with a blinding flash that seems to tear away the very foundations of life, and alcoholic or nonalcoholic, layman or professional, young or old, there arises from the very innermost sanctuary of the soul and heart the cry “My God, what a mess I have made of things!”

This “moment” may last for an hour, a day, a month, a year or for years. But whenever, wherever, however it comes — it is a dread and fearful moment, because *upon that moment and the decisions of that moment may depend our very life and our eternity*. And from that time on one can never be the same again.

***An angel from above clutches my hands while a devil from below pulls downward on my foot:*** Ralph gave a vivid and unforgettable image of the man or woman caught suspended in that influx of divine grace, based on traditional Catholic images like the ones in Michelangelo’s fresco over the altar in the Sistine Chapel, showing the naked bodies writhing in mid-air, the saved ascending



into heaven on the left, and the damned plunging down into hell on the right.<sup>158</sup>

It is then that life's greatest decision must be made and then it is that it seems that an angel has him by the hands and a devil by the foot. And having caught, perhaps only for a fleeting instant, a vision of himself naked in the white light of truth and the piercing rays of grace — having seen the abyss that separates him from what he should be, from what he has believed or tried to believe himself to be — and having at the same time recognized his own complete helplessness, he can do one of three things:

(1) He can try to go back to his old excuses and rationalizations. (2) He can give up, and commit suicide — either directly with a gun or noose, or indirectly by deliberately and knowingly drinking himself to death. (3) Or he can fall to his knees and accept the promise of a new and completely different life which God is offering him.

It is of necessity a “quantum change,” if we may call it that, which alcoholics are asked to make. It is not just a small handful of isolated faults which they must correct. The whole fabric of their past history — the persons whom they used TO BE — must be discarded, and they must learn how TO BE basically different people. We can call it (like St. Augustine) turning to a new Vision of Truth, or we can call it (like St. Thomas Aquinas and Paul Tillich<sup>159</sup>) receiving the New Being, but it requires reframing most of our basic presuppositions about life, and who we used to be. We must learn to re-tell the whole past history of our lives, seeing a new plot to the story, and a new set of basic values shaping the story line. And we

must learn to see our life stories above all as forming *a history of decisions*:<sup>160</sup>

For it is then that he sees fully and clearly without ... excuse what he has so far made of himself and how he has done it. He sees the great and the small failures — the great and the small successes. He for once now knows things for what they really are in themselves and not in their labels. He sees the total effect of what seemed to be little compromises — the little treasons, the little dishonesties, the little failures to live up to God's plan. He sees himself and his life for what it is — an intricate tissue of choices in which the smallest choice has given direction to other choices — like the tiny strokes of the artist's brush, in themselves meaningless — but in their union with others bringing forth the full portrait.

***The Theology of Decisions:*** This was the purpose of Father Ralph's life in Alcoholics Anonymous, to travel the North American continent preaching everywhere this message of *decision* and commitment and *the necessity for making real choices*: The twelve steps are not a philosophical theory to be analyzed and debated while we placidly continue our old way of life. They call us to make a decision, for or against God and the Sacred and the Truth of all things, which will either lead us upward along the paths of blessedness, or condemn us to journey down the tearful road of tragic doom.

Father Ralph used a vivid image at one point, as we have seen, a colorful metaphor involving beautiful angels and cruel demons, to describe the fundamental choice which God presented to us. But you do not need to believe in either real angels or real demons in order to understand the symbolism in the picture that he drew.

And today, right here and now, if Father Ralph was still around, he would tell you, the reader, “Do not put this book down without making a decision. Do you want to let yourself be pulled up by the angel who is now grasping your hands? Then make a decision right now to *help* the angel! Or do you want to struggle free of that angel’s attempt to rescue you, and let yourself be pulled down even deeper by the devil who is clutching your foot in one of his blood-soaked talons and trying to drag you even further down into the hellish world in which he dwells? And remember that a decision *not* to side *with* the angel is automatically a decision to surrender yourself to the devil.

Blessed be all who listen to this wise priest, and make the decision to turn their wills and their lives over to the Good, the Sacred, and the True.

## **Part II**

# **The First Roman Catholics in Alcoholics Anonymous**

## CHAPTER 1

### **Earliest AA: the Oxford Group and the Protestant Liberals**

Alcoholics Anonymous was founded in 1935 by two men, Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob Smith, who had been brought up as Protestants, and specifically, as New England Congregationalists. In spite of the fact that Congregationalism's roots had lain in seventeenth and eighteenth-century Puritanism (the world of Jonathan Edwards' "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*) this was a denomination which had developed and changed to the point where they very strongly took *the liberal side* — not the fundamentalist side — in the great fundamentalist-liberal debate which arose within early twentieth-century American Protestantism. In 1957 (two years after AA's "coming of age" at its St. Louis convention) the Congregationalists united with another modernist mainline American denomination to form the extremely liberal United Church of Christ.

At the time they first met, in 1935, Bill W. and Dr. Bob had both recently become involved with a controversial Protestant evangelical association called the Oxford Group, and initially worked with alcoholics under its umbrella. Nevertheless, both of them (as well as the majority of the alcoholics whom they sobered up during the first few years) came from liberal Protestant backgrounds, so a kind of generalized liberal Protestant influence rapidly became just as

important as the influence of the more specific teachings of the Oxford Group. And contact with the New Thought movement (especially Emmet Fox) introduced an even more radical form of non-traditional Protestantism which was also a force in early AA.

As was noted, American Protestants during the early twentieth century were deeply split by the liberal-fundamentalist dispute. One needs to understand the nature of that debate in order to grasp some of the issues which Catholics faced when they joined AA.

On the one side, the fundamentalists were implacable enemies of Catholicism, and would have created an unbreachable barrier to Catholics coming into AA, but fortunately neither they nor the surviving representatives of the revival-preaching frontier Protestant evangelists of the nineteenth century played any major role in AA in the 1930's or 1940's.

On the other side, the Protestant liberals and the New Thought people were committed to a position of basic religious tolerance, which made it easier for Catholics to come into AA. They had also given up preaching revivals and were no longer insisting that all their members had to have fallen down on their knees, at least once in their lives, in some sort of highly emotional conversion experience where they accepted Jesus Christ as their personal savior, before they could be regarded as "being saved." But it was also the case that many of the liberals and all of the New Thought authors rejected most of the traditional theological doctrines which the Roman Catholic Church held dear: the Virgin Birth, belief in the Real Presence of Christ in some effective fashion during the distribution of the bread and wine of the eucharist, belief in a Christ who was divine in the full sense of being consubstantial with God the Father, and so on. So when Roman Catholics, liberal Protestants, and followers of New Thought became joined together in A.A., they

made strange bedfellows, or so it would have appeared at first glance.

This was not a great issue when A.A. first began. For the first four years, Roman Catholics formed an almost negligible presence in Alcoholics Anonymous. Joe Doppler (or Doeppler), “The European Drinker,” became in April 1936 the first Roman Catholic to get sober in Alcoholics Anonymous. No more Roman Catholics joined until Morgan Ryan came into the program in January 1939. But by April of that year, the majority of the fourteen alcoholics in the Cleveland group were Roman Catholics, and they forced the AA leaders in Akron to make a choice: were they willing to make room for Catholics in Alcoholics Anonymous?

In January 1940, Sister Ignatia negotiated a working agreement between Dr. Bob, St. Thomas Hospital, and her superior, Sister Clementine, which subsequently became the model for Catholic participation in Alcoholics Anonymous across the board. There would now be an officially sanctioned AA-based alcoholism treatment program in place at St. Thomas Hospital. But Sister Ignatia was quite clear about one central requirement: Although it was run by a Catholic religious order, St. Thomas Hospital was “nonsectarian” (her word), and admitted patients regardless of their religious affiliation. The Oxford Group on the other hand was a “sect” (again her word, what we would today call a “cult”) which showed no tolerance within their group for anyone who held beliefs at variance with their own.<sup>161</sup>

The AA program had to be run the same way as St. Thomas Hospital, as a non-sectarian organization for the treatment of alcoholism, which offered help to everyone in need, regardless of religious affiliation, and which did not make anyone listen to people preaching any kind of religious dogma as a precondition for receiving treatment. Roman Catholics in Alcoholics Anonymous

would not try to preach their faith to the Protestants, but they would expect mutual tolerance back the other way. Fundamentalists would be allowed to join AA, as long as they followed the same rules: no attempts at taking over the group, no continual preaching of fundamentalist dogma and belief at AA meetings, and so on.

The floodgates were opened, and by the Fall of 1940, it was estimated that Alcoholics Anonymous had become 25% Catholic.<sup>162</sup> It was still an odd pairing. Many of the ideas in the Big Book reflected Protestant liberal or New Thought beliefs, as well as adaptations of Oxford Group ideas. For this reason, it will be wise to discuss some of the areas where Catholic leaders in AA were going to have to work out ways of dealing with ideas which were sometimes quite new to them.

***The influence of the Oxford Group on early Alcoholics Anonymous:*** The Alcoholics Anonymous movement was begun after Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob Smith met in Akron, Ohio, on Sunday, May 12, 1935 (Mother's Day) to discuss their mutual battle with alcoholism, and decided to work together to devise a method of healing alcoholism which would be medically, psychologically, and spiritually sound. Five months earlier, on December 14, 1935, Bill W. had had a profound spiritual experience at Towns Hospital in New York City as a result of coming in contact with a Protestant evangelical association called the Oxford Group,<sup>163</sup> and had not had a drink since that point. As he described his experience on page fourteen of the Big Book, he came to the realization, while he lay on his hospital bed, that

I must turn in all things to the Father of Light who presides over us all. These were revolutionary and drastic proposals, but the moment I fully accepted them, the effect was electric. There was a sense of victory, followed by such a peace and



serenity as I had never know. There was utter confidence. I felt lifted up, as though the great clean wind of a mountain top blew through and through. God comes to most men gradually, but His impact on me was sudden and profound.

As he described the experience while speaking to the AA International in St. Louis in 1955, there was also a vision of light involved, similar to what was described in a number of medieval Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox spiritual writings (ranging from the encounter with the Light of the Transfiguration which was the goal of the spiritual meditations of the Hesychast monks of Mount Athos, to the vision of light at the end of Dante's *Divine Comedy*).<sup>164</sup> Bill Wilson described his experience this way:

... It seemed to me as though I were at the very bottom of the pit .... All at once I found myself crying out, "If there is a God, let Him show Himself! I am ready to do anything, anything!" Suddenly the room lit up with a great white light. I was caught up into an ecstasy which there are no words to describe. It seemed to me, in the mind's eye, that I was on a mountain and that a wind not of air but of spirit was blowing .... Slowly the ecstasy subsided. I lay on the bed, but now for a time I was in another world, a new world of consciousness. All about me and through me there was a wonderful feeling of Presence ....<sup>165</sup>

As a result of this experience, when Bill Wilson met Dr. Bob on Mother's Day of 1935, Bill had been sober and attending Oxford Group meetings in New York City for five months. Dr. Bob, on the other hand — even though he had been attending Oxford Group meetings in Akron, Ohio for two and half years — still had not been able to get sober at all.<sup>166</sup>

The two of them, however, began working together to try to revise and improve the Oxford Group program, and by June, Dr. Bob had gotten continuously sober and never drank again. As they tried this new method out on other alcoholics, they were soon achieving a far higher success rate than the Oxford Group had ever managed. Nevertheless, they and their earliest followers incorporated a certain number of that group's beliefs and practices into their new alcoholic recovery program, and they continued to attend Oxford Group meetings for quite some time after this — down to 1937 in New York and down to 1939 in Akron and Cleveland.

***The Protestant quarrel between fundamentalists and liberals: (1) the fundamentalists.*** In the New York contingent, nearly all the members of Alcoholics Anonymous were Protestants until the Spring of 1939. But they seem to have all been Protestants of a particular sort. During that period, American Protestant denominations and congregations were being torn in two by the fundamentalist-liberal controversy. The Protestants in AA came down on the liberal side of that division, and seem to have fairly much all of them rejected the extreme fundamentalist position.

The term “fundamentalism” came from a work called *The Fundamentals: A Testimony To The Truth*, a set of ninety essays written by a number of authors and published in twelve volumes over the years 1910 to 1915.<sup>167</sup> The authors of these essays maintained that every word of the Bible was inerrant and literally true, and so took up combat not only against the Darwinian doctrine of evolution, but also against modern historical and literary criticism of the Bible in general. They attacked anyone who denied that the first five books of the Old Testament had been written by Moses, along with anyone who denied the Virgin Birth, the deity of Christ, or his resurrection from the dead. They believed that the Garden of

Eden and special creation of Adam and Eve, Noah's flood, the parting of the Red Sea, and the Hebrew children surviving in the fiery furnace were all historical facts, along with all of the biblical stories of talking donkeys, men walking on water, epilepsy being caused by demons, and so on. In these ninety tracts, the fundamentalists also attacked the Mormons, the Christian Scientists, the forerunners of the Jehovah's Witnesses, Spiritualism (talking with the spirits of the dead), and the Roman Catholic Church.

The fundamentalist movement was militant to an extreme. Many conservative church leaders who might otherwise have agreed with some of their theological beliefs were nevertheless completely repelled by the anger, personal animosity, and unrelenting aggressiveness of their attacks, where they would allow no peace until they had taken over a congregation or a denomination. When they were few in number they would cry out for freedom of speech, but once they had achieved a majority, they would silence all other voices and run out any remaining church leaders who dared to disagree with them. Or in other words, the militant fundamentalists of that time were not going to be suitable partners for a nonsectarian movement based on religious tolerance and cooperation between people of different religious backgrounds.

The controversy was raised to national prominence in the Scopes Monkey Trial of 1925, with the central focus at that point on the doctrine of evolution derived from Charles Darwin's books *The Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man*. In that year, the World's Christian Fundamentals Association talked the Tennessee state legislature into passing a law which prohibited public school teachers from denying the Biblical account of man's origin. A test case was set up when John Scopes, a Tennessee high school teacher, intentionally violated the Act. The trial which followed was broadcast over the radio throughout America.

For the fundamentalists, the path to salvation was a narrow one indeed, with them standing rigid guard over the entrance. Most of them taught that the only way that people could be saved from everlasting hell and damnation was to have an emotional conversion experience in which they took Jesus Christ as their personal savior. There was little or no emphasis on programs of continual moral and spiritual growth, other than fire and brimstone sermons condemning sins such as gambling, drinking, associating with loose women, refusing to take Jesus Christ as your personal savior, and so on. Many fundamentalists believed devoutly that alcoholics who had had a conversion experience would immediately be able to stop drinking for the rest of their lives. Otherwise, their approach toward alcoholism was punitive and condemnatory.

Were some alcoholics able to stop drinking by committing themselves totally to the fundamentalist mindset? In the United States, there were considerable numbers of young people in their teens and twenties (and sometimes older people as well) who had fallen into drinking too much — perhaps even to the point where the DSM-IV would have labeled them as fairly strong cases of Alcohol Abuse and the DSM-5 would have defined them as mild to moderate cases of Alcohol Use Disorder — but these people were not hard-core chronic alcoholics by traditional AA standards. Most of them were able to stop drinking if enough external pressure was applied (including fundamentalist preaching and threats of expulsion from the church congregation they had just joined). But this did nothing for the real alcoholics, who showed by their actions (time and time again) that they would leave this kind of church rather than quit drinking.

In the case of people who were genuine hard-core chronic alcoholics, were a small percentage able to quit drinking by joining the kind of Protestant fundamentalist church which specialized in

preaching hellfire and damnation? If you frighten people deeply enough with hideous images of pain and torture, designed to lodge themselves down into the darkness at the bottom of the human subconscious, you can sometimes change behavior to a degree. But it is a kind of “psychological rape,” where one obtains surface obedience based on a kind of nightmarish fear which is consequently deeply intermixed with subconscious anger and resentment. In fact, human minds so conditioned will not be able to think about God without visualizing an angry judge glaring down at them and threatening them with fire and unbearable torture, with the consequence that any thought of directly entering God’s presence for any reason at all will bring up the most frightening possible images of condemnation and personal annihilation. And this overpowering fear of God will then make it extremely difficult for these people to receive gifts of real grace from God later on.

So the fundamentalist movement was not really a very effective treatment for deep-set alcoholism.

But even more important for our inquiry here, the fundamentalist movement was totally hostile to the Roman Catholic Church. For most of them, the image of the Whore of Babylon in Revelation 17:4-18, sitting on the Seven Hills and drunk on the blood of the martyrs, referred to the city of Rome and the Pope. They taught their children that the Roman Catholics worshiped idols. Early twentieth century fundamentalists believed that if a Roman Catholic were ever elected president of the United States, he would immediately turn over control of the U.S. government to the Pope and the Italians who ran the Vatican offices.

If there had been any large number of fundamentalists in the early Alcoholics Anonymous movement, Roman Catholics who tried to come into AA would have been relentlessly badgered and harassed until they were either driven out or forced to compromise their most

basic religious principles. The flood of Catholics into AA which began in 1939-1940 could never have occurred.

**(2) *The Protestant liberals: Harry Emerson Fosdick.*** But fortunately it was not the Protestant fundamentalists who dominated AA. The overwhelming majority of early AA members were instead the kind of Protestants who were called “liberals” or “modernists.” And one of the liberal Protestant leaders who was especially well-known to the American public during the early twentieth century was Harry Emerson Fosdick. In 1927-1930 John D. Rockefeller, Jr. (one of the AA movement’s early admirers) built a church for Fosdick to preach in, Riverside Church in New York City, a huge building, the tallest church in the United States. It was set up as an interdenominational church where people could be freed from having to conform with the doctrines and dogmas of any particular denomination. And during the same period, from 1921 to 1948, Harry Emerson Fosdick’s brother, Raymond B. Fosdick, played a key role in administering many of John D. Rockefeller, Jr.’s philanthropies. Rockefeller and the Fosdick brothers liked the Alcoholics Anonymous movement because it embodied so well some of the best ideas of liberal Protestantism.

We can get an excellent view of the beliefs and style of early twentieth century Protestant liberalism by looking at Harry Emerson Fosdick’s famous sermon “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?” preached on May 21, 1922 in New York City.<sup>168</sup>

Although many fine Christians over the centuries have believed in the biological miracle called the virgin birth of Jesus, Fosdick said in that sermon, it was also the case that many good Christians in the modern period not only cannot accept that this could have been a historical fact, but point out that even in New Testament times there was no unanimity of Christian belief on that issue. The gospels of Matthew and Luke told that story, for example, but neither the

Apostle Paul nor the author of the gospel of John seem to have known anything about it.<sup>169</sup>

The fundamentalists, Fosdick went on to say, wanted to believe that the original biblical documents were dictated by God to their human scribes in the same way that a business executive would dictate a letter to a secretary. They wanted to believe that every word was infallible, not just at the level of spiritual insight but even when the biblical text was talking about scientific theories, medical treatments, or matters of historical fact. Liberal Protestants, on the other hand, pointed to the way in which the Bible had had to be reinterpreted time after time over the centuries as human knowledge about the world grew. New scientific discoveries and new historical knowledge had forced people over and over again to discard biblical statements, Fosdick said, which simply could no longer be regarded as correct.<sup>170</sup>

We can see his point easily. If we stopped and thought about it, regardless of what the early parts of the Bible assumed, the world was not flat. The biblical literalists at the time of the great scientist Galileo got him condemned for teaching that the earth circled in an orbit around the sun, and not vice versa. But today, even in the most religiously oppressive parts of the United States, all the schools and universities teach all their students that the earth is round (not flat), and that it circles the sun in its orbit. Regardless of what the New Testament authors believed, neither epilepsy nor leprosy was caused by demons, and there is no part of the United States today which is going to pass a law ordering medical schools to teach their students to treat epilepsy and leprosy by carrying out magical rituals to drive out the evil spirits, or ordering medical schools to teach about magic spells against demons as “an equally valid alternate theory.”

The fundamentalists believed that Christ was coming in a cataclysmic event, Fosdick pointed out, in which this earth would be

destroyed, along with the sun, moon, and stars, after a series of great apocalyptic battles. The liberals however believed that Christ was coming in a very different manner, in such a way that “slowly it may be, but surely, His will and principles will be worked out by God’s grace in human life and institutions,” until the whole earth was ruled by Christian principles of love, forgiveness, and tolerance.<sup>171</sup>

***The spirit of the Enlightenment: freedom of thought, religious tolerance, and the pursuit of ever-greater moral and intellectual progress.*** But there was more at stake than these specific quarrels. If we look at the basic principles which Fosdick was laying out in that sermon, we can see that he and his fellow liberals were simply acting as the modern day defenders of the spirit of the Eighteenth-century Enlightenment.<sup>172</sup> Human beings had to be allowed to ask questions, Fosdick said, engage in scientific inquiry, and speak the truth as they had discovered it:

Science treats a young man’s mind as though it were really important. A scientist says to a young man, “Here is the universe challenging our investigation. Here are the truths which we have seen, so far. Come, study with us! See what we already have seen and then look further to see more, for science is an intellectual adventure for the truth.” Can you imagine any man who is worthwhile turning from that call to the church if the church seems to him to say, “Come, and we will feed you opinions from a spoon. No thinking is allowed here except such as brings you to certain specified, predetermined conclusions.”<sup>173</sup>

Throughout the course of time, human knowledge has grown progressively. At first human beings only knew how to brandish clubs and throw spears, but then they invented the bow and arrow.



At first they only gathered wild plants, but then they learned how to plant crops. The oldest parts of the Old Testament taught religious ideas that were often barbaric in their cruelty, and ruthlessly vengeful in their bloodthirstiness. It took a thousand years of moral and religious progress to move from those primitive ideas to the most enlightened parts of the New Testament. And real revelation, Fosdick says in this sermon, has to continue to make progress even today.

[All real] revelation is progressive. The thought of God moves out from Oriental kingship to compassionate fatherhood; treatment of unbelievers moves out from the use of force to the appeals of love; polygamy gives way to monogamy; slavery, never explicitly condemned before the New Testament closes, is nevertheless being undermined by ideas that in the end, like dynamite, will blast its foundations to pieces .... over the doorway of the New Testament into the Christian world stand the words of Jesus: "When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth." That is to say, ... finality in the Bible is ahead. We have not reached it. We cannot yet compass all of it. God is leading us out toward it. There are multitudes of Christians, then, who think, and rejoice as they think, of the Bible as the record of the progressive unfolding of the character of God to his people ....<sup>174</sup>

The great Enlightenment thinkers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were appalled by the religious wars and persecutions which the European world was going through in their era. They had witnessed Protestants and Catholics butchering and torturing one another to death in nightmarish fashion, all over the European continent and the British Isles. They sought a new kind of

religion, a rational religion, which set aside medieval superstition and philosophical nit-picking: a religion built upon the idea of one God, the author and architect of the universe, a God whose simple moral laws could be seen in the workings of nature itself. Thomas Jefferson, in the Declaration of Independence, referred to these as “the laws of Nature and of Nature’s God.” We all knew what these rules were: they were simple things like tell the truth, keep your word, do not steal from other people or kill them, allow other people to worship God in whatever way they believe best, and in general treat other people as you would want them to treat you.

And among these great natural laws, *tolerance for other people’s religious beliefs* was one of the most important principles of all, if you wanted a world where people could live at peace with one another. The leaders of the American Revolution and the French Revolution had shared that conviction. In early American history, one saw total commitment to the principles of the Enlightenment not only in Thomas Jefferson but also in a host of other foundational figures, including Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, Thomas Paine, John Adams, and James Madison. They laid out the basic principles of the United States Constitution and Bill of Rights to conform to Enlightenment ideals. In seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe, a list of the great Enlightenment figures read almost like a who’s who of the great thinkers of that era: Voltaire, Immanuel Kant, John Locke, Pierre Bayle, Isaac Newton, Montesquieu, Baruch Spinoza, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and so on.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, William James’ *Varieties of Religious Experience* had likewise been shaped by the conviction that all sorts of religious beliefs were worthy of respectful study if we wanted to find spiritual tools which could make our own lives better. *The kind of blind intolerance which rejected other*

*people's religious beliefs out of hand would inevitably weaken our own understanding of the spiritual dimension of reality.* And this fundamental Enlightenment principle was equally central to Fosdick's moral position, and to the early A.A. position as it was established in 1939-40.

***Fosdick on why AA was so successful: nonsectarian and tolerant of all religions.*** Harry Emerson Fosdick was important all over America as an influential Protestant liberal leader during the early twentieth century, but he was even more important in early Alcoholics Anonymous history as one of the most famous outside supporters of the new AA movement, and one of the first major public figures to write admiringly about it. He wrote one of the first reviews of the Big Book after it came out, a piece which appeared in *The Religious Digest* and elsewhere, and was oft reprinted. In this review he pointed especially to what he regarded as the most important thing about AA: it was a completely *nonsectarian and tolerant organization* in which people of all religious backgrounds (or none at all) could join in the service of the universe's great Healing Power — something far greater than the power of any individual human being — which could rescue hopeless alcoholics from doom:

They are convinced that for the hopeless alcoholic there is only one way out — the expulsion of his obsession by a Power Greater Than Himself. Let it be said at once that there is nothing partisan or sectarian about this religious experience. Agnostics and atheists, along with Catholics, Jews and Protestants, tell their story of discovering the Power Greater Than Themselves .... By religion they mean an experience which they personally know and which has saved them from their slavery, when psychiatry and medicine had

failed. They agree that each man must have his own way of conceiving God, but of God Himself they are utterly sure, and their stories of victory in consequence are a notable addition to William James' "Varieties of Religious Experience."<sup>175</sup>

**Adolf von Harnack:** Another well-known Protestant liberal was the German church historian and theologian, Adolf von Harnack, who wrote one of the greatest of the nineteenth century histories of Christian theology, the multi-volume *History of Dogma*,<sup>176</sup> where he showed his mastery of all the technical terminology and philosophical distinctions of the Christian debates over the doctrine of the Trinity and numerous other such issues. Catholic Christians, for example, after centuries of bitter debate from the fourth to seventh centuries A.D., came to proclaim that there were three *hypostaseis* (substrata, hypostatizations, roles or personifications) and one *ousia* (essence or substance) in the Holy Trinity, and that Jesus Christ was *homoousios* to God (of the same essence, jointly sharing a common substance), as opposed to the heretical teaching of the Arians, who said that Christ was only *homoiousios* or *homoios* to God (that is, that he only had a similar essence or was like God). Jesus Christ, the ancient fathers of the Church went on to say, had two *physeis* or natures (one divine and the other human) along with two *thelêmata* (wills) and two *energeiai* (operations, energies) — united upon a single *hypostasis* (foundation) and maintaining a single external *prosôpon* (face, façade, role).<sup>177</sup>

But then in 1900, Harnack published his best-selling popular book, *What Is Christianity?*<sup>178</sup> and spoke out with prophetic fervor against this whole way of trying to present Christianity. All of this technical Greek terminology came from pagan Greek philosophy, he said, not from the Bible, and had nothing at all to do with the simple teaching of the historical Jesus. Christianity's proper task was not to

become involved in endless controversies about nit-picking philosophical issues, but to preach the message of God's love and forgiveness, and teach human beings to act with love, compassion, and tolerance, and devote themselves to carrying out concrete deeds of loving kindness to the human beings around them.

We must be clear about two things here. First, the Protestant liberals of the early twentieth century were not ignorant scoffers attacking something they did not understand — Harnack, as we have seen, was one of the world's experts on the history of Catholic theology. Second, the Protestant liberals were not attacking traditional Christianity because they were dilettantish over-educated playboys and playgirls who did not take religion seriously. On the contrary, the Protestant liberals were on a *prophetic mission*. We were not Christians at all, they proclaimed, unless we were dedicated above all else to healing the sick, feeding the hungry, aiding the downtrodden and despised, and teaching everyone around us that God loves us. The goal of the true Christian life was to show love and tolerance to everyone around us, acting towards them in the same way that we would want them to act towards us.

In *What Is Christianity?* Harnack reminded us forcibly that in true First Century Christianity, the early Christians had no huge church buildings with stained glass windows and church organs. Jesus and his apostles did not wear gold-embroidered vestments and chant complex rituals from elaborate liturgical books. They in fact owned no church property at all. They wandered from town to town preaching a simple gospel of love towards all. They met in people's homes (or on hillsides or on the beaches of the Sea of Galilee). They had no Vatican headquarters (or General Service Office) where powerful officials passed hundreds of rules telling other people how they must act and what they could read, and otherwise spent their whole time trying to run other people's lives. When people in the

1930's and 40's looked at early AA and said that *this was what real First Century Christianity must have looked like*, this was what they were pointing to. They did NOT mean that early AA looked to them like a twentieth-century fundamentalist church. The people who compared AA to First Century Christianity were Protestant liberals, and they looked with awe and admiration at early AA as a place where you could see the modern equivalent of the simple spiritual fellowship of Jesus and his first apostles.

**Horace Bushnell:** A nineteenth-century Congregationalist pastor, Horace Bushnell from Connecticut, was another influential figure in the development of Protestant liberalism. In his book *Christian Nurture* (1847), he chopped away decisively at the foundations of the revivalist movement. The kind of conversion experiences which were at the heart of American frontier revivalism and camp meetings could be major spiritual breakthroughs, he said, for those who had never before known a truly loving God. But a child brought up in the church, if the church was doing its job, should never doubt God's full acceptance and overwhelming love. Good spiritual training for children of the church would involve a series of gradual educational experiences.

We can see how Bushnell's ideas were adapted in the AA Big Book, where the appendix on spiritual experience explained how most alcoholics would find themselves undergoing a gradual educational process rather than a few "sudden and spectacular upheavals." And we can see how the AA Big Book was likewise borrowing from Bushnell and Fosdick and the rest of the Protestant liberal tradition when it said that the goal was "spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection."<sup>179</sup>

**The Southern Methodists and the Upper Room:** By the early twentieth century, the Southern Methodist Church, which had become one of the key liberal denominations in the United States,

was teaching its little children to sing songs like “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so, / Little ones to Him belong; we are weak but he is strong” and “Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world, / Red and yellow, black and white, all are precious in his sight, / Jesus loves the little children of the world.”<sup>180</sup> On the surface these might have sounded like simple-minded little ditties, but the greatest truths are often quite simple. The gospel message to these Methodists was that God first loved us when we were still lost in fear and anger, and would, through the power of his all-accepting love, teach us to love again. The greatest barrier to hearing the gospel was to be so afraid of God, because of nightmarish images of a punishing, condemning, rejecting God which had been foisted on us by fear-based religious systems, that we ran away from God instead of throwing ourselves gratefully into the arms of his love and healing grace. And the true measure of salvation lay not in how many doctrines and dogmas we believed, but in how open and loving our hearts were.

Methodism regularly described itself as “the religion of the heart,” and taught that the mark of a good Methodist was above all a warm heart. Roman Catholics who carried out their traditional Catholic devotions to the Sacred Heart of Jesus could in fact see the parallels to their belief in Methodist practice. And in fact, John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, had been brought up as a child in a deeply religious Anglo-Catholic family which read together, as part of their family’s morning prayer and meditation, from Thomas à Kempis’s *Imitation of Christ*, a medieval Catholic book which taught a similar glorification of the simple life of love and kindness as the way to bring the true Christ spirit into our lives.

The *Imitation of Christ* was one of the books, we remember, which Sister Ignatia used to give to alcoholics when they finished her treatment program at St. Thomas Hospital in Akron. And the

chapel at the hospital had at the altar end the image of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37), and stained glass windows along the right wall depicting the Seven Corporal Works of Mercy (Matthew 25:35): feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, befriending the immigrant worker, taking care of the sick, ministering to prisoners, and burying the dead. Good Methodists knew instantly, upon entering that chapel, that the Catholics who ran this hospital were people whom they must regard with the greatest respect, and that Sister Ignatia was someone who believed in the same goals they did.

A little booklet called *The Upper Room*, published by the old Southern Methodist Church in Nashville, Tennessee, was the most commonly used meditational book in the AA program from 1935 down to 1948 (when it began being replaced in AA circles by Richmond Walker's *Twenty-four Hours a Day*). In Dr. Bob's house, his wife Anne read from *The Upper Room* every morning. All the recovering alcoholics who had come to their house for morning coffee before going to work, prayed the prayers and discussed the readings.

The Southern Methodists had started off as an odd mixture of revivalist fervor and Anglo-Catholic piety. The Methodists had always been (as they are now) staunchly anti-Calvinist and anti-predestinarian. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they had believed that accepting God's free gift of grace in a conversion experience at a revival was the most common entry into the life of faith, but they also believed that human beings always had free will, and could reject God and turn against God's grace. In fact their understanding of the relationship between faith and works differed only verbally from the position which St. Thomas Aquinas had taught in the *Summa Theologica*.<sup>181</sup> Continuance in the life of faith meant using their freedom of will to devote themselves to a



“methodical” use (hence the nickname “Methodists”) of prayer, the sacraments, and all the other means of grace so that they could grow continually in love, compassion, emotional warmth, and understanding towards other people.

The Southern Methodists celebrated communion using an English translation of the old medieval Roman Catholic Latin mass, and it was always a sung service. They used old medieval chant tunes, modified slightly so they could be sung in four-part harmony. Charles Wesley’s communion hymns explained that the bread and wine functioned as conduits, so to speak, through which the Real Presence of Christ was conducted directly to the person taking communion, in a miraculous manner which could not be explained in natural terms — even the holy angels, Charles Wesley said, could do no more than stand in awe, and marvel.

Real Methodists and good Roman Catholics, when they got to know one another, tended to feel a natural kinship with one another at numerous levels. So one had the strange phenomenon that Roman Catholics totally rejected the Oxford Group because it was Protestant, and refused to join AA as long as it had any linkage to the Oxford Group, but had no problem going to AA meetings and using *The Upper Room* as their regular AA meditational book during AA’s early years, even though it too was, in principle, also Protestant. In fact, even today there are many Roman Catholic families in the United States who keep copies of *The Upper Room* in their homes for meditation and study. So it would be a misleading oversimplification to try to portray the earliest negotiations over Roman Catholic participation in AA as merely a blindly hostile, across-the-boards dispute between Protestants and Catholics. It depended on who the Protestants were.

***American Methodist emphasis on the “educational variety” of spiritual experience:*** An important and quite major change took

place in the American Methodist movement at the beginning of the twentieth century, when the majority of Methodists began to feel more comfortable discarding or at least strongly de-emphasizing the preaching of frontier type revivals in which preachers attempted to produce highly emotional conversion experiences as the doorway to the Christian life. In part they compensated by putting even greater emphasis upon reaching out to the poor and helpless (the Methodist Social Creed which was placed in the *Methodist Discipline* in 1908 was closely similar in spirit and principle to the teachings of Dorothy Day's Catholic Worker movement). They also fell back onto their eighteenth century roots (where their founder John Wesley had been deeply read in the Spanish and French Catholic spiritual literature of his time, including the writings of St. Ignatius Loyola and other Jesuit authors): the Methodists as a consequence taught a spirituality of "going on to perfection" where the perfect or ideal spiritual life was understood as one of continuous growth in ever greater love and inner peace — carried out over our whole lives — in a spiritual discipline based upon prayer, hymn-singing, active participation in the life of the church, reading good spiritual literature, developing greater and greater God-consciousness, and learning the proper exercise of our human wills. Like Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*, Methodist theology put a strong emphasis upon the necessity for mobilizing the deepest levels of our human feelings and emotions, in order to provide the motive power for the Christian spiritual life. The Methodists, as has been noted, called it developing "a warm heart."

So this was what *The Upper Room* taught the early AA people between 1935 and 1948: how to carry out *methodical spiritual exercises* in order to encounter progressively more and more transformative religious experiences, which were basically of "the 'educational variety' because they develop slowly over a period of

*time.*” I have deliberately italicized the words “methodical” and “spiritual exercises” here, along with the quotation from page 567 of the Big Book, to emphasize the way that Methodist theology, St. Ignatius Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises*, and the spirituality of the Big Book often converged quite markedly.

***Early Roman Catholic members in Alcoholics Anonymous:***

According to Bill Wilson’s memory, at the time when the final drafts of the Big Book were being written (Spring 1938–December 1938), there were no Roman Catholic members in the New York AA group. There was one Catholic member in Ohio, he said, who “had written his story” for the Big Book, “but had volunteered no further opinion.”<sup>182</sup>

This was Joe Doppler (or Doeppler), whose story appeared in the first, second, and third editions of the Big Book as “The European Drinker.” Born in Germany, his drink of choice during his youth was good Rhine wine. His devout Catholic parents wanted him to become a priest, but after attending a Franciscan school he decided he did not have the vocation, and became a harness maker and upholsterer by trade. He came to America when he was twenty-four and settled in Cleveland, Ohio, where his drinking became worse and worse, until Dr. Bob and three or four other AAs visited him and got him sober in April 1936. Joe thereby became the first Roman Catholic in AA.<sup>183</sup>

Morgan Ryan, an Irish Catholic who came in almost three years later, was the second. It was by then a crucial time in the development of AA. In January of 1939, four hundred multilith copies of the draft of the Big Book were produced and distributed to a variety of people for review. Morgan, formerly a \$20,000-a-year advertising man from Glen Ridge, New Jersey, had just gotten out of Rockland Asylum and joined the New York AA group. The New Yorkers agreed that he should convey one of the multilithed

manuscript copies to the Catholic Committee on Publications of the Archdiocese of New York. Bill Wilson was delighted when the Catholic authorities responded positively:

The Committee, [Morgan] said, had nothing but the best to say of our efforts. From their point of view the book was perfectly all right as far as it went. After reading the section on meditation and prayer, the Committee had made certain suggestions for improvement [which] looked so good that we adopted them on the spot. In only one sentence of the entire book had they found it necessary to suggest a real change. At the conclusion of my own story, Chapter 1 of the original draft, I had made a rhetorical flourish to the effect that “we had found Heaven right here on this good old earth.” Morgan’s friend on the Committee pointed this out to him with a smile and said, “Don’t you think that Bill W. could change that word ‘Heaven’ to ‘Utopia’? After all, we Catholics are promising folks something much better later on!”<sup>184</sup>

As a side note, Morgan R. later appeared on Gabriel Heatter’s 9:00 p.m. radio program “We the People” on April 29, 1939 and told his life story, and how he had regained his sobriety in the new AA program. A full transcript of his talk has survived.<sup>185</sup>

The important thing about the embassy which Morgan was sent on to the Catholic Committee on Publications was that, even in January of 1939, with as yet only those two Catholic members in the program — Joe Doppler and Morgan Ryan — the new AA movement was already committed to gaining approval from the Catholic Church, and to making their material as acceptable as possible to good believing Catholics. In the 1930s this was quite an extraordinary admission for a group of American Protestants to

make: the acknowledgment that their group was going to have to make its teachings compatible with traditional Catholic belief and that — should it become necessary — they might have to incorporate important Catholic spiritual principles into the heart of their system of faith, or otherwise modify what they had been doing.

***Alcoholics Anonymous and the Oxford Group:*** The place where the new AA movement was quickly forced to make that decision — are we willing to part with something truly near and dear to us in order to allow Roman Catholics to join us? — lay in AA's linkage to the Oxford Group. This was an early twentieth-century Protestant movement, as we noted at the beginning of this chapter, which had been begun by an American Lutheran pastor named Frank Buchman. In spite of the group's name, the connection with Oxford University in England was only tangential (the university later sued them for using its name), and they also had nothing at all to do with the nineteenth century English renewal of interest in traditional Catholicism (involving Cardinal John Henry Newman *et al.*) called the Oxford Movement.

Frank Buchman (1878–1961), the founder of the Oxford Group, was involved in the American and European Protestant missionary movement working in the Far East and Middle East during the early twentieth century: many of his ideas came from sources within that movement.

The original Protestant evangelical movement had been started in the early eighteenth century by people like the Puritan theologian Jonathan Edwards in colonial Massachusetts and the Anglo-Catholic theologian John Wesley in England. They had rediscovered the ancient Catholic principle that divine grace could actually change human character itself. One could take a man or woman whose life was inexorably heading towards a tragic doom, and by the power of

God's grace, totally change the way that person's life story ended, turning it into a tale of blessing and triumph.

Buchman helped revitalize that classic evangelical theme; he referred to this transformation of our lives — the central goal of his preaching and teaching — as “life changing.”<sup>186</sup> He wanted to genuinely *change lives* in good and positive ways, creating men and women who were far more loving, more unselfish, and more honest.

But some of his other concerns could disturb people, especially what some saw as an unhealthy preoccupation with what he regarded as grave sexual sins, including homosexuality, transvestism, and masturbation. He became involved in missionary work in China from 1916 to 1918, but his claim that many of the other Protestant missionaries in China were ineffective due to their own sinfulness, with the implication that one of their major problems was homosexuality, caused Bishop Logan Roots to receive so many complaints that he finally demanded that Buchman leave China.<sup>187</sup>

Buchman decided to go to England to try out some of the foreign mission's newly-devised one-on-one missionary methods to create Christian youth groups among Cambridge and Oxford University students who were no longer attending church or trying to live by strict traditional Christian moral principles. Older people—university professors, newspaper editors, prominent businessmen, major government officials, and the like—also began attending these group meetings, and the Oxford Group was formed.<sup>188</sup>

By the mid-1930s, the Oxford Group had established regular meetings in the United States, both in New York City and in Akron. Ebby Thacher, the man who showed Bill Wilson how to use the power of God's grace to conquer his compulsion to drink, had gotten sober in the Oxford Group, and Bill likewise began attending Oxford Group meetings in New York City in December 1934 as part of his sobering up process.

For two and a half years, Bill W. and his wife Lois attended two Oxford Group meetings a week and took the alcoholics on whom they were working to the group's meetings. But in late Spring of 1937, leaders at the Oxford Group's Calvary Mission in New York ordered alcoholics staying there to stop attending the "drunks only" meetings which Bill and Lois were holding at their Clinton Street apartment. In August 1937, Bill and Lois quit attending Oxford Group meetings, and their new alcoholic recovery program in New York was permanently split off from the Oxford Group.<sup>189</sup>

In Akron, Ohio, the connection between the alcoholics and the Oxford Groupers ran far deeper and lasted much longer. In 1933, rubber baron Harvey Firestone, Sr. (president of the Firestone Rubber and Tire Company) brought a large contingent of Oxford Group members to Akron so that they could get the first group started in that city. Dr. Bob's wife Anne persuaded him to start attending these new Oxford Group meetings early in 1933, shortly after they were begun. While going to these meetings, he and his wife became close to Henrietta Seiberling, the daughter-in-law of the founder of the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company and a devoted group member. In March or April 1935, Henrietta found out that Dr. Bob's compulsive drinking was on the point of totally destroying his medical career, and received guidance that she and some of the other Oxford Group members should begin using Oxford Group methods to try to get him sober.<sup>190</sup>

Nothing they tried worked, until Bill Wilson arrived in Akron in May, and — via their common Oxford Group connection — made contact with the doctor and began explaining how he himself had been using group principles to stay sober back in New York.<sup>191</sup> Dr. Bob had his last drink in June of that year, and he and his wife Anne set up an alcoholic recovery program in Akron based on the further

adaptation of Oxford Group principles which he and Bill Wilson had worked out that summer.

The Akron alcoholics went to a weekly meeting of the Oxford Group on Wednesday nights at T. Henry and Clarace Williams's home, where there were also non-alcoholics present (including Henrietta Seiberling and the Williams's themselves). But the alcoholics also went to Dr. Bob and Anne's house on the other six days a week, where Anne and perhaps some of the wives would be the only non-alcoholics present. They either attended Anne's morning meditation session, where she read from the previously mentioned Protestant booklet called *The Upper Room* (followed by an informal discussion over coffee of the bible verses and short meditations found in that day's reading), and/or they came to the house in the evening for informal discussion meetings and work with new members.



## CHAPTER 2

### **The Cleveland Catholics and Sister Ignatia**

***Cleveland Catholics force the final split from the Oxford Group.***

By April 1939, there were fourteen alcoholics in Cleveland, Ohio, a major American manufacturing city on Lake Erie; they were led by a man named Clarence Snyder, who had gotten sober on February 11, 1938. The Cleveland people were traveling every week to the Wednesday night Oxford Group meeting at T. Henry and Clarace Williams's home in Akron, forty miles to the south. The problem was that a majority of the Cleveland contingent were Roman Catholics, and they informed Clarence that their parish priest had told them they would be excommunicated if they continued attending Oxford Group meetings.

One of the issues, according to later memories, arose because Oxford Group members were taught to confess their worst and most secret sins to one another. A good Catholic would only find that advisable or appropriate when done with a trained and competent priest, who knew how to distinguish between serious sins and imaginary issues, and who had the power of the keys and would be able to forgive the person's sins and restore that person to a state of grace.<sup>192</sup>

Clarence repeatedly tried to get Dr. Bob to stop holding the main weekly meeting for alcoholics as part of the Oxford Group gathering

at T. Henry and Clarace Williams's home. An additional part of the problem was that the alcoholics were being bunched in there with the non-alcoholic Oxford Group members — the Wednesday gathering was not a meeting for alcoholics alone. But Dr. Bob's loyalty to T. Henry, Clarace, Henrietta Seiberling and the other non-alcoholic Oxford Groupers remained unbreakable, and he refused to stop ordering his alcoholics to attend that meeting.<sup>193</sup>

Finally, in April 1939, Clarence was working on a Cleveland alcoholic named Albert (Abby or Al) Golrick (Abby's story made it into the second and third editions of the Big Book under the title "He Thought He Could Drink like a Gentleman"). When Clarence began discussing the Catholic problem with Abby's wife Grace, he told her that he believed they needed to stop attending the Akron meeting and start their own meeting right there in Cleveland, but that he had been unable to find any place they could meet. Grace told him that she and Abby would be glad to welcome them into their home at 2345 Stillman Road in Cleveland Heights.<sup>194</sup> (AA historian Nancy Olson believed that Abby himself was Catholic, but I have been unable to produce independent confirmation of this.<sup>195</sup>)

Armed with this new possibility, Clarence nevertheless made one final attempt to convince Dr. Bob to break the Oxford Group connection:

I says, "Doc you know these fellows can't come." I says, "They can't belong to the Oxford Group." I says, "We don't need all this folderol of the Oxford Group. We can eliminate a lot of this stuff. We have a book now with these Twelve Steps, and we have the Four Absolutes, and anyone can live with that."

He says, "Well you can't do that," he says, "you can't break this thing up."

I says, “We’re not breaking anything up. All I’m interested in is something with more universality so that anybody can belong whether they have a religion or believe in anything or not. They can come.”

He says, “Well you can’t do that.”

I says “We’re gonna do something.”

And he says, “Like what?”

And I says, “Well we’ll see like what!”<sup>196</sup>

At the very end of his life, at the time he married his third wife Grace (this was in 1971, the year he turned sixty-nine), Clarence had had a long and turbulent life, filled with many disappointments and failures. At that point, Clarence turned into a Protestant fundamentalist and began teaching an Assemblies of God Pentecostal-style recovery program in which he demanded that AA newcomers pray to Jesus, and fall down on their knees and turn their lives over to Jesus as their personal savior. Some AA historians focus primarily on that final phase of his life when they think about Clarence’s style of AA teaching. But back here in 1939 he was a very different person. Only thirty-six years old, and still filled with hope and overflowing confidence in God’s redeeming power, he instead emphasized a kind of AA based on *universalism*, where “anybody can belong whether they have a religion or believe in anything or not.”<sup>197</sup>

The young, liberal Clarence Snyder did not want to see the Cleveland Roman Catholics squeezed out of AA. So on Wednesday, May 10, 1939, the recovering alcoholics from Cleveland went for one last time to the Oxford Group meeting at T. Henry and Clarace Williams’s house in Akron. At the close of the meeting, Clarence announced that this was “the last time the Cleveland contingent

would be down to the Oxford Group as a whole.” He told Dr. Bob that

“We’re gonna start our own group in Cleveland .... This is not gonna be an Oxford Group. It’s gonna be known as Alcoholics Anonymous. We’re taking the name from the book; and only alcoholics and their families are welcome. Nobody else .... We’re gonna meet at 2345 Stillman Road, Cleveland Heights, at Al and Grace G.’s home.”

Doc stood up and said, “You can’t do this.”

Clarence replied, “There’s nothing to talk about.”<sup>198</sup>

The meeting broke up in a near riot as the Cleveland protestors stood up and walked out. Three or four of the Cleveland alcoholics refused to join this rebellion, but nine of them (the majority) remained united, and held their first Cleveland meeting the next evening (May 11, 1939). Everyone from Akron traveled the forty miles to Cleveland and barged into the Golrick’s home. As Clarence described it:

“The whole group descended upon us and tried to break up our meeting. One guy was gonna whip me. I want you to know that this was all done in pure Christian love. A.A. started in riots. It rose in riots.”<sup>199</sup>

In a letter to Hank P. on June 4, 1939, Clarence told him that in the new Cleveland group there was “not too much stress on spiritual business at meetings.”<sup>200</sup> It was conducted, in other words, in a way very different from the Oxford Group’s strongly religious style. According to Mitchell K., “Clarence always felt that overt spirituality belongs between a ‘baby’ and his sponsor,” and should

not be introduced into AA meetings. “Prayer and Bible reading was a prerequisite, Clarence felt, but only at home.”<sup>201</sup>

To conclude the story, in late October 1939, the Akron alcoholics also quit going to T. Henry and Clarace Williams’s home, and began holding their big weekly meeting at Dr. Bob’s house. Then in January 1940 they moved the meeting to King School.<sup>202</sup> AA’s break with the Oxford Group was now complete.

*The issue to Sister Ignatia: nonsectarian help to all vs. becoming tied to one narrow religious sect or cult.* By January of 1940, Sister Ignatia had negotiated a working agreement between Dr. Bob, St. Thomas Hospital, and her superior, Sister Clementine. There would now be an officially sanctioned AA-based alcoholism treatment program in place at St. Thomas Hospital.<sup>203</sup> But Sister Ignatia was quite clear about one central requirement: although run by a Catholic religious order, the hospital was “nonsectarian” (her word),<sup>204</sup> and admitted patients regardless of their religious affiliation. The Oxford Group on the other hand was a “sect” (again her word),<sup>205</sup> what we would today call a religious cult, with extremely narrow and rigid religious requirements for its members. Therefore any alcoholism treatment program carried on at the hospital had to be freed from any connection with that movement.

The new AA movement, all across the U.S. and Canada, quickly began to recognize the wisdom of this approach. What was called the Old Preamble (or Texas Preamble), which was created in 1940 and began to be read at the start of AA meetings in many places, expressed this understanding clearly:

We feel each person's religious convictions, if any, are his own affair, and the simple purpose of the program of AA is to show what may be done to enlist the aid of a Power greater

than ourselves, regardless of what our individual conception of that Power may be.<sup>206</sup>

***Roman Catholics began flooding into AA:*** This arrangement — Alcoholics Anonymous as a nonsectarian program, not allied with any particular creed or denomination, and not setting up barriers against anyone of any religious background — worked so well that the question of whether Roman Catholics could join AA seems to have become a non-issue, at the practical level at least, from that point on. When the first AA group in Indianapolis was founded on October 28, 1940, for example, by a good Irish Catholic named Doherty Sheerin, apparently no one in AA circles thought anything of it at all. And on the other side, the Catholic churches in that city allowed him to advertise AA in their church buildings and Catholic priests recommended the new alcoholism program enthusiastically.<sup>207</sup>

Roman Catholic alcoholics had been flooding into the AA program in such large numbers, in fact, that in a letter written by Bill Wilson on October 30, 1940, he estimated that, “as matters now stand, I suppose A.A. is 25 percent Catholic.”<sup>208</sup>

Events moved very quickly after that point. A Catholic priest named Father Ed Dowling, S.J., although not an alcoholic himself, started the first AA meeting in St. Louis on October 30, 1940, and in November or December of 1940 became AA co-founder Bill Wilson’s sponsor and spiritual guide, a role which he continued to fulfill for the next twenty years.

On November 10, 1943, Father Ralph Pfau (the subject of this book), who was an assistant pastor at St. Joan of Arc’s Catholic Church in Indianapolis, phoned the AA contact number in that city, and became the first Roman Catholic priest to get sober in AA.

The most widely used set of newcomers lessons in early AA, a pamphlet called the *Tablemate*, arose out of the weekly beginners classes which began being held in Detroit on June 14, 1943, and was later given its first printed version in Washington D.C. We can note how the pamphlet's instructions on how to do Step Five not only assumes that a large number of the alcoholics at these meetings would be Roman Catholics, but also takes the time to give a Catholic explanation of the difference between doing a real AA fifth step and going to what was in those days a good Catholic's regular weekly confession:

The Catholic already has this medium readily available to him in the confessional. But — the Catholic is at a disadvantage if he thinks his familiarity with confession permits him to think his part of A.A. is thereby automatically taken care of. He must, in confession, seriously consider his problems in relation to his alcoholic thinking .... The non-Catholic has the way open to work this step by going to his minister, his doctor, or his friend.<sup>209</sup>

The kind of Alcoholics Anonymous that spread across the U.S. and Canada from this point on (and eventually was brought to all the rest of the world) now had a solid base of two thousand years' worth of traditional Catholic spirituality as one of the major sets of theological building blocks and spiritual tools which people could call upon for the healing of their souls.

## CHAPTER 3

### **The Unitarians Join the Plea for a Nonsectarian AA**

*The Unitarians in Cleveland also insisted that AA break its linkage with the Oxford Group — Rev. Dilworth Lupton.* It also quickly became apparent that Roman Catholics were not the only ones who were condemning AA because of its Oxford Group linkage. At the opposite end as it were from the Catholics, we can see the Unitarians<sup>210</sup> — at that time one of the most liberal of all the American Protestant denominations — likewise regarding the Oxford Group as a narrowly doctrinaire sect or cult with which they wanted absolutely no contact at all. And the Unitarians, just like the Catholics, refused to endorse AA as long as AA was teaching Oxford Group ideas and intertwining itself with the Oxford Group.

Under this kind of pressure, Dr. Bob and the Akron alcoholics finally declared their independence from the Oxford Group in October 1939 and quit going to T. Henry and Clarace Williams' place for the weekly Oxford Group meeting.

Rev. Dilworth Lupton, the pastor at the First Unitarian Church in Cleveland, Ohio, responded in a positive way almost immediately, preaching a sermon on November 26, 1939 in which he warmly praised the new AA movement. And in turn, the AA people printed copies of the sermon and began using it as an AA pamphlet, called "Mr. X and Alcoholics Anonymous" (where Mr. X was Clarence



Snyder). It was one of the earliest AA pamphlets and was used for many years by members in Cleveland to help describe the AA program to newcomers and spread the AA message.<sup>211</sup> This is the reason it is such an important document: the Alcoholics Anonymous people, regardless of their own various religious backgrounds, seem to have considered it to be an excellent statement of their own understanding of what was meant by keeping AA nonsectarian.

The Rev. Lupton said in that pamphlet that he saw the AA movement as resting upon four basic principles, which he described as follows:

1. *The principle of spiritual dependence* upon a power-not-ourselves, where we learn to put our faith in a spiritual Presence outside ourselves.

2. *The principle of universality:*

“In our great museums one usually finds paintings covering several ages of art, often brought together from widely separated localities — the primitive, medieval and modern periods; products of French, American, English, and Dutch masters; treasures from China, Japan, and India. Yet as one looks at these productions he instinctively feels that a universal beauty runs through them all. Beauty knows no particular age or school. Beauty is never exclusive and provincial; it is inclusive and universal.”

“So, too, in the field of religion .... Back of all religions is religion itself. Religion appears in differing types, but they are all expressions of one great impulse to live nobly and to adore the highest.”

3. *The principle of mutual aid*: alcoholics helping other alcoholics through comradeship and fellowship with one another.

4. *The principle of transformation* — the transformation of human character.<sup>212</sup>

In Lupton's list we can see him invoking certain fundamental ideas that came from Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), the father of classical liberal Protestant theology. In Schleiermacher's first major work, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* (Ger. 1799, Eng. trans. 1893), he said that all true religion was based on an innate awareness within the human mind, which was “a sense and taste for the Infinite.” This was the idea which later evolved into Richard Maurice Bucke's concept of cosmic consciousness and became an important part of Aldous Huxley's perennial philosophy (both Bucke and Huxley were important influences on Bill Wilson's thought).

In Schleiermacher's later work, *The Christian Faith* (Ger. 1st ed. 1821–2; 2nd ed. 1830–1; Eng. trans. 1928), he moved the focus to the human side of the divine-human relationship, and said that religion was based on “the feeling of absolute dependence” upon God. Jesus, he said, was the supreme example of this kind of God-consciousness.

***Dilworth's first principle (spiritual dependence)*** was a statement of that latter idea, the feeling of absolute dependence upon God, which seemed to be echoed so strongly throughout the pages of the AA Big Book: we had to “let go absolutely” (page 58); we had to ask “His protection and care with complete abandon” (page 59); we found that we could not completely launch ourselves upon this new

way of life until “we could ... abandon ourselves utterly to Him” (page 63).

But this idea had likewise been echoed in innumerable works of Catholic piety over the previous two thousand years, and certainly lay behind the teaching of the Two Standards (the two battle flags) in St. Ignatius Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises*, as well as the concept of the Two Cities and the Two Loves in St. Augustine’s *City of God*. Both Augustine and Loyola taught the importance of not only becoming aware of our absolute dependence upon God, but also the importance of making a full conscious commitment to live in the way our knowledge of that dependence taught us that we had to live. The beauty of Dilworth’s four principles was that they referred us to important elements of both the best of the Protestant tradition and the best of the Catholic tradition.

***Dilworth’s second principle (universality)*** went back to the underlying premise of Schleiermacher’s first great work, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, where he said that true religion, in all periods of history and all over the world, was based on an innate awareness within the human mind, which was “a sense and taste for the Infinite.”

And here Dilworth may have been more immediately under the influence of a more recent figure, Rudolf Otto,<sup>213</sup> one of the two most important Protestant theologians of the early twentieth century. In his formative book *The Idea of the Holy* (1st Ger. ed. 1917; Eng. trans. 1923),<sup>214</sup> Otto developed his own theological system after making a detailed study of the ideas of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) and Jakob Friedrich Fries (1773–1843).<sup>215</sup> Fries had been one of the best of the early Kantian commentators.<sup>216</sup>

In *The Idea of the Holy*, Otto added an additional category to the philosopher Kant’s categories of the understanding, a category which could be schematized in three different ways: in ethics it was

called the Good, in aesthetics it was called the Sublime, and in religion it referred to a quasi-aesthetic awareness which Otto called the feeling (*Gefühl*) of the Holy or the Sacred: a kind of intuition or hint (*Ahnung*) of the infinite shining through the finite. When Otto gave more detailed descriptions of this experience of the holy or sacred dimension of reality (which he also sometimes called the feeling of the “numinous”), it is clear that he was referring to something closely similar to what some of his contemporaries were calling “cosmic consciousness” or “cosmic religious feeling.”

But again, over the course of two thousand years of Catholic mysticism, the greatest saints had spoken frequently of their extraordinary experiences of the infinite: we think here of St. Augustine in his *Confessions* describing how he and his mother St. Monica both had experienced visions of the One (the single, undivided, infinite eternal ground of all reality), St. Bonaventura’s explanation of how to shut awareness of the finite world out of our consciousness in *Journey of the Mind to God*, St. John of the Cross’s description of both the bottomless dark abyss and the infinite heights of divine awareness in his writings, and so on. Again, Dilworth allowed us to reach back to important parts of both the Protestant tradition and the Catholic tradition.

***Dilworth’s third principle (mutual aid)*** referred to a part of the twelve-step program which even atheists like Jim Burwell (AA’s first famous atheistic member) was able to accept. Burwell came into AA on January 8, 1938 but rejected the idea of God and could not get continuously sober until June 16, when he decided to take the AA fellowship as his higher power,<sup>217</sup> a strategy that has been used by innumerable alcoholics in subsequent years.

And the importance of being part of a religious community was a truism in both the Protestant and Catholic traditions, ever since the early Egyptian and Syrian desert monks had discovered that most

people who attempted to live as hermits, in total isolation from any other human beings, simply went insane.

*Dilworth's fourth principle (the transformation of human character)* further allowed A.A. to work with newcomers who were atheists by focusing on improving their behavior and ethics. The Protestant evangelical tradition in its original version, as seen in the teachings of its great eighteenth century founders (especially Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley), saw the heart of the gospel as lying in the power of God's grace to actually change basic human character.<sup>218</sup> On the Catholic side, in the *Interior Castle* to give one especially good example, St. Teresa of Avila described how the human soul, when in the first mansions, found itself surrounded and blinded by vicious wild beasts, snakes, vipers, and poisonous creatures. These symbolized the powers of evil and wickedness which attempted to overmaster the soul. The soul's first duty was not to attempt to obtain visions of God and the infinite, or to try to hear Jesus and the saints and holy angels talking to us inside our souls, but to start cleaning up our lives and putting aside all of the selfishness and greedy ambition which was keeping us enslaved.<sup>219</sup>

The Rev. Dilworth's sermon was a beautiful piece of analysis. As was noted earlier, the AA people almost immediately turned it into one of their first printed pamphlets and began distributing copies of it everywhere they could. This short but thoughtful work seemed to them to give an excellent summary of their side of the bargain with the Catholics and Unitarians. This was what a nonsectarian AA should look like.

## CHAPTER 4

### Akron Reading List and Father Ralph Pfau's Golden Books

*THE AKRON MANUAL (1942): the issue was the Oxford Group, not Protestantism — note how the Manual recommended AA's continued use of the Protestant meditational booklet called *The Upper Room*.* It is interesting to note that, although the issue for Roman Catholics during this transition period (running from 1939 through the early 1940's) is often assumed by AA historians to have been Protestantism as such, a closer look shows that this was not at all so. Let us look for example at a pamphlet entitled *A Manual for Alcoholics Anonymous*, which was published in Akron in 1942 or not long afterwards, and designed to be given to newcomers just coming into the AA program. We can see from this pamphlet that Akron AA meetings were still frequently being begun with a reading from the Protestant booklet called *The Upper Room*, and that there was nothing noticeably Catholic about the meeting format:

Here, briefly, is how meetings are conducted in the dozen or more Akron groups, a method that has been used since the founding of A.A.... The leader opens the meeting with a prayer, or asks someone else to pray. The prayer can be original, or it can be taken from a prayer book, or from some

publication such as *The Upper Room* .... In closing the entire group stands and repeats the Lord's Prayer.<sup>220</sup>

And we know that *The Upper Room* continued to be the most commonly used AA meditational booklet, not just in Akron, but in AA meetings across the United States, down to 1948. At that time it began to be replaced by Richmond Walker's *Twenty-Four Hours a Day*, which quickly became the AA program's second most printed book, secondary only to the Big Book. But Rich was also a liberal Protestant, a very free-thinking Unitarian from Massachusetts, who drew many of his ideas from classical Protestant idealism of the radical and anti-traditional sort, including the New England Transcendentalists and the nineteenth-century German idealist philosophers.<sup>221</sup>

***THE AKRON MANUAL (1942): the Akron reading list in this manual contained mostly Protestant liberal writings.*** The Akron manual gave a recommended reading list for AA newcomers which is very instructive:<sup>222</sup>

1. *Alcoholics Anonymous* (the Big Book) 1939.
2. The Holy Bible.
3. Henry Drummond, *The Greatest Thing in the World*, a talk given in 1887 and published immediately afterward.
4. Emmet Fox, *The Sermon on the Mount*, copyright 1934, 1935, 1938.
5. James Allen, *As a Man Thinketh*, first published in 1908 or a little before.
6. Winfred Rhoades, *The Self You Have to Live With*, 1938.
7. Ernest M. Ligon, *The Psychology of Christian Personality*, 1935.
8. E. Stanley Jones, *Abundant Living*, 1942.

9. Bruce Barron, *The Man Nobody Knows: A Discovery of the Real Jesus*, copyright 1924, 1925.
10. *The Unchanging Friend*, a series published by the Bruce Publishing Co. in Milwaukee.

**Bruce Barron** portrayed Jesus in warmly human fashion, in the way typical of the Protestant liberalism of that period. Following in the spirit of Adolf Harnack's *What Is Christianity?* he portrayed Jesus as totally human, not an otherworldly God-man, and completely ignored the medieval doctrine of Jesus' death on the cross as a blood sacrifice for other people's sins.

**E. Stanley Jones** was a mainline Methodist, hence also on the side of the Protestant liberals in the early twentieth-century American struggle with the fundamentalist movement. Chapter 6 of his 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 does not "feel" like we are in real contact with God, and where we have extraordinary difficulty forcing ourselves to pray at all). So although we might call him a liberal or modernist, there was also a good deal of traditional monastic spirituality lying behind some of his recommendations. Methodist spirituality and Roman Catholic spirituality were sometimes very closely similar.

Two of the Akron books had a definitely psychological bent. The AA movement (in Akron as well as New York) was an attempt to combine some simple but very effective psychological insights with



a spirituality which was deeply held, but phrased as much as possible in nonsectarian and very simple language.<sup>223</sup>

**Ernest Ligon:** One of these books on the Akron list was by a professor of psychology at Union College in Schenectady, New York. Ernest Ligon was educated at Texas Christian University (Disciples of Christ) and Yale University, so he was fairly much a mainstream Protestant, but with a leaning towards the liberals and modernists. As an example, we can see how he stated in his book that not all the sayings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount were genuine words of Jesus, and/or they may not have originally been stated verbatim in those exact words. His book gave a Neo-Freudian psychological interpretation of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, where 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 Neo-Freudian psychiatrist Alfred Adler (1870-1937), and 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.

**Winfred Rhoades** had a book on this list, which was based on his psychological work in the Boston Dispensary unit of the New England Medical Center, where he conducted classes in "thought control" and helped and advised individuals with adjustment problems. He defined religion as "intrinsically not a belief, not a doctrine ... but conscious association with the divine Spirit and Life." Again we see the rejection of doctrines and dogmas (whether modern fundamentalist doctrines or ancient traditional doctrines) in

favor of the realm of feeling and intuition, and establishing contact with an immaterial, nonphysical, fourth dimension of reality.

**Henry Drummond:** There was only one Protestant on the Akron list who did not completely fit into some sort of liberal or modernist mold. Henry Drummond was closely associated with Dwight L. Moody and the world of nineteenth century Protestant revivalism, which meant that he was very much a part of old-fashioned conservative Protestantism. *The Greatest Thing in the World* was originally a talk given by Drummond in 1887, long before AA came along. But this particular work in fact spoke about human love (and God's love) in a way which would have delighted any Protestant liberal or modernist of the 1930's and 40's, so this was a case of the exception that proves the rule.

**New Thought: Emmet Fox and James Allen.** Two other figures on the Akron list — Emmet Fox and James Allen<sup>224</sup> — were representatives of New Thought, and were therefore over on the radical side of modern Protestantism: their ideas were linked with groups such as Unity Church, the Religious Science movement, and the Church of Divine Science. Their more recent heirs include the followers of *A Course in Miracles* (ACIM), Gerald Jampolsky, Marianne Williamson, Louise Hay, and so on. In terms of the fundamentalist-liberal controversy, both Fox and Allen very much rejected the dogmas of fundamentalism.

Fox was born in Ireland and came from a pious Roman Catholic family. He was educated by the Jesuits at Stamford Hill College in England, but after discovering his skills as a faith healer, he linked himself to the New Thought movement and the Church of Divine Science. His Catholic background still showed, in particular in the influence on him of the medieval spiritual tradition represented in figures like St. Denis (the author who wrote c. 500 A.D. under the name of Dionysius the Areopagite), John Scotus Eriugena and

Meister Eckhart, and by the way he used allegory and symbol as his principal tool for biblical interpretation.

Fox spoke lovingly of what he called the birth of the Wonder Child within our souls: “Bible symbolism has its own beautiful logic, and just as the soul is always spoken of as a woman, so this, the Spiritual Idea that is born to the soul, is described as a child. The conscious discovery by you that you have this Power within you, and your determination to make use of it, is the birth of the child.”<sup>225</sup> In this manner, each human being becomes an individualization of God, a divine consciousness “coming to birth” over and over again:

[Man’s] work is to express, in concrete, definite form, the abstract ideas with which God furnishes him .... [In doing thus each human being becomes] an individualized consciousness. God individualizes Himself in an infinite number of distinct focal points of consciousness, each one quite different; and therefore each one is a distinct way of knowing the universe, each a distinct experience .... If God did not individualize Himself, there would be only one experience; as it is, there are as many universes as there are individuals to form them through thinking.<sup>226</sup>

Fox denounced the fundamentalist conception of God even more vehemently than the liberal theologians of the mainline Protestant denominations:

Glimpsing one tiny corner of the universe, and that with only half-opened eyes, and working from an exclusively anthropocentric and egocentric point of view, men built up absurd and very horrible fables about a limited and man-like God who conducted his universe very much as a rather ignorant and barbarous prince might conduct the affairs of a

small Oriental kingdom. All sorts of human weaknesses, such as vanity, fickleness, and spite, were attributed to this being. Then a farfetched and very inconsistent legend was built up concerning original sin, vicarious blood atonement, infinite punishment for finite transgressions; and, in certain cases, an unutterably horrible doctrine of predestination to eternal torment, or eternal bliss, was added.<sup>227</sup>

Fox also accepted all of the major findings of the new historical-critical biblical research, such as (to give one example) the discovery that the Old Testament book of Isaiah actually contained the writings not only of the prophet Isaiah who lived in the eighth century B.C. (in chapters 1-39), but also the writings of other authors, including the major sixth century author whose name is unknown, but who is referred to by biblical scholars as Deutero-Isaiah (chapters 40-55).<sup>228</sup>

And beyond that, Fox also believed in reincarnation and many other ideas that would have horrified any fundamentalist who read his books. He said that death for example was the final separation of the etheric body from the physical body when the Silver Cord which linked them (a standard motif in discussions of out-of-body soul travel) was permanently broken, and the etheric body (the bearer of personal consciousness) went to live in a four-dimensional heaven. He believed that it was on rare occasions possible to communicate with the spirits of the dead, although he advised against it as being usually an escape mechanism for unhappy people who ought instead to be concentrating on their own spiritual development.<sup>229</sup>

***For atheists in the AA program: James Allen and his New Thought version of nontheistic Buddhist teaching.*** In his book *As a Man Thinketh*, originally published in 1902 or 1903, James Allen quoted from the great Buddhist text called the Dhammapada and explained the Buddhist understanding of karma. He also described

how to escape from the chains of bad karma — these being endless chains of events, which brought “bad luck” and catastrophe down on our heads over and over again, seemingly by accident, but in fact not. By putting this book on their reading list, the Akron AA group was telling alcoholics that, if we could learn to break these repeating chains, we would find ourselves no longer being driven into trying to escape into drugs and alcohol.

This was a work above all for the atheists in early AA, but in fact this kind of Buddhist nontheistic interpretation of A.A. spirituality could also be used quite effectively by people who sought God through a New Thought spiritual approach. Through enlightenment, we discovered the powerful negative effect of bad chains of karma in our lives. By learning how to replace this bad karma with good karma, we began to find true serenity and peace, and happy, satisfying relationships with other people.

The New Thought contingent in early AA believed in ideas that were often squarely opposed to good Roman Catholic doctrine, to an even greater extent than the mainline Protestant liberals (by which is meant people like the Congregationalists, Methodists, Northern Baptists, Episcopalians, some of the Presbyterians, and so on). Yet the followers of New Thought were just as committed to religious tolerance as the liberals, so Sister Ignatia’s idea of setting up a nonsectarian program for restoring alcoholics to physical, psychological, and basic spiritual health was feasible with them too.

***The only Catholic work on the Akron reading list: The Unchanging Friend.*** The only entry on that list that seems to have been Catholic was *The Unchanging Friend*, a series published by the Bruce Publishing Company. But unfortunately we know nothing about what it taught. Mel Barger says that “that company 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.”<sup>230</sup> But beyond that we can say nothing.

***No Oxford Group books on the 1942 Akron reading list:*** And on the other hand, it should be noted that not a single book on the Akron list was an Oxford Group book in the narrow sense. That is, there was no reference to works like A. J. Russell’s *For Sinners Only* or V. C. Kitchen’s *I Was a Pagan*. Similarly, even books which were too closely linked to the Oxford Group were studiously avoided, such as H. A. Walter’s *Soul-Surgery*, or Harold Begbie’s *Twice-Born Men* or *More Twice-Born Men*.

***Roman Catholics in AA did not begin to get substantial works written for them until 1947, when FATHER RALPH PFAU’S GOLDEN BOOKS began giving them and other AA’s contact with the rich treasures of traditional Catholic spirituality.***

The lack of major Roman Catholic representation in early AA literature was finally remedied when Father Ralph Pfau published the first of his fourteen Golden Books in 1947, a booklet entitled the *Spiritual Side*, under the pen name “Father John Doe.” This was followed the next year by the second of the Golden Books, with the significant title *Tolerance* — reemphasizing the principle of a nonsectarian AA — and then by a long series of other works. He quickly became one of the four most published AA authors writing for AA readers — and most importantly of all, his books were as widely read and admired among Protestants as among Catholics. Catholicism now provided one of the major interpretive themes of the new Alcoholics Anonymous movement.<sup>231</sup>

## CHAPTER 5

### **What Roman Catholics and Protestant Liberals Taught Each Other**

By the 1950's, Roman Catholics were playing a very noticeable role in Alcoholics Anonymous. Father Ralph Pfau in Indianapolis continued publishing his Golden Books (and other works as well), becoming in the process one of the four most published AA authors. In 1947, Bill Wilson had taken instruction in the Catholic faith from the Venerable Fulton J. Sheen, professor at the Catholic University of America and host of the nationally broadcast radio program, the Catholic Hour. And although Wilson did not end up converting, in 1952-53 he asked Father Ed Dowling, S.J., and Father John C. Ford, S.J., to help him write the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, the book which was second only to the Big Book in its importance to understanding AA teaching.

Nevertheless, in the early 1940's when Roman Catholics first began coming into AA in large numbers, it has been noted that the literature of the new movement was dominated by liberal Protestant and New Thought works. So it must be asked once again, why Catholics were not bothered by this kind of Protestantism but were offended by Oxford Group ideas and involvement.

***Why did Catholics object to the Oxford Group?*** We must also again prefix these remarks with a statement of all the valuable things which the early AA movement learned from the Oxford Group in

1935. By its emphasis on “life changing,” the Oxford Group had refocused twentieth-century spirituality on the original emphasis of the eighteenth-century evangelical revival: divine grace could change human character itself, and begin a real healing of the vices which immersed fallen men and women in the entire destructive repertoire of human sinfulness. And this in turn enabled AA to link itself back to the great Catholic tradition, from St. Augustine to St. Thomas Aquinas to St. Teresa of Avila, of the *cura animarum*, the healing of human souls by the power of God’s grace. The Oxford Group also provided the initial starting point for many of AA’s twelve steps, including the need to admit our sins to another human being, and the necessity of making amends.

But to understand what happened in 1939–1940, we also need to understand the degree to which many people held a very negative perception of the Oxford Group. Even a defender of the group like Victor C. Kitchen (author of the important Oxford Group book *I Was a Pagan*) admitted that his first visit to one of the group’s house parties was motivated by the belief, based on reading popular reports, that he was going to see a circus sideshow of religious fanatics:

Based on things he had read in the newspapers, Kitchen had gathered the impression that “Buchmanism” was a kind of fanatical cult with bizarre practices. He assumed he was going to see something very exotic, with flickering torches in a dimly-lit room with tiger skin rugs on the floor. In an orgy of confession, men and women were going to stand up in mixed company and give lurid accounts of all the sins they had committed, including all the gross details of their most perverted sexual escapades. These emaciated true believers, hollow eyes gleaming with blind fanaticism, would also sit



around and engage in automatic writing rituals which seemed to be a mixture partly of the kind of seances which mediums held when they were trying to talk to the spirits of the dead, and partly of what young people did at parties when they played with a Ouija Board and allowed the pointer to move around the letters of the alphabet written on the sides of the playing board in an attempt to receive messages from some other spirit world. Under the control of Frank Buchman and the other cult leaders, the converts would blindly do whatever these “divine commands” ordered, immediately and without question. The Oxford Group was portrayed as a fanatical and authoritarian cult, where the members gave up all their individualism and freedom. Members were not allowed to ask questions and explore issues rationally, but simply had to obey the cult leaders and let the group rule their lives.<sup>232</sup>

The Oxford Group stressed the importance of what they called the Four Absolutes: Absolute Honesty, Absolute Unselfishness, Absolute Love, and Absolute Purity. There was a fanaticism to this: their zeal for these principles seemed to violate the warning from the Catholic tradition, going all the way back to St. Augustine, that after Adam and Eve’s fall, ordinary human beings could (with the aid of God’s grace) remain free of mortal sin in this life, but that no human beings (other than Jesus and Mary) could ever be free of venial sins.

And to the Oxford Group, Absolute Purity referred to sexual sins, particularly (in their eyes) homosexuality, transvestite and transgender behavior, and masturbation. A 1954 Oxford Group/Moral Re-Armament book describes how they believed that homosexuals could be identified:<sup>233</sup>

There are many who wear suede shoes who are not homosexual, but in Europe and America the majority of

homosexuals do. They favor green as a color in clothes and decorations. Men are given to an excessive display and use of the handkerchief. They tend to let the hair grow long, use scent and are frequently affected in speech, mincing in gait and feminine in mannerisms. They are often very gifted in the arts. They tend to exhibitionism. They can be cruel and vindictive, for sadism usually has a homosexual root. They are often given to moods .... There is an unnecessary touching of hands, arms and shoulders. In the homosexual the elbow grip is a well-known sign.

The preoccupation with homosexuality went back in Buchman's life even to the period before he founded the Oxford Group, when he was a young unmarried man in his thirties (he never did marry) spending his time working continuously with younger men and constantly preaching to them about the evils of that kind of sexual behavior. It should be said that the problem raised in 1939-1940 was not that the Oxford Group condemned homosexuality and masturbation (the Roman Catholic Church of that era preached against both of these too), but that attitudes of that time regarded homosexuality and cross dressing in particular as things so shameful that they should not even be mentioned in polite society, but instead swept under the carpet and denied. Buchman himself would corner young men whom he barely knew and start accusing them of homosexuality or masturbation.

The tipping point, however, where a good deal of public opinion turned completely against the Oxford Group, came in an entirely different area, when Frank Buchman was quoted as saying, in an interview in the New York *World-Telegram* on 25 August 1936: "I thank heaven for a man like Adolf Hitler, who built a front line of defense against the anti-Christ of Communism." And Frank

Buchman did in fact attend the 1935 Nazi rally in Nuremburg, to which he was invited by one of Heinrich Himmler's friends, and was Himmler's guest at the Berlin Olympics in August 1936. Buchman's defenders have, ever since, argued that the apparently pro-Hitler quotation was taken out of context, and that he had visited the Nazis to see if he could convert them to Oxford-Group-style Christianity and avert the war that was threatening all of Europe. But the damage was already done in American public opinion, and by the end of 1939—when it was becoming increasingly apparent that the U.S. was in great danger of being dragged into the war which Hitler had begun with his invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939 — more and more Americans (including American Catholics) were becoming unwilling to support the Oxford Group in any way.

***The American Catholic position: cooperation with members of other religions on nonsectarian projects.*** The American Catholic Church was not going to allow good Roman Catholics to be drawn into what they (along with many other Americans) regarded as the Oxford Group's cult-like and fanatical beliefs and practices.

But the Church seems for the most part to have been willing to support the vision of a *nonsectarian* alcoholic recovery program, in the same way that American Catholics regularly participated in numerous nonsectarian charitable and socially useful public programs, working alongside Protestants, Jews, and others for the greater good of the whole community.

It was the old Catholic principle, seen in St. Thomas Aquinas and many other great Catholic teachers, which held that there were some beliefs which were matters of revealed truth only (including such things as Catholic dogmas about the divinity of Christ, original sin, the substitutionary atonement, the real presence of the body and blood in the eucharist, the sacraments as means of grace, and so on) which many non-Catholics might not necessarily share. But there

were also matters of natural theology and natural morality in which men and women of good will might cooperate.

Theologically, for example, good Catholics believed that the fact of God's existence could be demonstrated logically. So one did not need to accept the revealed truths of the Catholic faith in order to believe in God's existence. In the area of natural morality and natural law ethics, it was clear to all civilized and rational human beings that gross violations of the seven deadly sins, such as murder, lying, and stealing, could be shown to result in irrational and ultimately self-destructive behavior. Or in other words, good Catholics could participate in a tolerant and nonsectarian variety of AA in the same way in which they could run for public office, vote in elections, and handle coins marked "In God We Trust" in cities and states where the civil government remained tolerant and nonsectarian, even if Roman Catholicism was a minority religion in that city or state.

Fundamentalist Protestants eventually began to join AA, and they were accepted and tolerated as long as they followed the ground rules which had already been laid out: no preaching their own particular religious dogmas in AA meetings, no attempt to convert other AA members to their specific beliefs, and tolerance for all.

No one in fact ended up losing. It was found that the majority of alcoholics from Protestant fundamentalist backgrounds (as well as men and women from the socio-economic-educational class from which the fundamentalist denominations drew most of their members) would eventually start going to church, once they had been sober for two or three years. Likewise, Roman Catholic priests and nuns who joined AA continued serving the Catholic Church faithfully, and the majority of Roman Catholic laypeople who got sober in AA became able to attend Catholic Church services once again with joy and comfort, and without being overwhelmed any

more by the old feelings of guilt and despair which they often felt while attending mass in the days before they joined AA and worked the twelve steps.

There were an extraordinary number of cases where people who had fallen into atheism had their belief in God restored by working the twelve steps, and no known case of a man or woman alcoholic who came to the program as a believer, and ended up being turned into an atheist by AA!

***The liberal Protestant contribution to AA:*** In spite of what appeared to be almost diametrically opposed theological beliefs to traditional Catholicism on so many issues, the liberal Protestants were able in fact to give something very important to the Roman Catholics in the Alcoholics Anonymous movement. There were many Catholic alcoholics who had violated some of the Church's moral rules when they were still drinking, in ways which left them too frightened to come back to God and the Church. This is a story which one heard from recovering Catholic alcoholics over and over again in AA meetings. Believing that God had totally and irreparably condemned them to eternal hell, they fell into despair and sinned all the more, believing that they were doomed anyway. All they could see was the implacable figure of Christ on his Judgment Seat, with a handful of souls being lifted by angels up to heaven, but with most of the poor people in that awful scene being dragged down into the flames of hell by loathsome demons. Many of them could not even enter a Catholic Church without feeling their insides torn apart by the fear that the priest — if he obtained any knowledge of what they had done — would drive them out with scolding, revulsion, and total condemnation.

A God who refused to forgive anybody was certainly not part of any good Catholic teaching. Quite the contrary, and any good priest would respond to a returning alcoholic by acting as the agent of

God's forgiveness and healing love. But unless the priest was an alcoholic himself, even the kindest and gentlest Catholic priest in the world was not going to be able to get close enough to these frightened fallen-Catholic alcoholics to give them that message.

The liberal Protestants of the early twentieth century had worked out some extremely effective ways of reaching out to people who were frightened to death of God — which in reality meant every human soul in this fallen world, because God is the scariest thing in the universe — and persuading them to take a chance on trusting God just enough to start learning, bit by bit, that God's only desire was to heal them, and wipe away their tears, and slowly teach them how to feel joy and smile once again. They had worked these techniques out in the process of dealing with their own sometimes terrifying childhood fears, which had been produced by the hell-fire-and-damnation sermons of some of the nineteenth century frontier revivalists and tent meeting preachers. So liberal Protestant laypeople in AA were able on many occasions to act as surrogates for the good Catholic priest, reaching out with hands of love to fearful Catholic alcoholics, and encouraging them to return to the Church and her priests and sacraments, and the great spiritual teachings of the holy saints.

And a paralyzing fear of God was certainly not a Catholic problem alone. Unfortunately, the United States and Canada were filled with too many churches which taught a condemning God to their laypeople, and a theology preoccupied with questions of “who gets punished?” and “how can I avoid being punished?”

And even more importantly, it must be noted once again that, no matter how hard we work to try to present comforting images such as depictions of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, or Jesus holding the little children in his arms, or St. Thérèse of Lisieux (the Little Flower) reaching out to us in love, the real God is still an inherently

frightening reality, and this truth applies to all religions across the board. Rudolf Otto, one of the major Protestant liberal theologians of the early twentieth century, explained this especially clearly in his formative book, *The Idea of the Holy*. God is the Wholly Other, the divine abyss lying behind the universe's surface illusion of understandability. God looms before us as the *mysterium tremendum*, the mystery beyond all ordinary knowing, which fills our hearts with awe, dread, and trembling.<sup>234</sup> But the Protestant liberal tradition, in works like *The Upper Room* and *Twenty-Four Hours a Day*, knew how to calm the frightened soul, and bring people gently into the sacred presence, where the divine grace could begin to fully exercise its miraculous healing powers.

***The Catholic contribution to AA:*** The Catholics had what may have been an even more important contribution to make to AA, and to all the Protestants in that program. In the early days of the AA program, we read about alcoholics going through all of the steps (as they were understood then) in three or four hours. In the Big Book itself (as we see on page 65) the fourth step inventory was almost naively simple. The man who wrote the inventory was having an affair on his wife, and padding his expense account at work. He was resentful because another man at work, Mr. Brown, was not only angling for his job, but had also told his wife about the other woman.

This was not a truly detailed moral inventory at all, compared to traditional Catholic self-analysis in terms of the seven deadly sins (Pride, Anger, Envy, Greed, Lust, Gluttony, and Acedia<sup>235</sup>), or the painful self-searching which we saw in St. Augustine's *Confessions*, or the requirements made on us human beings in the St. Francis Prayer or First Corinthians 13:4–7, or the methodology used for the discernment of spirits in the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius Loyola, where we learned how to become more and more aware of the pattern of consolations and desolations which colored our

deepest inner moods and feelings. The best Catholic spiritual teaching — thinking of the writings of spiritual guides like St. Francis de Sales, St. Teresa of Avila, and St. Thérèse of Lisieux — had always involved a detailed look at the inner workings of our own hearts and the way our inner spiritual state affected every facet of the way we acted and spoke in our everyday lives in the outer, material world.

When Roman Catholics began coming into the program in large numbers in 1939-40, many of them had already received some training in that more profound kind of soul-searching. They combined forces with that branch of early Alcoholics Anonymous which stressed the psychological side of AA, to turn the working of the fourth through seventh steps into an impressively deep *psychotherapeia* — the divine process for the healing (*therapeia*) of the soul (*psychê*).

This strengthened the Alcoholics Anonymous program in extraordinary fashion. A look at early membership figures will make this clear. In the first four years (with almost no Catholic membership) AA membership grew 20 times larger. But during the next ten years (after the Catholics came in) membership grew over 750 times larger.<sup>236</sup>

Time Span — Total Members

1935 — 5 members

1935-1939 — 100 members

1939-1949 — 75,625 members

1949-1959 — 151,606 members

1959-1969 — 297,077 members

Now some of this more rapid growth was probably due to the publication of the Big Book. But surely no one would try to argue



that the flood of Catholics who began coming into AA in 1939–40, or the new deliberately nonsectarian ground rules, had a negative effect on AA membership growth. And probably because of the quiet, unconscious incorporation into AA practice during these years of the traditional Catholic techniques of prayer, meditation, and moral inventory used for fostering lifelong spiritual growth, the average number of years of continuous sobriety among AA members has been steadily rising. We had a figure of 4 years average sobriety in 1977, for example, which more than doubled by 2007 to 8.1 years.

The history of Roman Catholics in early AA, and the story of the great AA teachers and leaders whom the Catholic Church contributed to the movement — Sister Ignatia, Fr. Ed Dowling, Fr. Ralph Pfau, Fr. John C. Ford, Fr. Joseph Martin, Dr. Austin Ripley, and Dr. Ernest Kurtz, to name some of the most famous — is an impressive tale of God’s grace at work in the world, and the all-conquering power of real love, forgiveness, tolerance, and cooperation. The success of AA teaches the lesson that human beings do not need to burn one another at the stake anymore, or fly airliners into skyscrapers in insane acts of murder and martyrdom, or butcher one another in hideous religious wars. We are seeing the development, before our very eyes, of a vision of the world that works. How could the good God, and the holy fathers and mothers of the church, not be delighted by the countless flowers of grace which AA has sprinkled all about the earth?

## NOTES

1. NOTES TO PART I. FATHER RALPH PFAU: Walker was the author of *Twenty-Four Hours a Day* (1948), and Webster wrote *The Little Red Book* (1946). All four of the major early A.A. authors died within six years of one another — Richmond Walker in 1965, Ralph Pfau in 1967, and Bill Wilson and Ed Webster in 1971 — producing a major change of era by the end. Sister Ignatia also died during this same period, in 1966.

2. The Old Cathedral in Vincennes, St. Bernard's in Gibson County in extreme southern Indiana, and St. Anne's in Indianapolis. See Ralph Pfau (Father John Doe) and Al Hirshberg, *Prodigal Shepherd* (Indianapolis, Indiana: SMT Guild, orig. pub. 1958; references in my book are to the edit. pub. after Pfau's death in 1967), pp. 83-89, 141-151, 161 ff.

3. From the book *Alcoholism: A Source Book for the Priest* (National Clergy Council on Alcoholism, 1960), as cited in Monsignor William J. Clausen, "Historical Perspective of Father Ralph Pfau and the NCCA," in the NCCA Blue Book Archives, adapted from a talk given by Msgr. Clausen at the fiftieth anniversary celebration of the NCCA in 1999.

4. Fr. John C. Ford, S.J., in a telephone conversation with Mary Darrah in 1985, spoke of his own "alcoholism and recovery from it some forty years earlier under the care of Dr. William Silkworth at New York's Towns Hospital." This was the first time he revealed publicly that he was an alcoholic himself; it had been a closely guarded secret for many years. See Mary C. Darrah, *Sister Ignatia: Angel of Alcoholics Anonymous* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1992), ix. The figure of forty years has to be approximate, because Fr. Ford was in Italy teaching at the Gregorian University from 1945 to 1946. In an interview in 1984, Fr. Ford said that an A.A. member took him to several A.A. meetings in 1947. He seemed to be describing that as his first contact with regular A.A. meetings. This statement was made in an interview with David A. Works at Campion Center (Weston, MA), June 26, 1984, pp. 1-2 (transcript available at the archives of The North Conway Institute), as cited in Oliver J. Morgan,

“‘Chemical Comforting’ and the Theology of John C. Ford, SJ: Classic Answers to a Contemporary Problem,” *Journal of Ministry in Addiction & Recovery*, Vol. 6(1) 1999: 29-66, see note 13. Ernest Kurtz, in a note to Glenn F. Chesnut, 20 January 2009, warns us however that Ford’s involvement in A.A. was different in kind from Ralph Pfau’s, so that a simple-minded attempt to determine “which one came into A.A. first” does not necessarily do justice to either man’s important contribution to the A.A. movement: “Ford was an alcoholic and joined A.A. early. But because of his position as America’s most respected expert in moral theology, he feared that he would lose credibility if his disease or A.A. membership became known .... So he took on quite a bit of anonymous service work. For example, Ford was one of those involved in the hot line that ‘those concerned about their use of alcohol’ were encouraged to call. But on chronology, I am not sure. John was already showing signs of weakening memory for details when I interviewed him in 1977.”

5. Pfau, *Prodigal Shepherd* 248.

6. Originally published in Indianapolis, Indiana, by the SMT Guild, they are now kept in print by Hazelden in Center City, Minnesota.

7. Ralph Pfau (Father John Doe), *Sobriety and Beyond* (Center City, Minnesota: Hazelden, 1955) and *Sobriety Without End* (Center City, Minnesota: Hazelden, 1957).

8. Pfau, *Prodigal Shepherd*. Father Ralph S. Pfau and Al Hirshberg, “A Priest’s Own Story,” *Look*, Vol. 22, No. 5 (March 4, 1958): 84-97; and “Out of the Shadows,” *Look*, Vol. 22, No. 6 (March 18, 1958): 85-98.

9. *Look*’s circulation reached 3.7 million in 1954 (see “Shake-up at Look,” *Time*, January 11, 1954) and peaked at 7.75 million in 1969. As a side note, after *Look* magazine finally closed in 1971, their five million item photograph collection was eventually donated to the Library of Congress. There are presumably a number of excellent photographs of Fr. Ralph in that collection, including not only the originals of the ones which were published in those two *Look* magazine articles, but also others which

were not used. There are other excellent photos of him at various ages in the archives of the Archdiocesan headquarters at Indianapolis, Indiana.

10. Ralph Pfau, *Contact with God* (Indianapolis, Indiana: SMT Guild, 1959), 93 pages long, book cover is blue velvet. A fairly rare book today — unlike his other works, no longer in print.

11. Originally issued through SMT Guild in Indianapolis as 33 rpm long playing records, the complete set of thirty recordings is now available from Hazelden in Center City, Minnesota, as tape cassettes.

12. AAHistoryLovers at <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/AAHistoryLovers/info> see Messages No. 5575, 5576, 5584, and 5585 (as of Aug. 23, 2016).

13. Indianapolis Archdiocesan Archives; Pfau, *Prodigal Shepherd* 195.

14. Indianapolis Archdiocesan Archives. Ralph's first name was given in Latinized form as "Rafael" in the old documents in the archives, which were still kept in Latin during that period.

15. Telephone conversation with Ralph's niece and executor Pat Worrell (daughter of Ralph's brother George Edwin "Ed" Pfau) on 27 February 2002. Also from notes made the next day when Pat Worrell allowed herself to be interviewed by archivist Frank Nyikos and myself at a restaurant in Indianapolis, on 28 February 2002. Also see Pfau, *Prodigal Shepherd* 17 and 51.

16. Pfau, *Prodigal Shepherd* 180. Diocese of Nashville: Bishop's Page at <http://www.dioceseofnashville.com/bishop2-former.htm> (as of 28 Jan 09). Catholic Hierarchy at <http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/bishop/bsmitha.html> (as of 28 Jan 2009). Clergy from the Archdiocese of Indianapolis who have become bishops elsewhere, from the Archdiocesan web page at <http://www.archindy.org/175TH/bishops-other.html> (as of 28 Jan 2009).

17. Pfau, *Prodigal Shepherd* 17 and 24.

18. Worrell 27 February 2002; Pfau, *Prodigal Shepherd* 247-248.

19. Worrell 27 February 2002; Worrell 28 February 2002.

20. Pfau, *Prodigal Shepherd* 13-15.

21. Ibid. 30 and 33-34.

22. Ibid. 36, 39-40, 42, 44-45, 46-49, and 96.

23. Such as, for example, parts of the book by Joseph W. Ciarrocchi, *The Doubting Disease: Help for Scrupulosity and Religious Compulsions* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1995).

24. Carol E. Watkins, MD, “Scrupulosity: Religious Obsessions and Compulsions” <http://www.baltimorepsych.com/scrup.htm> (as of May 28, 2016). Laurie Krauth, MA, “Scrupulosity: Blackmailed by OCD in the name of God” <http://beyondocd.org/expert-perspectives/articles/scrupulosity-blackmailed-by-ocd-in-the-name-of-god> (as of May 28, 2016). Thomas M. Santa, CSSR, “Scrupulosity And How To Overcome It,” available online (as of May 28, 2016) at <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=3739> and also at <http://www.catholic.com/magazine/articles/thoughts-that-will-not-go-away>.

25. Pfau, *Prodigal Shepherd* 28.

26. Ernest Kurtz, *Shame & Guilt*, second edition, revised and updated, Hindsfoot Foundation Series on Treatment and Recovery (New York: iUniverse, 2007). Ernest Kurtz and Katherine Ketcham, *The Spirituality of Imperfection: Modern Wisdom from Classic Stories* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992).

27. Pfau, *Prodigal Shepherd* 51, 54, 57-59, and 63-65.

28. Ibid. 70-72, 76-78.

29. *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 4th ed. (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 2001; orig. pub. 1939), 64. “Resentment is the ‘number one’ offender. It destroys more alcoholics than anything else.” Resentment and fear are the central focus of the fourth step, the all-important self-inventory upon which the remaining steps build.

30. Pfau, *Prodigal Shepherd* 80-97, 109-111, 125, 141-142, 149-151, 159, 161-178, and 179-180.

31. Ruth Hock of the New York A.A. office assembled a list of the groups known to New York at that time (there were twenty-seven of them) and published it in A.A. Bulletin #1 (14 November 1940), a copy of which was posted on September 4, 2006 by Bill Lash in AAHistoryLovers Message No. 3673, at <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/aahistorylovers/conversations/messages/3673> (available at that address as of May 28, 2016).

32. Dohr's niece Laura later wrote a detailed account. See Neil S. (Fishers, Indiana), "History of Indianapolis AA," <http://hindsfoot.org/nindy2.html> (posted on May 25, 2000). See also Glenn F. Chesnut, "Doherty Sheerin and the Founding of A.A. in Indianapolis," <http://hindsfoot.org/nIndy1.html> (posted on 11 May 2005).

33. See also Glenn F. Chesnut, *Changed by Grace: V. C. Kitchen, the Oxford Group, and A.A.*, Hindsfoot Foundation Series on Spirituality and Theology (New York: iUniverse, September 2006). Chesnut's notes and observations, pp. 2-29 at the beginning of Philip Leon, *The Philosophy of Courage or the Oxford Group Way*, orig. pub. 1939 by Oxford University Press, with a new foreword by Glenn F. Chesnut, in the electronic edition published by [stepstudy.org](http://stepstudy.org), September 2008, available at <http://stepstudy.files.wordpress.com/2008/09/philosophyofcourage.pdf> (as of May 28, 2016).

34. Quoted from correspondence from Mitchell K. to Glenn F. Chesnut, March 28, 2009. See also Mitchell K., *How It Worked: The Story of Clarence H. Snyder and the Early Days of Alcoholics Anonymous in Cleveland, Ohio* (Washingtonville, New York: AA Big Book Study Group, 1999), chapt. 4.3, pp. 135-140. Compare *Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers: A Biography, with Recollections of Early A.A. in the Midwest* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1980) 162-164. Dick B. has published a number of books attempting to show that early A.A. was essentially a Protestant Fundamentalist sect, see for example Dick B.

(Kihei, Maui, Hawaii), *The Akron Genesis of Alcoholics Anonymous*, 2nd ed. (Kihei, Maui, Hawaii: Paradise Research Publications, 1998; orig. pub. Seattle, Washington: Glen Abbey Books, 1992). I do not know of any other good A.A. historians who would accept Dick B.'s theories — the Protestants in early A.A. were liberals like Harry Emerson Fosdick and the Methodist editors of *The Upper Room*, Anglo-Catholic Episcopalians, Unitarians like Richmond Walker, admirers of New Thought authors like Emmet Fox and James Allen, Swedenborgians, Spiritualists, and so on — not a single Fundamentalist in the lot, that I have ever been able to discern.

35. Pfau, *Prodigal Shepherd* 184-195. In fact, Ralph had actually stopped drinking three or four weeks earlier, when he began reading the A.A. Big Book, see page 191.

36. These two saints stick out because they are the only ones whose names were mentioned with any great prominence or frequency in the Golden Books. St. Thérèse was referred to especially often — usually as “St. Teresa,” but context makes it clear that it was the nineteenth-century Carmelite from Lisieux who was meant, rather than the earlier sixteenth-century Carmelite, St. Teresa of Ávila.

37. See for example Robert F. Evans, *Pelagius: Inquiries and Reappraisals* (New York: Seabury, 1968).

38. One can find excellent introductions to the history and the issues in Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (London: Faber & Faber, 1967) and J. Patout Burns, S.J., *The Development of Augustine's Doctrine of Operative Grace* (Paris: Etudes Augustiennes, 1980). See also Glenn F. Chesnut, “The Pattern of the Past: Augustine's Debate with Eusebius and Sallust,” in John Deschner, Leroy T. Howe, and Klaus Penzel (eds.), *Our Common History as Christians: Essays in Honor of Albert C. Outler* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 69-95. Also see Glenn F. Chesnut, “Eusebius, Augustine, Orosius, and the Later Patristic and Medieval Christian Histories,” in Harold W. Attridge and Gohei Hata (eds.), *Eusebius, Christianity, and Judaism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), pp. 687–713. Published simultaneously in

Japanese by Yamamoto Shoten Publishing House, Tokyo. Also see the material on Augustine in Glenn F. Chesnut, *The First Christian Histories: Eusebius, Socrates, Sozomen, Theodoret, and Evagrius*, 2nd ed., rev. and enlarged (Macon GA: Mercer University Press, 1986; orig. pub. in Paris by Éditions Beauchesne, 1977).

39. Ralph Pfau (Father John Doe), *The Golden Book of Resentments* (Indianapolis: SMT Guild, 1955), pp. 41–55, “The Myth of Perfection.”

40. He could have given numerous other quotations from traditional Catholic literature and doctrinal statements. St. Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologica* says that in this world and this life, human beings can be perfect in the sense of not committing mortal sin, but cannot be perfect at the level of venial sins, which all human beings commit. The Council of Vienne in 1311 declared that the proposition “that man in this present life can acquire so great and such a degree of perfection that he will be rendered inwardly sinless, and that he will not be able to advance farther in grace” was to be condemned as a heresy (Denziger §471).

41. Glenn F. Chesnut, *The Higher Power of the Twelve-Step Program: For Believers & Non-Believers*, Hindsfoot Foundation Series on Spirituality and Theology (San Jose: Authors Choice/iUniverse, 2001), Chapter V. “Two Classical Authors of A.A. Spirituality,” Section 2. “The Myth of Perfection: Father John Doe’s Golden Books,” pp. 129-133.

42. Compare 1 John 1:8, 2:4, 4:20 and Romans 3:23.

43. Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:13, and Luke 4:1-13; Matthew 26:36-46, Mark 14:32-42, and Luke 22:41-46; see also Hebrews 2:18 “For because he himself has suffered and been tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted.”

44. Edward Dowling, S.J., “Catholic Asceticism and the Twelve Steps,” in the *Blue Book* (1953), published annually by the National Clergy Conference on Alcoholism (today called the National Catholic Council on Alcoholism and Related Drug Problems). The article can be read on-line at AAHistoryLovers Message no. 346, at



<https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/AAHistoryLovers/conversations/topics/346> (as of Aug. 17, 2016); reprinted in AAHistoryLovers Message no. 1322, September 13, 2001, at <http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/AAHistoryLovers/message/1322> (as of Aug. 17, 2016).

45. Ted Le Berthon, “The Faith and Alcoholics Anonymous,” *Catholic Mind* 53 (January 1955): 19-28, available online at [http://silkworth.net/religion\\_clergy/01040.html](http://silkworth.net/religion_clergy/01040.html) (as of May 29, 2016).

46. Contrary to what Fr. Ralph was arguing, it should be noted that *Twenty-Four Hours a Day*, the great spiritual masterpiece by A.A.’s second most published author, Richmond Walker, clearly brought readers down the Illuminative Way and the Unitive Way, leading them into the divine Silence (*Sigê*), and the mystical Quiet (*Hêsychia*) of the Eastern Orthodox contemplative tradition. See Richmond Walker, *Twenty-Four Hours a Day*, compiled by a Member of the Group at Daytona Beach, Fla., rev. ed. (Center City, Minnesota: Hazelden, 1975; orig. pub. 1948).

47. Conversation with Mel Barger (Toledo, Ohio) when he came to speak at the Michiana Conference in South Bend, Indiana, on September 15, 2007. In AAHistoryLovers Message 2996, Mel Barger says “Fr. Pfau .... didn’t seem to think much of Bill W ... and told me (in 1953) that Bill’s spiritual experience in Towns Hospital was not from grace, as grace can come only through the Church,” see <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/AAHistoryLovers/conversations/messages/2996> (as of May 29, 2016). Bill W. described this vision of light in *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age: A Brief History of A.A.* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1957), 63.

48. Ralph Pfau (Father John Doe), *The Golden Book of Sanctity* (Indianapolis: SMT Guild, 1964), 35.

49. *Ibid.* 36.

50. Ralph Pfau (Father John Doe), *The Golden Book of Decisions* (Center City, Minnesota: Hazelden, 1957).

51. The book that is presently used as the major study work in Recovery, Inc. is Abraham Low, *Mental Health Through Will-Training: A System of Self-Help in Psychotherapy as Practiced by Recovery, Inc.* (Boston: Christopher Publishing House, orig. pub. 1950). The earlier works were Abraham A. Low, *The Technique of Self-Help in Psychiatric Aftercare* (Chicago: Recovery, Inc., 1943), and Abraham Low, *Lectures to Relatives of Former Patients* (Chicago: Recovery, Inc., 1943). For the first work — *Mental Health through Will-Training* — the text I have worked from was the second edition, published by Christopher Publishing House in 1952.

52. Ralph Pfau, *The Golden Book of Sanity* (Indianapolis: SMT Guild, 1963), 12 and 47n.

53. Edward Dowling, S.J., in “Catholic Asceticism and the Twelve Steps,” gave high praise to Abraham Low’s approach. If I may quote Dowling’s words in that article: “*The Saturday Evening Post*, December 6, 1952, wrote up Recovery Inc., and showed how it approached neuroses and psychoses in much of the amateur group way that A.A. approaches the alcoholic neurosis. Its founder, Doctor Abraham A. Low, rejects psychoanalysis as philosophically false and practically ineffective. He writes: ‘Life is not driven by instincts but is guided by the will.’ Sanity, rather than sobriety, is the aim of the A.A. second step. Psychiatric literature echoes A.A.’s statement that alcoholism is a form of insanity. Yet, in treating this insanity, we know the success of the approach which is amateur and group, moral and spiritual. We remember the last speech of Dr. Bob, co-founder of A.A. Dying of cancer, he left his mental legacy: ‘Don’t louse it up with psychiatry.’”

54. Linda Farris Kurtz, DPA, *Self-Help and Support Groups: A Handbook for Practitioners*, Sage Sourcebook for the Human Services, Vol. 34 (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1997); Linda Farris Kurtz, DPA, and Adrienne Chambon, PhD., “Comparison of Self-Help Groups for Mental Health,” *Health and Social Work* 12 (1987): 275-283.

55. Ralph Pfau (Father John Doe), *The Golden Book of Sanctity* (Indianapolis: SMT Guild, 1964), 12-13. It should be noted that this wordplay unfortunately does not work on the original Greek of the New Testament, where *hagios* means a holy man or saint and *hagiasmos* means sanctification, because Greek does not have a word from this root which means to give something one's approval or sanction. There are parallels here in Fr. Ralph's teaching to the kind of doctrine which Luther and Calvin drew from St. Augustine and the New Testament, but Ralph was a Catholic, and for him God's approval came not from merely holding a passive attitude of faith in God's love and forgiveness, but from *actually attempting to perform concrete actions* which one tried to carry out to the best of one's ability. Ralph's position would have been rejected by Luther and Calvin as "works righteousness." Episcopalians and Methodists on the other hand (like the Southern Methodists who published *The Upper Room*, a major influence on the Big Book and early A.A.) would have agreed with Ralph that "faith without works was dead," and the Methodists in particular (see the repeated statements of this principle in John Wesley's *Standard Sermons*) held the synergistic doctrine that people who did not respond to a gift of God's grace by trying to put it into action to the best of their ability, would not receive the subsequent gifts of grace which they would otherwise have been sent.

56. Pfau, *The Golden Book of Sanctity*, 12.

57. *Ibid.*, 30-31.

58. *Ibid.*, 42-43. "Going on to perfection" was the Methodist technical phrase used to describe the dynamic process of continual spiritual growth which was taught in the early A.A. meditational book called *The Upper Room*.

59. See for example Margaret Dorgan, "Thérèse of Lisieux and the Discalced Carmelite Tradition," *The Way*, Supplement, Summer 1997 (Heythrop College, London), 28-37; available online at [http://static1.1.sqspcdn.com/static/f/143555/1002326/1188433983847/The\\_reseandCarmelitetraditiondorgan.pdf?token=203dBbK4XallqwpPX5Yplnk](http://static1.1.sqspcdn.com/static/f/143555/1002326/1188433983847/The_reseandCarmelitetraditiondorgan.pdf?token=203dBbK4XallqwpPX5Yplnk)

Q17g%3D (as of May 30, 2016). Mary Frohlich, RSCJ, “Desolation And Doctrine in Thérèse of Lisieux and in Postmodern Culture,” *Theological Studies*, June 2000, Vol. 61, Issue 2; available online at <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/DESOLATION+AND+DOCTRINE+IN+THERESE+OF+LISIEUX.-a063185311> (as of May 30, 2016).

60. Vilma Seelaus, OCD, “Therese: Spirituality of Imperfection,” *Spiritual Life*, Winter 1998 (quarterly journal published by the Discalced Carmelite Friars at the Carmelite Monastery in Washington, D.C.), available online at <http://carmelitesofeldridge.org/vilma5.html> (as of May 30, 2016).

61. Ernest Kurtz and Katherine Ketcham, *The Spirituality of Imperfection*. Ernest Kurtz, *Shame & Guilt*, 2nd rev. ed.

62. St. Thérèse of Lisieux, *The Story of a Soul (L'Histoire d'une Âme)*, from *Soeur Thérèse of Lisieux*, ed. and trans. Thomas N. Taylor (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1912), 1.2.

63. *Ibid.*, 11.158.

64. *Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers: A Biography, with Recollections of Early A.A. in the Midwest* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1980), 338.

65. Pfau, *Golden Book of Sanctity*, 11-12.

66. As they once said on their webpage — <http://www.nccatoday.org/> (back in March 2009) — “Fr. Ralph Pfau (1904 - 1967) was the founder of the NCCA. Through his dedication and commitment, many Catholic priests, religious and laypersons found recovery and were restored to the faith family, leading productive and hopeful lives. Ralph Pfau was the first Catholic priest to recover from Alcoholism through AA.” For a more detailed account, see Monsignor William J. Clausen, “Historical Perspective of Father Ralph Pfau and the NCCA,” adapted from his talk at the 50th anniversary celebration of the NCCA in 1999, available online at <http://venerablematttalbotresourcecenter.blogspot.com/2008/02/historical-perspective-of-father-ralph.html> (as of May 30, 2016).

67. Clausen, “Historical Perspective of Father Ralph Pfau and the NCCA,” quoting from Ralph S. Pfau et al., *Alcoholism: A Source Book for the Priest: An Anthology* (Indianapolis: National Clergy Conference on Alcoholism, 1960). Reprint: Lake Orion, Michigan: National Catholic Council on Alcoholism and Related Drug Problems (NCCA), 1998.

68. Darrah, *Sister Ignatia*, 196-197 and 286 n 17, based on a telephone interview with the Rev. Raymond Atkins, Tiffin, Ohio, Apr. 1, 1986.

69. As quoted in Darrah, *Sister Ignatia*, 197.

70. Clausen, “Historical Perspective of Father Ralph Pfau and the NCCA.” The name of the group underwent several changes: The phrase “and Related Drug Problems” was added to the NCCA name in 1974, and “Clergy” was changed to “Catholic” in 1988, to indicate that the leadership of the group had long been including women religious and Catholic lay people. Pat Worrell (28 February 2002) said that the 1988 name change was the result of the NCCA receiving a large bequest. Worrell (a Catholic laywoman) was herself made a committee member in 1972 (a post she filled for twelve years), and Sister Therese Golden, OP, was made a member of the board in 1974.

71. W. Robert Aufill, “The Catholic Contribution to the 12-Step Movement,” the full text of this article is given in AAHistoryLovers message no. 347, available online at <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/aahistorylovers/conversations/messages/347> (as of May 30, 2016). Bill W. “How the Big Book Was Put Together,” describing how a pre-publication copy of the Big Book was sent to the Catholic Committee on Publications in New York by Morgan R., the full text of Bill’s words is given by Nancy Moyer Olson in AAHistoryLovers message no. 185, available online at <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/aahistorylovers/conversations/messages/185> (as of May 30, 2016). On Morgan Ryan’s appearance on Gabriel Heatter’s “We the People” radio program on August 29, 1939 see AAHistoryLovers messages no. 1705 (from Nancy Moyer Olson), no. 5321 (from John Barton), and no. 5331 (from bruceken@aol.com),

available online (as of May 30, 2016) at <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/aahistorylovers/conversations/messages/1705>, <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/aahistorylovers/conversations/messages/1705> , and <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/aahistorylovers/conversations/messages/5331>.

72. *Pass It On: The Story of Bill Wilson and How the A.A. Message Reached the World* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1984), 201 and 281.

73. Contents of a letter from Fr. Ed Dowling to Sister Ignatia, dated 25 March 1960, as related by Sr. Mary Denis Maher, CSA, Archivist, Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine, in a note dated 25 September 2008.

74. Clausen, “Historical Perspective of Father Ralph Pfau and the NCCA.”

75. Archives of the Indianapolis A.A. Intergroup Office.

76. Venerable Matt Talbot Resource Center: <http://venerablematttalbotresourcecenter.blogspot.com/> (as of June 1, 2016).

77. AAHistoryBuffs Message no. 932, “Fr. Ralph Pfau, AKA Fr. John Doe,” posted on Feb 19, 2002 by Nancy Moyer Olson, see <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/aahistorybuffs/conversations/messages/932> (as of August 20, 2016). The AAHistoryBuffs was the predecessor of the AAHistoryLovers web group. Tex Brown told this story to me also, at the National Archives Workshop in Chicago the year before, in 1999. Nancy was unable to find the date of Bill Wilson’s speech.

78. Bob Pearson, *A.A. World History 1985*, unpublished draft, Chapter 1, “When A.A. ‘Came of Age.’” See also AAHistoryBuffs Message no. 932 posted on Feb 19, 2002 by Nancy Olson, see <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/aahistorybuffs/conversations/messages/932>

es/932 (as of Aug. 17, 2016). The AAHistoryBuffs was the predecessor of the AAHistoryLovers.

79. Pfau, *Prodigal Shepherd*, 237-238.

80. See the letter in the New York A.A. Archives dated Feb. 11, 1958 from Bill Wilson to Dean B. of Indianapolis, Indiana; and the letter dated June 2, 1958 from Bill Wilson to George S. of Philadelphia. Bill Wilson's anger was aroused by Father Pfau's publication of his autobiography in a two-part article in *Look* magazine on March 4 and March 18, 1958, which gave Pfau's full name along with full-face photos of him (as well as Pfau's book-length autobiography *Prodigal Shepherd* which also appeared that same year).

81. A Canadian Catholic priest who was in A.A., Father Pete W., was present when Ralph and Bill W. met and made their peace with one another, and told me the story in a long telephone conversation we had when I was first beginning my research on Father Ralph c. 2002.

82. New York A.A. Archives: Captain Jack S., while traveling in South America, to Bobbie B. in the Alcoholic Foundation office on March 19, 1949; George S. of Philadelphia to Bill on August 24, 1962. Thanks to Amy Filiatreau, the New York A.A. Archivist, for discovering these two letters.

83. Worrell 28 February 2002.

84. Father Ralph S. Pfau and Al Hirshberg, "A Priest's Own Story," *Look*, Vol. 22, No. 5 (March 4, 1958): 84-97; and "Out of the Shadows," *Look*, Vol. 22, No. 6 (March 18, 1958): 85-98. Lillian Roth, *I'll Cry Tomorrow* (New York: Frederick Fell, 1954). Lillian first joined A.A. in 1946. New York A.A. Archives: letters from Bill Wilson to Dean B. (Indianapolis) on February 11, 1958; and Bill Wilson to George S. (Philadelphia) on June 2, 1958 (thanks to Amy Filiatreau, the New York A.A. Archivist, for discovering these two letters).

85. Chester E. Kirk Collection of the John Hay Library at Brown University.

86. Father Ralph Pfau's obituary, from the *Chicago Tribune*, Monday, February 20, 1967, "Father Pfau, Alcoholism Fighter, Dies," notes he died of hepatitis. Worrell 27 February 2002 explained how he contracted it. The Archdiocesan Archives in Indianapolis corroborates his date of death, and describes his funeral mass and burial.

87. Ralph Pfau (Father John Doe), *The Golden Book of Resentments* (Indianapolis: SMT Guild, 1955), 7 and *The Golden Book of Passion* (Indianapolis: SMT Guild, 1960), 5-9.

88. Glenn F. Chesnut, *Changed by Grace: V. C. Kitchen, the Oxford Group, and A.A.* (New York: iUniverse, 2006), in Chapter 6, on pp. 93-96.

89. Three years ago, I wrote up an account of Plato's teaching on this topic, which was included in John Stark's *Tales from the Caribbean* (Bloomington, Indiana: iUniverse, 2012) in Chapter 25, "God, religion, and acting morally," in a section of that book which John and I put together as a joint project. I would like to borrow this material back at this time, and use portions of it pretty much verbatim in the account of Plato's teaching which follows. It is based for the most part on material from my lectures on ancient Greek culture at Indiana University over the many years when I was professor of ancient history there.

90. I wrote up an account of this part of Aristotle's teaching in my book *Changed by Grace: V. C. Kitchen, the Oxford Group, and A.A.*, in Chapter 6, on p. 94. I have simply copied part of that description here.

91. Glenn F. Chesnut, *Father Ed Dowling: Bill Wilson's Sponsor* (Bloomington, Indiana: iUniverse, 2015), Chapter 28, "Bill W. Takes Instructions in Catholicism from Fulton J. Sheen: 1947."

92. The discussion of Bill W.'s ideas which follows is based on the section in Glenn F. Chesnut, *Changed by Grace: V. C. Kitchen, the Oxford Group, and A.A.*, in Chapter 6, on pp. 93-96.

93. Ralph Pfau (Father John Doe), *The Golden Book of Resentments* (Indianapolis: SMT Guild, 1955), 7.



94. Ibid.

95. Ralph Pfau (Father John Doe), *The Golden Book of Passion* (Indianapolis: SMT Guild, 1960).

96. Ibid. 6.

97. Ibid. 7. Father Ralph here quotes from the famous passage in the Apostle Paul's letter to the Romans in the New Testament, where the apostle speaks of the struggle between the spirit and the flesh. Ralph says that when he speaks of "the passions," he is speaking of the same part of the human makeup which Paul refers to as "the flesh." See Romans 7:19 and 23–25 (Douay-Rheims translation): "For the good which I will, I do not; but the evil which I will not, that I do .... But I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind, and captivating me in the law of sin, that is in my members. Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? The grace of God, by Jesus Christ our Lord."

In linking what the Apostle Paul calls the *flesh* with the idea of the *passions*, Father Ralph was probably being influenced by St. Augustine. He may have been pointed there by St. Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologica* where, when Aquinas was discussing the passions, he made numerous references to Book 14 of Augustine's *City of God*. See for example St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I-II, q. 25 "Of the order of the passions to one another," art. 4 "Whether these are the four principal passions: joy, sadness, hope and fear?"

If we look at Book 14 of the *City of God* (as in for example chs. 2 and 8–9), we will see that Augustine set out in that book to refute the pagan Stoic philosophers, who had said that there were four basic passions — fear, desire, grief, and joy — and had said that the philosopher who had obtained true wisdom and serenity would be completely freed of these passions. Against this Stoic doctrine, St. Augustine said that, on the contrary, the four passions formed the basic fabric of our human motivation. Good people desired good things while bad people desired evil

things, good people rejoiced over good accomplishments while bad people rejoiced over evil accomplishments, and so on. In order to motivate men and women to do good things, we not only had to work to break their emotional attachment to their old evil ways, we also had to inspire them at the deepest possible emotional level before they would commit themselves to the new way of life we were trying to teach them. For more about this aspect of Augustine's thought, see Glenn F. Chesnut, "The Pattern of the Past: Augustine's Debate with Eusebius and Sallust."

98. Pfau, *Golden Book of Passion* 10.

99. Ibid. 11–12.

100. Ibid. 29.

101. I am drawing verbatim in places here from my discussion of "the pancake principle" in Glenn F. Chesnut, *Changed by Grace: V. C. Kitchen, the Oxford Group, and A.A.*, in Chapter 6, on pp. 98–99.

102. I have simply copied part of my discussion in Glenn F. Chesnut, *Changed by Grace: V. C. Kitchen, the Oxford Group, and A.A.* (New York: iUniverse, 2006), in Chapter 6, p. 97.

103. Ralph Pfau (Father John Doe), *The Golden Book of Tolerance* (Indianapolis: SMT Guild, 1948; orig. titled *The Golden Book of Charity*, where charity was an older English word for "love") 47–48.

104. Ibid. 47–48.

105. Ralph Pfau (Father John Doe), *The Golden Book of Principles* (Indianapolis: SMT Guild, 1954) 43–54.

106. Ibid. 45.

107. Beginning with his first trial experiment, a simple one-day retreat which he conducted on a Sunday afternoon and evening at a site run by the Little Sisters of the Poor, apparently in the latter part of 1945. This event was probably held at the retirement home which the sisters ran, called the St. Augustine Home for the Aged, located at that time at 500 East Vermont Street in Indianapolis. (In 1968, they moved to 2345 West 86th Street, but

their religious order is still doing its good work in Indianapolis today at the new site.)

108. Pfau, *Golden Book of Principles* 45–46.

109. Ibid. 46. The Long Form of the Traditions was first set out in Bill Wilson’s essay “Twelve Suggested Points for AA Tradition” in the April 1946 issue of the A.A. *Grapevine*. The Short Form, which was published three and a half years later in an article in the A.A. *Grapevine* for November 1949, said simply: “Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.”

110. As recounted in his autobiography: Pfau, *Prodigal Shepherd*.

111. Pfau, *Golden Book of Principles* 46. For the biblical commandment to love your neighbor as yourself, see the original Old Testament statement of the rule in Leviticus 19:18, followed by the numerous New Testament quotations of that basic principle of Torah in Matthew 5:43, 19:19, 22:39; Mark 12:31, 12:33; Luke 10:27; Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14; and James 2:8.

112. See Glenn C[hesnut], “The Self-Hate Syndrome: the equally destructive opposite to the path of Grandiosity and Arrogance” at <http://hindsfoot.org/archive2.html> (as of June 1, 2016), along with Melody Beattie, *Codependent No More: How to Stop Controlling Others and Start Caring for Yourself* (Center City, Minnesota: Hazelden, 1986) and Melody Beattie, *The Language of Letting Go: Daily Meditations for Codependents* (Center City, Minnesota: Hazelden, 1990). Also see Sue C. (South Bend, Indiana), “Escaping the Bog of Self-Loathing: Learning how to love ourselves again, using the Fourth Step to heal our shame, guilt, co-dependence, and depression,” at <http://hindsfoot.org/selfhate.pdf> (as of June 1, 2016) and Glenn F. Chesnut, “Dante’s Swamp of Depression: The Fifth Circle of Hell” at <http://hindsfoot.org/danteswamp.pdf> (as of June 1, 2016).

113. They were not large in number, even though they would frequently show up and heckle loudly when Jesus was traveling around preaching in

northern Palestine. See for example Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* Book 17, Ch. 2 which tells us about six thousand men from “the sect of the Pharisees” who, during the Herodian period, refused to take a pledge of goodwill toward Caesar. This may not have been all of the Pharisees, but it does make clear that they made up only a minority group in terms of absolute numbers. For that reason, among others, I regard it as a serious mistake to try to tie the Pharisees too closely to the rise of later rabbinic Judaism. On a number of issues, Jesus himself was closer to later orthodox rabbinic Judaism (which represented the majority position within later Judaism) than he was to the relatively small number of Pharisaic sectarians. On this issue, I am close in many ways to the position taken by the scholar who taught me beginning New Testament Greek some fifty-four years ago, E. P. (Ed Parish) Sanders, see his *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977) and his *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985).

114. Matthew 23:23 (Douay-Rheims translation).

115. John Shaifer (b. June 19, 1923, sober September 15, 1960, d. November 13, 2000), “His Life in the Program,” transcript of a lead given in Lafayette, Indiana, on August 26, 1999. See <http://hindsfoot.org/ngary1js.html> and <http://hindsfoot.org/ngary2js.html> (as of June 1, 2016).

116. Matthew 5:9 in the medieval Latin Vulgate and Roman Catholic Douay-Rheims translation which Father Ralph used.

117. Ralph Pfau (Father John Doe), *The Golden Book of Excuses* (Indianapolis: SMT Guild, 1952) 9.

118. Ibid. 10.

119. Ibid. 10.

120. Luke 15:11–24 (Douay-Rheims translation) “A certain man had two sons: And the younger of them said to his father: Father, give me the portion of substance that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his substance. And not many days after, the younger son, gathering all

together, went abroad into a far country: and there wasted his substance, living riotously.” After he ran out of money, he had to get a job feeding a farmer’s pigs. “And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks the swine did eat; and no man gave unto him. And returning to himself, he said: ‘How many hired servants in my father’s house abound with bread, and I here perish with hunger? I will arise, and will go to my father, and say to him: “Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee: I am not worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.”’ And rising up he came to his father. And when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and was moved with compassion .... And the father said to his servants: ‘Bring forth quickly the first robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat and make merry: Because this my son was dead, and is come to life again: was lost, and is found.’ ”

121. *Golden Book of Excuses* 11.

122. *Ibid.* 10.

123. Pfau, *Golden Book of Principles*, 24.

124. To give some examples, the basic underlying idea has been spoken of as the vision of the Good and the Beautiful in Plato’s Parable of the Cave, as the act of revelation carried out by the divine Logos in Justin Martyr and Eusebius of Caesarea, as the act of Being Itself in Thomas Aquinas, as the “act of giving birth to the living power of God” in some Eastern Orthodox understandings of the Theotokos metaphor and in Meister Eckhart’s sermons, and as the speaking of the Word of God (in scripture, sermons, liturgy and so on) in Protestant writings from Martin Luther in the sixteenth century to Karl Barth in the twentieth century.

125. Augustine’s dates and ages based on Sheehan’s Chronology of St. Augustine’s Confessions, available at <http://web.stanford.edu/class/ihum40/augchron.pdf> (as of June 1, 2016).

126. Augustine, *Confessions* **Error! Main Document Only.**4.15.25. The English translations from the *Confessions* which I am using are my

own. For the Latin text, I employed Augustine, *Confessions*, Vol. 1: Introduction and Latin text, ed. James J. O'Donnell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), available online at <http://faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/conf/> (as of April 4, 2016). For those who wish to read these passages in full context, the classic English translation is Augustine's *Confessions*, trans. E. B. Pusey, Library of the Fathers (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1838), available online at <http://faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/Englishconfessions.html> (as of April 4, 2016). A more modern translation was published by Albert Outler, the man who first taught me about Augustine and patristic theology, and about the thought of John Wesley. See Augustine, *Confessions and Enchiridion*, trans. Albert C. Outler, Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), available online at <http://faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/augustine/conf.pdf> (as of April 4, 2016).

127. Augustine, *Confessions* **Error! Main Document Only.**4.15.25. At the end of this passage, Augustine quoted Psalm 17:29 in the Latin translation he was using — *quoniam tu inluminas lucernam meam Domine Deus meus inluminas tenebras meas*. In modern Protestant Bibles, this is Psalm 18:28, which I would translate as “For you will light my lamp; the Lord my God will illuminate my darkness.”

128. Augustine, *Confessions* **Error! Main Document Only.****Error! Main Document Only.**10.2.2, my translation.

129. Ibid. **Error! Main Document Only.**12.25.35, my translation.

130. Ibid. **Error! Main Document Only.**12.25.35, my translation.

131. Chesnut, *Changed by Grace: V. C. Kitchen, the Oxford Group, and A.A.*, Chapter 7. “The Names of God and God as Truth Itself.”

132. The English translations are mine. For the Latin text, see *Corpus Thomisticum S. Thomae de Aquino Opera Omnia* at <http://www.corpusthomisticum.org/iopera.html> (as of April 11, 2016). *Summa Theologiae Prima pars, quaestio 16, articulus 1* is available from the list there at <http://www.corpusthomisticum.org/sth1015.html>.

133. In the discussion of Jonathan Edwards which follows, I have borrowed language from my section on Edwards in pp. 127-129 of Glenn F. Chesnut, *Father Ed Dowling: Bill Wilson's Sponsor*.

134. Jonathan Edwards, "A Divine and Supernatural Light, Immediately Imparted to the Soul by the Spirit of God: A Sermon Preach'd at Northampton [Massachusetts], And Published at the Desire of some of the Hearers" (Boston: S. Kneeland & T. Green, 1734). Available online in the Christian Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/edwards/works2.iii.i.html> (as of April 11, 2016).

135. Ibid.

136. **Error! Main Document Only.** Glenn F. Chesnut, *The First Christian Histories: Eusebius, Socrates, Sozomen, Theodoret, and Evagrius*, 2nd ed., rev. and enlarged (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1986). [Orig. pub. in Paris by Éditions Beauchesne in 1977.]

137. The Allegory of the Cave may be found in Plato, *Republic*, 2 vols., trans. Paul Shorey, Loeb Classical Library (London: William Heinemann, 1935–7), 7.1.514A–3.518B. A more detailed description of this allegory may be found in Chesnut, *Changed by Grace*, Chapter 7, see espec. pp. 119–124. I also discuss this Platonic idea in Chesnut, *Father Ed Dowling: Bill Wilson's Sponsor*, Chapter 6, "Pain and Suffering: (1) Emmet Fox" and Chapter 18, "Gregory of Nyssa: the Transcendent Realm."

138. He was referring to the worship of Sol Invictus (the Unconquered Sun) which was made an official Roman cult by the emperor Aurelian in 274 A.D., and continued to play a prominent role in Roman public religion down to the early years of the Emperor Constantine, who began placing an image of Apollo as the classical Greek sun god (representing Sol Invictus) on his coins in 310 A.D. and continued to do so for a while even after his victory at the battle of the Milvian Bridge on October 28, 312, as can be observed in the coin minted in 313 portraying Constantine and Apollo (with a diadem of the sun's rays) in profile standing side by side.

139. Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, 2nd ed. trans. John W. Harvey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950; orig. pub. 1923). The original German was Rudolf Otto, *Das Heilige: Über das Irrationale in der Idee des göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen*, 11th ed. (Stuttgart: Friedrich Andreas Perthes, 1923; orig. pub. 1917).

140. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. from the (unpublished) French original by Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1959). (A German version, likewise translated from the French original, had been published as *Das Heilige und Das Profane* in 1957.)

141. Glenn F. Chesnut, *God and Spirituality: Philosophical Essays*, Hindsfoot Foundation Series on Spirituality and Theology (Bloomington, Indiana: iUniverse, 2010), Chapter 4, “The Realm of the Sacred” and Chapter 5, “The Mysterium Tremendum.” Rudolf Otto believed that Immanuel Kant’s list of twelve categories (outlined as four sets of three) needed to be expanded. (1) The idea of the sacred or holy was also a fundamental category of the understanding, and (2) the idea of the good and (3) the idea of the beautiful (or sublime) might be two additional closely connected categories, forming another triplet. Or the sacred, the good, and the beautiful might instead just be three different ways of schematizing one underlying category, depending on whether we were thinking about religion, morality, or aesthetics.

142. In 1937, Abraham A. Low, M.D., founded a program called Recovery Inc. (later renamed Recovery International) which conducted classes in many large cities. Their main text was Low’s *Mental Health Through Will-Training: A System of Self-Help in Psychotherapy as Practiced by Recovery, Incorporated*, 1st ed. (Boston: Christopher Publishing House, 1950). For more about Low and his importance see Linda Farris Kurtz DPA, *Recovery Groups: A Guide to Creating, Leading,*



*and Working with Groups for Addictions and Mental Health Conditions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 80.

143. See Albert Ellis, *How To Live with a Neurotic* (Oxford, England: Crown Publishers, 1957) and Aaron T. Beck, *The Diagnosis and Management of Depression* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1967).

144. The book that is presently used as the major study work in Recovery, Inc. is Abraham Low, *Mental Health Through Will-Training: A System of Self-Help in Psychotherapy as Practiced by Recovery, Inc.* (Boston: Christopher Publishing House, 1950). His earlier work was Abraham A. Low, *The Technique of Self-Help in Psychiatric Aftercare*, 3 vols., (Chicago: Recovery, Inc., 1943), including *Lectures to Relatives of Former Patients* (Boston: Christopher Publishing House, 1967). For the first work — *Mental Health through Will-Training* — the text I have worked from is the second edition, published at West Hanover, Massachusetts: Christopher Publishing House, 1952.

145. William R. Miller and Janet C'de Baca, *Quantum Change: When Epiphanies and Sudden Insights Transform Ordinary Lives*, afterword by Ernest Kurtz (New York: Guilford Press, 2001). For more about this book, see Chesnut, *Father Ed Dowling: Bill Wilson's Sponsor*, pp. 130-131 and 478.

146. Miller and C'de Baca, *Quantum Change*, ix-x.

147. **Error! Main Document Only.** *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 4th ed. (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 2001; orig. pub. 1939), Chapter 2: "There is a Solution," p. 27.

148. Miller and C'de Baca, *Quantum Change*, 13.

149. There is a useful summary entitled "Alcohol Use Disorder: A Comparison Between DSM-IV and DSM-5" on the NIH (National Institutes of Health) website: National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, see <http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/dsmfactsheet/dsmfact.pdf> (as of

April 30, 2016). The DSM–5 list has eleven items: “In the past year, have you: (1) Had times when you ended up drinking more, or longer, than you intended? (2) More than once wanted to cut down or stop drinking, or tried to, but couldn’t? (3) Spent a lot of time drinking? Or being sick or getting over other aftereffects? (4) Wanted a drink so badly you couldn’t think of anything else? (5) Found that drinking — or being sick from drinking — often interfered with taking care of your home or family? Or caused job troubles? Or school problems? (6) Continued to drink even though it was causing trouble with your family or friends? (7) Given up or cut back on activities that were important or interesting to you, or gave you pleasure, in order to drink? (8) More than once gotten into situations while or after drinking that increased your chances of getting hurt (such as driving, swimming, using machinery, walking in a dangerous area, or having unsafe sex)? (9) Continued to drink even though it was making you feel depressed or anxious or adding to another health problem? Or after having had a memory blackout? (10) Had to drink much more than you once did to get the effect you want? Or found that your usual number of drinks had much less effect than before? (11) Found that when the effects of alcohol were wearing off, you had withdrawal symptoms, such as trouble sleeping, shakiness, restlessness, nausea, sweating, a racing heart, or a seizure? Or sensed things that were not there?”

150. Arthur S. (Arlington, Texas), Tom E. (Wappingers Falls, New York), and Glenn C. (South Bend, Indiana), *Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) Recovery Outcome Rates: Contemporary Myth and Misinterpretation* (October 11, 2008), available online at <http://hindsfoot.org/recout01.pdf> (as of May 1, 2016). Also see Glenn F. Chesnut, Ph.D., “An A.A. Success Rate of Only One Percent Would Be Statistically Impossible,” <http://hindsfoot.org/oneperc.doc> (as of May 1, 2016).

151. Ralph Pfau (Father John Doe), *The Golden Book of Decisions* (Center City, Minnesota: Hazelden, 1957), 5. The quote is usually given in books of famous quotations as “On the Plains of Hesitation bleach the bones of countless millions who, at the Dawn of Victory, sat down to wait,

and waiting — died!” and attributed to George W. Cecil who, writing under the pseudonym of William A. Lawrence, is said to have written this in an advertisement for the International Correspondence Schools in *The American Magazine* (March 1923), p. 87.

152. Pfau, *Golden Book of Decisions* 8.

153. Ibid.

154. Ibid.

155. Ibid. 9. My note as a Roman historian (which was what I did for a living for thirty-three years): under Roman law, Pontius Pilate, as the Roman governor of the province, was the only person in the province empowered to approve the death penalty. Pilate’s claim that Jesus’s execution “wasn’t his responsibility” was totally bogus and a complete lie.

156. Ibid. 9–10.

157. Ralph Pfau (Father John Doe), *The Golden Book of Excuses* (Indianapolis: SMT Guild, 1952) 9–10.

158. Ibid. 10.

159. **Error! Main Document Only.**Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952). Tillich, one of the greatest theologians of the twentieth century, taught at Union Theological Seminary in New York City along with Reinhold Niebuhr, the author of the Serenity Prayer.

160. Pfau, *Golden Book of Excuses* 10.

161. NOTES TO PART II. FIRST ROMAN CATHOLICS: See Mary C. Darrah, *Sister Ignatia: Angel of Alcoholics Anonymous* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1992) 85-87, and particularly Sister Ignatia’s words contained in a transcription of Bill Wilson interviewing her, from the Alcoholics Anonymous Archives in New York, as cited and quoted on Darrah page 86.

162. Bill Wilson, 30 October 1940 letter to a member in Richmond, Virginia, as quoted in *Pass It On—the Story of Bill Wilson and How the A.A. Message Reached the World* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1984) 171-173, see espec. 173.

163. Chesnut, *Changed by Grace: V. C. Kitchen, the Oxford Group, and A.A.* Or for a look at a highly philosophical Oxford Group work, see Glenn F. Chesnut, “Foreword,” pages 2-29, to Philip Leon, *The Philosophy of Courage or The Oxford Group Way*, original text published 1939 by Oxford University Press; this electronic edition, published by stepstudy.org in 2008, is available online at <http://stepstudy.files.wordpress.com/2008/09/philosophyofcourage.pdf> (as of Aug. 18, 2016).

164. See the beautiful little classic, for example, by a Russian Orthodox priest living in exile in Paris, who worked out how to bridge the gap between Catholic and Orthodox theology, and explain each side’s position and experiences to the other: Vladimir Lossky, *The Vision of God*, trans. A. Moorhouse (London: Faith Press, 1963).

165. *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age* 63.

166. For more details here (and for other important dates during this general period of AA history), see Arthur S. (Arlington, Texas), *A Narrative Timeline of AA History* (April 2004), the chief modern reference work on AA dates, available online at [http://www.silkworth.net/timelines/timelines\\_public/timelines\\_public.html](http://www.silkworth.net/timelines/timelines_public/timelines_public.html).

167. A. C. Dixon and (later) Reuben Archer Torrey, eds. *The Fundamentals: A Testimony To The Truth*. 12 vols. Chicago: Testimony Publishing Co., 1910-1915. THE 12-VOLUME SET: Vols. 1–7 available on the internet on the New York Public Library Internet Archive at <http://www.archive.org/details/fundamentalstest17chic> (as of June 4, 2016). Vols. 4–9 available at HathiTrust at <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=coo.31924092329774;view=1up;seq=>

8 (as of June 4, 2016). Vol. 10 at <https://archive.org/details/cu31924031663168> (as of June 4, 2016). Vol. 11 at <https://archive.org/details/cu31924098504685> (as of June 4, 2016). Vol. 12 at <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=yale.39002088544748;view=1up;seq=5> (as of June 4, 2016). TORREY'S 4-VOLUME SET available at Northwestern Theological Seminary (as of June 4, 2016): Vol. 1 at <http://ntslibrary.com/PDF%20Books%20II/Torrey%20-%20The%20Fundamentals%201.pdf>; Vol. 2 at <http://ntslibrary.com/PDF%20Books%20II/Torrey%20-%20The%20Fundamentals%202.pdf>; Vol. 3 at <http://ntslibrary.com/PDF%20Books%20II/Torrey%20-%20The%20Fundamentals%203.pdf>; and Vol. 4 at <http://ntslibrary.com/PDF%20Books%20II/Torrey%20-%20The%20Fundamentals%204.pdf>.

168. Harry Emerson Fosdick, “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?” sermon preached on May 21, 1922 at First Presbyterian Church on West Twelfth Street in New York City; printed in *Christian Work* 102 (June 10, 1922): 716–722; abridged copy available online at <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5070/> (as of June 4, 2016); full text at <http://baptiststudiesonline.com/wp-content/uploads/2007/01/shall-the-fundamentalists-win.pdf> (as of June 4, 2016).

169. Ibid.

170. Ibid.

171. Ibid.

172. For a good introduction to the Enlightenment era, see Carl L. Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1932).

173. Fosdick, “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?”

174. Ibid.

175. Harry Emerson Fosdick, review of *Alcoholics Anonymous*, orig. printed in *The Religious Digest* and two other religious journals; now available online at <http://silkworth.net/bbreviews/01003.html> (as of June 4, 2016).

176. Adolf von Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte* (3rd ed. in three volumes, 1894-1898; English translation entitled *History of Dogma* in seven volumes, 1894-1899). For a comparison between Harnack's approach to writing the history of Catholic theology, and that of contemporary Roman Catholic church historians (both liberal and conservative), see Glenn F. Chesnut, "A Century of Patristic Studies 1888-1988," in Henry Warner Bowden (ed.), *A Century of Church History* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), pp. 36-73.

177. See Glenn F. Chesnut, *Images of Christ: An Introduction to Christology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row/Seabury, 1984).

178. Adolf von Harnack, *Das Wesen des Christentums* (the original German appeared 1900; the English translation, *What is Christianity?*, appeared in 1901).

179. *Alcoholics Anonymous* (4th ed.), Appendix II "Spiritual Experience" p. 569; also p. 60.

180. The words to "Jesus Loves Me" were written by a woman named Anna Bartlett Warner, who lived opposite the grounds of the United States Military Academy, where her uncle was chaplain. They first appeared in print in 1860; the tune was written by William Batchelder Bradbury in 1862. The words to "Jesus Loves the Little Children" were written by a preacher named Clare Herbert Woolston (1856-1927), a man who lived in Chicago, Illinois; they are normally sung to the 1864 Civil War tune "Tramp! Tramp! Tramp!" by George Fredrick Root.

181. So for example, Aquinas distinguished between venial sins and mortal sins by defining a mortal sin as "a conscious violation of a known law of God." John Wesley, the Oxford University professor who founded the Methodist movement, made what was essentially the same distinction

between what he called “sin improperly so called” and “sin properly so called,” where the latter was (in his words) a “conscious violation of a known law of God.”

182. Bill Wilson in *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age* 168.

183. Nancy Olson (founder and moderator of the AAHistoryLovers until her death on March 25, 2005), et al., *Biographies of the Authors of the Stories in the Big Book*, available online at [http://www.a-1associates.com/westbalto/HISTORY\\_PAGE/Authors.htm](http://www.a-1associates.com/westbalto/HISTORY_PAGE/Authors.htm) (as of June 4, 2016).

184. Bill Wilson in *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1957) 168-169; see also Ernest Kurtz, *Not-God: A History of Alcoholics Anonymous*, expanded edition (Center City, Minnesota: Hazelden, 1991; orig. pub. 1979), p. 75. See also W. Robert Aufill, “The Catholic Contribution to the 12-Step Movement,” the full text of this article is given in AAHistoryLovers message no. 347, available online at <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/aahistorylovers/conversations/messages/347> (as of May 30, 2016).

185. See AAHistoryLovers Message No. 5331, “AA’s First Meeting on the West Coast,” available online at <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/AAHistoryLovers/conversations/topics/5331> (as of June 4, 2016).

186. Chesnut, *Changed by Grace: V. C. Kitchen, the Oxford Group, and A.A.*, and Glenn F. Chesnut, “Foreword,” pages 2-29 of the new online edition (September 27, 2008) of Oxford Group author Philip Leon’s *The Philosophy of Courage* at <http://stepstudy.files.wordpress.com/2008/09/philosophyofcourage.pdf> (Leon’s book was originally published in 1939 by Oxford University Press).

187. S.v. “Frank N. D. Buchman,” Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank\\_N.\\_D.\\_Buchman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank_N._D._Buchman) (as of June 4, 2016).

188. Chesnut, *Changed by Grace*.

189. For more details here (and for other important dates during this general period of AA history), see Arthur S., *Narrative Timeline of AA History*.

190. Chesnut, *Changed by Grace* 3. Also see *Dr. Bob and the Good Oldimers* 53-57.

191. *Dr. Bob and the Good Oldimers* 60-67.

192. Mitchell K., *How It Worked: The Story of Clarence H. Snyder and the Early Days of Alcoholics Anonymous in Cleveland, Ohio* (Washingtonville, New York: AA Big Book Study Group, 1997) 135-136. See also Mary C. Darrah, *Sister Ignatia: Angel of Alcoholics Anonymous* 31, and also Clarence H. Snyder's biography, "The Home Brewmeister," in Nancy Olson et al., *Biographies of the Authors of the Stories in the Big Book*, available online at [http://www.a-1associates.com/westbalto/HISTORY\\_PAGE/Authors.htm](http://www.a-1associates.com/westbalto/HISTORY_PAGE/Authors.htm) (as of June 4, 2016).

193. Mitchell K., *How It Worked* 136.

194. Ibid. 136-137.

195. Albert (Abby) Golrick's biography, "He Thought He Could Drink like a Gentleman," in Nancy Olson et al., *Biographies of the Authors of the Stories in the Big Book*.

196. Mitchell K., *How It Worked* 139.

197. Grace was the one pushing Clarence in the fundamentalist direction. After their marriage, the two of them lived in Casselberry, Florida, just north of Orlando, and attended the Pentecostal services at the Assembly of God Church in nearby Winter Park, Florida. See Mitchell K. p. 215 and the article on Clarence H. Snyder (and his Big Book story "The Home Brewmeister") in Nancy Olson et al., *Biographies of the Authors of the Stories in the Big Book*.

198. Mitchell K., *How It Worked* 140.



199. Ibid. 142.

200. Ibid. 142.

201. Ibid. 142.

202. Arthur S., *Narrative Timeline*.

203. Mary C. Darrah, *Sister Ignatia: Angel of Alcoholics Anonymous* 85-87. That is, beginning in January 1940, alcoholics who were given beds at St. Thomas Hospital in Akron began being officially noted on the hospital's books as having been admitted for alcoholism. On pp. 82-83, Darrah explained that Sister Ignatia and Dr. Bob actually started admitting the first few alcoholic patients to St. Thomas Hospital during the late summer of 1939, but camouflaged this by writing some diagnosis other than alcoholism on the admittance form. The first patient who had been surreptitiously admitted in this fashion came on August 16, 1939, when Dr. Bob told Sister Ignatia about his own alcoholism, and then begged her to get a man named Walter B. into a hospital room somehow.

204. St. Thomas Hospital was "nonsectarian," tape-recorded oral history of Sister Ignatia, C.S.A., 1954, her words as contained in a transcription of Bill Wilson interviewing her, from the Alcoholics Anonymous Archives in New York; as cited and quoted in Darrah, *Sister Ignatia* 86.

205. The Oxford Group was a "sect," letter from Sister Ignatia to Bill Wilson, 3 April 1957, Alcoholics Anonymous Archives in New York, and Mount Augustine Archives in Richfield, Ohio; as quoted in Darrah, *Sister Ignatia* 83.

206. For the full text of two typical versions of the early Preamble see "Texas Preamble," AAHistoryLovers Message no. 3760 at <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/AAHistoryLovers/conversations/topics/3760> (as of June 4, 2016) or "1940 AA Preamble" at [http://silkworth.net/aahistory/1940\\_aa\\_preamble.html](http://silkworth.net/aahistory/1940_aa_preamble.html) (as of June 4, 2016).

207. See Glenn F. Chesnut, “Doherty Sheerin and the Founding of A.A. in Indianapolis: October 28, 1940,” available online at <http://hindsfoot.org/nIndy1.html> (as of June 4, 2016) and Pfau, *Prodigal Shepherd*.

208. Bill Wilson, 30 October 1940 letter to a member in Richmond, Virginia, as quoted in *Pass It On — the Story of Bill Wilson and How the A.A. Message Reached the World* 171-173, see espec. 173.

209. For the quote, see Discussion No. 2, “The Spiritual Phase,” in the section on the fifth step, at <http://hindsfoot.org/Detr2.html> (as of June 4, 2016). The entire pamphlet is available online at <http://hindsfoot.org/detr0.html> (as of June 4, 2016). Entitled “Alcoholics Anonymous: An Interpretation of the Twelve Steps,” it was composed of material which was first assembled and used for beginners’ classes in Detroit in 1943, and then began being published in printed form shortly afterwards in Washington, D.C. Hence called the “Detroit Pamphlet” or the “Washington D.C. Pamphlet” (sometimes also referred to as the “Tablemate” or “Table Leaders Guide”). For many years afterward, it was reprinted and used by AA groups all over the United States, from the East Coast and Upper Midwest to the Southwest and West Coast.

210. In the United States, the Unitarians began as a theological movement within the New England Congregationalists beginning around the middle of the eighteenth century, a little before the American revolution. William Ellery Channing (1780–1842), who became pastor of the Federal Street Church in Boston in 1803, was a well-known early leader of the American Unitarians as they began to become more organized during the nineteenth century. In 1961, the American Unitarian Association merged with the Universalist Church of America, to form the Unitarian Universalists, as they are presently called. (The word “universalist” in this sense was applied to the denial that any eternal Hell existed, and the belief that all human beings would ultimately be saved in the *apocatastasis* or final restoration of all things at the end of time.)

211. “Mr. X and Alcoholics Anonymous,” a sermon preached on November 26, 1939 by Dilworth Lupton at the First Unitarian Church, Euclid at East 82nd Street, Cleveland, Ohio. Can be read online at [http://silkworth.net/aahistory/mr\\_x.html](http://silkworth.net/aahistory/mr_x.html) (as of June 4, 2016).

212. Ibid.

213. In the period between the First and Second World Wars, many regarded Rudolf Otto and Karl Barth as the two most important and formative Protestant theologians. Rudolf Otto, *Das Heilige: Über das Irrationale in der Idee des göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen*, 11th ed. (Stuttgart: Friedrich Andreas Perthes, 1923; 1st ed. pub. 1917). It appeared in English six years after the first German edition, as *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, 2nd ed., trans. John W. Harvey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950; 1st ed. of Harvey's translation pub. 1923). Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief*, 1st ed. 1919, 2nd ed. 1922 (the Eng. trans. by Edwyn C. Hoskyns, *The Epistle to the Romans*, was orig. pub. 1933).

214. Rudolf Otto, *Das Heilige*; English trans. *The Idea of the Holy*.

215. Rudolf Otto, *Kantisch-Fries'sche Religionsphilosophie und ihre Anwendung auf die Theologie* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1909), trans. into English as *The Philosophy of Religion Based on Kant and Fries*, trans. E. B. Dicker (London: Williams & Norgate, 1931). Otto says at the end of this work that, inspired by Fries' theories about how the human mind (in spite of Immanuel Kant's claims to the contrary) could in fact have an awareness of the infinite, in his next book he was planning on making a detailed phenomenological study (as we would term it today) of that fundamental human religious feeling, looking at a variety of religions at various periods of history all around the world. The result of course was Otto's greatest work, *The Idea of the Holy*.

216. One of his most important works was Jakob Friedrich Fries, *Neue oder anthropologische Kritik der Vernunft* (3 vols., 2nd ed., Heidelberg:

Christian Friedrich Winter, 1828–1831), that is, “New or Anthropological Critique of Reason.” The word anthropological had not yet taken on its modern meaning. He meant by it what we would today call a *phenomenological* analysis (namely, of the categories). There are historical links between Fries and Edmund Husserl, a much later figure who was the founder of the early twentieth century philosophical movement called phenomenology.

217. Jim Burwell, “Sober For Thirty Years,” *A.A. Grapevine* (May 1968), repr. *A.A. Grapevine* November 1999).

218. Chesnut, *Changed by Grace: V. C. Kitchen, the Oxford Group, and A.A.*

219. St. Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle*, trans. E. Allison Peers (Garden City, New York: Image Books / Doubleday, 1961), First Mansion, chapter 2 (Eng. trans. pp. 40-41).

220. The Akron Manual: *A Manual for Alcoholics Anonymous*, available online at <http://hindsfoot.org/AkrMan1.html> and <http://hindsfoot.org/AkrMan2.html> (as of Aug. 20, 2016). The latest datable reference in the pamphlet is to E. Stanley Jones’ book *Abundant Living*, which first came out in 1942, so it could not have been written prior to that date. But the kind of hospitalization described for newcomers, and the mention of there only being a dozen or so AA meetings in Akron, indicate that it could not have been written very long after that at the latest. Other internal references in the pamphlet tighten the dating to establish a June 1942 publication date.

221. Richmond Walker, *Twenty-Four Hours a Day*, orig. pub. anonymously in 1948 in Florida by the AA group in Daytona Beach, with the only ascription being the short phrase “compiled by a Member of the Group at Daytona Beach, Fla.” The present rev. ed. is published at Center City, Minnesota: Hazelden, 1975. See also Glenn F. Chesnut, “Richmond Walker and the Twenty-Four Hour Book,” talk given at the 8th Annual National A.A. Archives Workshop, Fort Lauderdale, Florida, Sept. 27,

2003; a transcript is available online (as of June 4, 2016) at <http://hindsfoot.org/rwfla1.html>, <http://hindsfoot.org/RWfla2.html>, and <http://hindsfoot.org/RWfla3.html>, and a recording of the original talk is available online (as of Aug, 20, 2016) at <http://unmeasureddistances.ftml.net/audindex.html> and <http://unmeasureddistances.ftml.net/audglenn05.mp3>. See also Glenn F. Chesnut, “Practicing the Presence of God: Richmond Walker's Twenty-Four Hour book — the path to soul-balance and inner calm,” taken from Glenn F. Chesnut, *The Higher Power of the Twelve-Step Program: For Believers & Non-believers*, Hindsfoot Foundation Series on Spirituality and Theology (San Jose: iUniverse, 2001), the first half of Chapter Five, “Two Classical Authors of A.A. Spirituality,” available online at <http://hindsfoot.org/hp5rw.html>).

222. At the very end of *A Manual for Alcoholics Anonymous* (the Akron Manual).

223. The representative of the early psychological wing of AA who left the longest and most detailed account of their beliefs was Sgt. Bill Swegan, see William E. Swegan with Glenn F. Chesnut, Ph.D., *The Psychology of Alcoholism*, Hindsfoot Foundation Series on Alcoholics Anonymous History (Bloomington, Indiana: iUniverse, 2011; orig. pub. 2003 as *On the Military Firing Line in the Alcoholism Treatment Program*, by Sgt. Bill S. with Glenn F. Chesnut). On the importance of combining psychology and spirituality in effective alcoholism treatment, see also Richard M. Dubiel, *The Road to Fellowship: The Role of the Emmanuel Movement and the Jacoby Club in the Development of Alcoholics Anonymous*, ed. by Glenn F. Chesnut, Hindsfoot Foundation Series on the History of Alcoholism Treatment (New York: iUniverse, 2004).

224. Emmet Fox, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Key to Success in Life* and *The Lord's Prayer: An Interpretation* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1938). James Allen, *As a Man Thinketh* (1902) can be found in Mel B., *Three Recovery Classics: As a Man Thinketh (by James Allen), The Greatest Thing in the World (by Henry Drummond), An Instrument of*

*Peace (the St. Francis Prayer)*, Hindsfoot Foundation Series on Spirituality and Theology (New York: iUniverse, 2004).

225. Emmet Fox, *Power Through Constructive Thinking* (New York: Harper Collins, 1932-1940) 3.

226. Fox, *Power Through Constructive Thinking*, 21; also Fox, *The Sermon on the Mount* and *The Lord's Prayer*, in his commentary on the fourth clause in the Lord's Prayer ("Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, in earth as in heaven"), pp. 158-159. Glenn F. Chesnut, *God and Spirituality: Philosophical Essays*, Hindsfoot Foundation Series on Spirituality and Theology (New York: iUniverse, 2010), 232-233.

227. Fox, *Sermon on the Mount*, 4.

228. Fox, *Power Through Constructive Thinking*, 111.

229. Fox, *Power Through Constructive Thinking*, the chapters on "Life after Death" and "Reincarnation."

230. See AAHistoryLovers message no. 1930 at <http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/AAHistoryLovers/message/1930>.

231. Glenn F. Chesnut, "Ralph Pfau (Father John Doe) and the Golden Books," talk given on September 29, 2001 at the 6th National A.A. Archives Workshop in Clarksville, Indiana (across the river from Louisville, Kentucky). Transcript available online (as of June 6, 2016) at <http://hindsfoot.org/pflou1.html>, <http://hindsfoot.org/PfLou2.html>, and <http://hindsfoot.org/PfLou3.html>. The original audio recording can be listened to (as of June 6, 2016) at <http://unmeasureddistances.ftml.net/audindex.html>.

232. Chesnut, *Changed by Grace* 42.

233. The Oxford Group began referring to itself as Moral Re-Armament (MRA) in 1938. Paul Campbell and Peter Howard, *Remaking Men* (New York: Arrowhead Books, 1954) 60-62. As quoted in the section of the Orange Papers on "Homophobia and Gay-Bashing" at <http://www.orange-papers.org/orange-rroot630.html> (as of June 4, 2016).

234. Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*. Glenn F. Chesnut, *God and Spirituality: Philosophical Essays*, Hindsfoot Foundation Series on Spirituality and Theology (New York: iUniverse, 2010), Chapter 5, “The Mysterium Tremendum.”

235. Acedia (sometimes translated not too accurately as “sloth”) meant giving up, moving from half efforts and passive aggression to continual procrastination to greater and greater gloominess and melancholy, to an eventual state of total despair.

236. Arthur S. (Arlington, Texas), Tom E. (Wappingers Falls, New York), and Glenn C. (South Bend, Indiana), *Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) Recovery Outcome Rates: Contemporary Myth and Misinterpretation* (October 11, 2008), page 30. Available online at <http://hindsfoot.org/recout01.pdf> (as of Aug. 20, 2016).

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Father Ralph Pfau's books were originally published by Father Pfau himself, operating under the name of the SMT Guild (where the initials stood for the Sons of Matt Talbot). The three nuns who were his assistants handled the billing and mailing. Many of these books (perhaps all) were actually printed at St. Meinrad Archabbey back in those early days. After Father Pfau's death, two of his nieces (Patricia Worrell and Marge Klemm) took over the task for a number of years, but eventually arranged with the Hazelden Foundation to print and distribute all of them.

### **Father Pfau's books from Hazelden Publishing**

All of Pfau's books (except for *Contact with God*) are still available (as well as all of his recordings) from Hazelden Publishing, 15251 Pleasant Valley Road, P.O. Box 176, Center City, Minnesota 55012-0176. Phone 800-328-9000 or 651-213-4200. See their publishing center's website at <http://www.hazelden.org/web/public/publishing.page> (as of July 21, 2016). To look up individual works, go to <http://www.hazelden.org/itemquest/search.view?srch=Y&start=0&=&kw=> and search for Ralph Pfau, and if it does not come up under that name, search for John Doe.

### **AAHistoryLovers web group**

At <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/AAHistoryLovers/info> (as of May 29, 2016). Over 2,800 members from around the world, including most of the top A.A. historians and archivists in the U.S., Canada, and abroad. Over 11,000 messages on numerous topics in A.A. history, stretching from March 2002 to the present. The messages from 2002 to 2012 may also be downloaded at <http://hindsfoot.org/aahl.html> (as of May 29, 2016) in the form of MS Word .docx files, as text files (.txt files), or as Microsoft Access database files (.mdb files). Moderated by Nancy Olson (with aid from Ernest Kurtz and Glenn F. Chesnut)



from its beginning till her death on March 25, 2005. Moderated by Glenn F. Chesnut from that time to the present. For an account of the history and governing principles guiding this web group, see Glenn F. Chesnut, “The History of the AA History Lovers,” either at <http://hindsfoot.org/aahlhist.doc> or at <http://www.williamwhitepapers.com/pr/History%20of%20AA%20History%20Lovers%20Glenn%20Chestnut.pdf> (as of Aug. 20, 2016).

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#### **Father Ralph Pfau's books from Hazelden Publishing**

Most of Pfau's books (and his recordings) are still available from Hazelden Publishing, 15251 Pleasant Valley Road, P.O. Box 176, Center City, Minnesota 55012-0176. Phone 800-328-9000 or 651-213-4200. Only the little book called *Contact with God* is currently out of print. See the Hazelden publishing center's website at <http://www.hazelden.org/web/public/publishing.page> (as of July 21, 2016). To look up individual works, go to <http://www.hazelden.org/itemquest/search.view?srch=Y&start=0&=&kw=> and search for Ralph Pfau, and if it does not come up under that name, search for his pseudonym John Doe.

These books were originally published by Father Pfau himself, operating under the name of the SMT [Sons of Matt Talbot] Guild. The three nuns who were his assistants handled the billing and mailing. Many of these books (perhaps all) were actually printed at St. Meinrad Archabbey. After Father Pfau's death, two of his nieces (Patricia Worrell and Marge Klemm) took over the task for a number of years, but eventually arranged with the Hazelden Foundation to print and distribute all of them. Many of the copies of Father Pfau's works which I used in researching this book were old versions bequeathed to me by A.A. old timers, so in this bibliography I have listed each volume with either SMT Guild or

Hazelden as the publisher, depending on when and where the copy on my bookshelf was published.

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