

A.A.-12 Step Influences From The Oxford Group

What The Last Decade's Research Tells Us

Dick B.

PO Box 837, Kihei, HI 96753-0837

Ph/fax: 808 874 4876

Email: dickb@dickb.com

URL: <http://www.dickb.com/index.shtml>

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The “Facts” Were Colored by Most Historical Texts, Inadequate Investigation, and by Overtly Hostile Writers and Observers.

The Critics and their Role in Creating a Factual Vacuum: You will find very little adequate information about the Oxford Group in either A.A.'s “Conference Approved” publications or in historical titles and articles written about A.A.'s “Oxford Group Connection.” Sadly, in fact, you will find little about the Oxford Group—as Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob Smith knew it—by looking in the present-day literature of the surviving group. Perhaps this obvious void can be attributed to oft-repeated and vehement criticisms of the Oxford Group. Scathing charges spanned most of the years of founder Frank Buchman's life—long after the facts themselves had become stale and utterly irrelevant to the Group's ideas and practices. Many of the criticisms were simply *ad hominem* attacks on Oxford Group founder Dr. Frank Buchman. They contended for his alleged pro-Hitler leanings, his alleged sexual obsessions and orientation, his authoritarianism, and his allegedly heretical, cultish, but basically Protestant, ideas. See for examples of the varying outpourings: (1) Tom Driberg [an atheist-Oxford Group opponent], *The Mystery of Moral Re-Armament*. NY: Knopf, 1965; (2) Clair M. Dinger [a Roman Catholic clergyman], *Moral Re-Armament: A Study of Its Technical and Religious Nature in the Light of Catholic Teaching*. D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1961; (3) Ken Ragge [an outspoken A.A. critic], *The Real AA: Behind The Myth of 12-Step Recovery*. AZ: See Sharp Press, 1998; (4) Martin and Deidre Bobgan [a Protestant husband and wife team from the psychiatric community determined to label A.A. a religious, heretical cult] *12 Steps To Destruction*. CA: EastGate Publishers, 1991. There are many more varieties and approaches, to be sure. What seems clear is that it is more popular to damn A.A. through its Oxford Group root and thereby obscure its full religious history than it is to report the complete history and let A.A. stand on its own for analysis and/or criticism. See Dick B., *Turning Point: A History of Early A.A.'s Spiritual Roots and Astonishing Successes*. Kihei, HI: Paradise Research Publications, Inc., 1997.

The Vast, Un-tapped Reservoir of Oxford Group Literature: There is no dearth of writing on the Oxford Group itself. Originally, the entity was called “The Groups.” Then, “A First Century Christian Fellowship.” Then, the “Oxford Group,” Then, “Moral Re-Armament.” And now, “Initiatives of Change.” I believe my own bibliographies contain the best, largest, and most complete listings of materials on, about, against, for, and relevant to this Buchman movement-whatever its name. In all, they comprised some 27,900 items. See particularly, Dick B., *Making Known the Biblical Roots of Early Alcoholics Anonymous*. Kihei, HI: Paradise Research Publications, Inc., 2001. See also, Dick B., *The Books Early AAs Read for Spiritual Growth*, 7th ed. Kihei, HI Paradise Research Publications, Inc.; *Dr. Bob and His Library*, 3rd ed., Kihei, HI: Paradise Research Publications, Inc. ; *Good Morning!: Quiet Time, Morning Watch, Meditation, and Early A.A.*, 2d ed., Kihei, HI: Paradise Research Publications, Inc., *New Light on Alcoholism: God, Sam Shoemaker, and A.A.* Kihei, HI: Paradise Research Publications, Inc., . See also the approving references to my bibliographic materials in a study by the University of Virginia (www.religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/nrms/aa.html) and by Christianity Today Magazine (<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/33.22>). The investigative problem I found (when I began my research over thirteen years ago) was that very few people (other than a few of its early critics) had a complete understanding of the principles and practices of the Oxford Group of the 1920’s and early 1930’s; and even fewer saw the major importance of the Oxford Group in terms of its obvious influence and impact on A.A. and the Twelve Steps. Even worse, undocumented, erroneous remarks about the Oxford Group, coupled with Bill Wilson’s repeated criticisms of the Oxford Group, tended completely to overshadow not only the rich treasure of Oxford Group writings, but also to detour researchers and historians from the path to other, equally if not more, important sources of A.A. cures. Cures and a program that drew heavily on the Creator, the Bible, Quiet Time, the teachings of Rev. Sam Shoemaker, the journal of early A.A. kept and taught by Dr. Bob’s wife Anne Smith in the 1930’s, and the large amount of *non-Oxford Group* Christian literature studied and used by pioneer AAs.

The Treasure Trove of A.A. History in hundreds of Oxford Group Books, Magazines, Pamphlets, Articles, and other Materials: Dozens of Oxford Group principles, practices, expressions, and idioms found their way directly into Alcoholics Anonymous. Yet very few A.A. reporters—either within the fellowship or outside of it—seemed willing to acknowledge these facts, to investigate them, or to utilize them in understanding A.A.’s Twelve Steps, Big Book, Slogans, Literature, Manuals, and Fellowship practices. This was the joy for me, as an active AA and a long-time researcher, in examining the two, related groups together and filling in the long-misreported Oxford Group part of the “religious” nature and content of our recovery program. Yes. I said “religious.” Any objective look at A.A.’s program, including the rulings of several courts thereon, validates the unquestionable religious character of A.A. It also renders useless and misleading the nebulous descriptions of A.A. as “spiritual.” If, then, you want to know what Bill Wilson meant when he said that nobody invented A.A., that all of its ideas were borrowed, and that its primary sources were religion, medicine, and experience, you need to know what few AAs of a decade ago knew anything at all about. That is the nature and facts concerning the Oxford Group. You don’t engage in such a study to link

or restore A.A. to the Oxford Group in the yesteryear or today. You study it to get the facts correct and better to understand the A.A. program as Bill Wilson fashioned it in 1939, primarily from the thoughts, teachings, and language of Oxford Group leader Rev. Samuel M. Shoemaker, Jr.

Titles that Specifically Point out the A.A. ideas taken from the Oxford Group: Until recently, my own research produced virtually the only complete discussion of the materials published about the Oxford Group-A.A. link and source. Then, as my bibliographies began to be published, more people acquired Oxford Group books, read my titles, and made some observations on their own. The difficulty with their renditions is that they are only partial clearly omit examination of the words and writings of the Oxford Group leaders of the 1920's and early 1930's. By contrast, I not only studied thousands and thousands of pages of Oxford Group evidence, I also submitted my materials to a large number of the Oxford Group leaders of its formative years and also to a large number of early A.A. pioneers who knew the Oxford Group situation backwards and forwards. Their names are specifically listed in my various titles on the Group. And I know from their comments and approving endorsements that my own materials provide the best picture of any available. The titles are these: Dick B., *The Oxford Group and Alcoholics Anonymous*; Anne Smith's *Journal, 1933-1939*; *New Light on Alcoholism: God, Sam Shoemaker, and A.A.*; *Good Morning: Quiet Time, Morning Watch, Meditation, and Early A.A.*; *Utilizing Early A.A.'s Spiritual Roots Today*; *The Akron Genesis of Alcoholics Anonymous*; *Turning Point*; *That Amazing Grace*; and *Twelve Steps for You*. And if you want to be one of those who really understands the history of A.A., the Oxford Group impact on its ideas; and the very language of its Big Book and Steps, the foregoing are the books for you. Granted, they are large in number, but so are the Oxford Group books, materials, communications, and time-span from Oxford Group beginnings in about 1918 through 1951 when A.A. noticeably abandoned its Oxford Group identification, history, and attributions. They were, in fact, replaced by ridicule, minimization, distortion, and a vacuum of history.

The Twenty Eight Oxford Group Ideas That Impacted on A.A. and the Twelve Steps
I do not intend to repeat the extensive discussion of the Oxford Group's impact ideas as detailed in my title *The Oxford Group and Alcoholics Anonymous*. But I do wish to summarize them because most present-day discussions of the Oxford Group/A.A. connection don't describe enough of the Oxford Group ideas to clarify the Oxford Group in practice or the full backdrop of A.A. ideas that came therefrom. First, I'll give some illustrations of vitally important Oxford Group ideas that were utilized by A.A. pioneers, gradually obscured by the Oxford Group as it exists today, and ultimately treated by current A.A. literature as if they never existed in the program: (1) Yahweh, the Creator. (2) Jesus Christ. (3) The Bible. (5) The Five C's – Confidence, Confession, Conviction, Conversion, and Continuance. (6) Soul Surgery – the process of eliminating sin. (7) Sin – anything that blocks you from God or another. (8) The Four Absolutes – Honesty, Purity, Unselfishness, and Love. (9) Surrender – the full and complete giving of your life to the Creator for His direction. (10) Obedience of the Creator's will as the organ of spiritual knowledge. (11) Loyalty. (12) Teamwork. (13) The varieties of prayer – intercessory, forgiveness, guidance, healing, thanksgiving. (14) Self-examination in terms of the Four

Absolutes. (15) Fellowship. (16) Witnessing. (17) Spiritual Experience. (18) The message that God has done for you what you could not do for yourself. (19) The Spiritual Principles of living as identified in the Ten Commandments, the two Great Commandments, 1 Corinthians 13, the Book of James, and the sermon on the mount. (20) God has a plan, and man's chief duty is to fit his life into God's plan.

The twenty-eight ideas include the foregoing and more. Yet many new AAs and their official historians have missed the boat. Here's some of the vital historical resources they ignored. In 1919, *Soul Surgery* was written to define the personal evangelism techniques involved in the Five C's. At Sam Shoemaker's request, Rev. Sherwood Day wrote *The Principles of the Group*, pointing out 7 ideas that were *the* principles of the Group and came from the Bible. Shortly, Harold Begbie's *Life-Changers* described the actual practices of the Groups and some of the leaders in that work. Rev. Julian Thornton-Duesbury wrote *Sharing* to define the Bible sources and the actual practice of Oxford Group "sharing for confession" and "sharing for witness." Sam Shoemaker's first significant title was *Realizing Religion* and, step by step, laid out the need for finding God, the process of being born again, the process of surrender, the Four Absolutes, the Five C's, Witness, and Fellowship. Sam also wrote *Children of the Second Birth* to show how lay people found God as they understood Him and to demonstrate the necessity for Jesus Christ as the Way. About 1927, Eleanor Forde wrote *The Guidance of God* which became a "must" for understanding the Oxford Group idea of "guidance." And Rev. Howard Rose wrote the little pamphlet "*Quiet Time*" to document the Bible sources for the Quiet Time practices of accepting Christ, Bible study, prayer, self-examination, confession, and witness. Frank Buchman had long before been taught and adopted the "Four Standards" of Jesus. Dr. Robert E. Speer had presented those four in *The Principles of Jesus*. Though still often called the "standards" by Oxford Group pioneers, they became popularized, expanded, called the "absolutes," then explained in full by Buchman's spiritual mentor, Professor Henry B. Wright of Yale in *The Will of God and a Man's Lifework*. These, then, were the foundational works I put together piece by piece for the twenty-eight principles that impacted on A.A. They were fleshed out with the many other life-changing stories of the Oxford Group that had followed at slightly later dates – *Russell's For Sinners Only*, Shoemaker's *Twice-Born Ministers*, Begbie's *More Twice Born Men*, Foot's *Life Began Yesterday*, Kitchen's *I Was a Pagan*, and others by Amelia Reynolds, Olive Jones, Charles Clapp, Jr., Roger Hicks, Ebenezer Macmillan, Cecil Rose, and still others, particularly activists in Great Britain.

The Finds of the Last Decade have Shown us a Live, Lively, Loving, Serving Group of People Who Had Their Troubles, Surrendered to the Almighty, Endeavored to Change Their Lives in Obedience to His Will, adopted the Way Spelled out by the Bible and Christ

Today I have received, read, and mostly passed along to The Wilson House Library and to Dr. Bob's Episcopal Church in Akron thousands of writings by and about the Oxford Group. One by one almost all the early leaders and supporters have written and themselves published their stories. Contrary to the dire descriptions of critics, the stories are not about a cult. They are not about a strange new religion. They are not particularly

about Frank Buchman. They are not about “public confessions” or “key men” or impossible-to-attain “absolute” standards or some particular sect or denomination. For the writers include bishops, scholars, statesmen, union members, business people, wives, clergy, and others. They come from the Episcopal, Methodist, Presbyterian, Dutch Reformed, Congregational, Lutheran, and other Protestant faiths. In fact, as has occurred in so many long-standing movements such as the YMCA and Salvation Army, the “Oxford Group” people of today have altered their objectives, their beliefs, and their activities. They have also embraced the Jewish Rabbi of London, the Dalai Lama, Franz Cardinal Koenig, Ghandi, and many of faiths from Japan and Third World Countries. They seldom, if ever, talk about Buchman, Shoemaker, Jesus, the Bible, the Four Absolutes, the Five C’s, Sharing, Fellowship, or Witness. The language focuses more toward “forgiveness” and “reconciliation” without sectarian creeds or entanglements.

However, there have emerged very recently for research—yours and mine--three major historical finds that provide much information about the Oxford Group of the early A.A. era.

The Akron Newspaper Articles of the early 1930’s: These, in bulk and in full, are materials gathered by another person but forwarded to me by T. Willard Hunter. Willard, now in his 80’s, has been a great friend of mine, a friend of A.A., author, orator, and columnist, who worked for and with both Frank Buchman and Sam Shoemaker. His materials consist of a large portfolio of news articles and photos of the famed Oxford Group/Firestone events of the early 1930’s which had so much to do with A.A.’s beginnings in Akron. The facts are discussed in my title *The Akron Genesis of Alcoholics Anonymous*. Also, I traveled to Akron myself to view most of the articles—some in the newspaper copies at Akron University, and some at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Akron. But the articles and photos themselves tell in glaring headlines and text of Akron and Ohio newspapers about Russell Firestone’s cure of alcoholism, about Bible study and prayer, about the need for Christian principles in society, about the availability of the power of Christ to change lives and solve human problems. They tell of man’s barriers of selfishness, dishonesty, and fear and how these need to be cut out from the soul. And they uniformly attribute deliverance to Almighty God and the work of His son, Jesus Christ. Thanks to several benefactors, I have placed copies at locations where they can be viewed by large numbers of people: The Wilson House where Bill Wilson was born, Stepping Stones (the home of Bill and Lois Wilson), the archives of the Akron Intergroup (with Gail L., the archivist for Founders Day in Akron), Ray G.--the archivist at Dr. Bob’s Home in Akron, Dr. David Lewis for his collections at Brown University, with several concerned historians in Minnesota, Tennessee, Florida, and California, and with the library at Dr. Bob’s church (St. Paul’s) in Akron. The title of the document containing these newspaper materials is *The Oxford Group Comes to Akron: The Formative Events of A.A. in 1933*. Be sure to view this living history for a complete, visual picture of the beginnings of A.A. recovery in the work of the Oxford Group.

The huge, hand-crafted, bound pictorial book about Oxford Group leaders, activities, and history from 1939 to 1946. This book was given to me at Fort Myers Beach in Florida by Mr. and Mrs. (Eleanor Forde) James Draper Newton shortly before

the death of Jim. Its title is *Preview Of A New World: How Frank Buchman Helped His Country Move From Isolation To World Responsibility* ISBN 91-630-2969-3. Jim had told me of the book's importance, and I studied it carefully after his death. I discovered it was prepared and first published in Sweden in 1994 by Arthur Strong. Mr. Strong, an Englishman, was a professional photographer who worked in the United States and Britain and retired in Sweden. A benefactor enabled me to purchase several copies from Strong and distribute them to many of the sources mentioned above. Interested parties have lodged copies in California libraries; with the President of Ireland, The British Library, Stanford University Libraries, Dr. Franz Cardinal Konig, the Harry S. Truman Library, and the United States Senate Library; and with many others.

The book is a photographic treasure for those who frequently ask, What was the Oxford Group. I have spent years studying this organization. And the book thrusts before me and any reader the biography of Dr. Frank Buchman, the well-known colleagues and friends such as Bunny Austin, Harry Truman, Louis B. Mayer, Kenneth D. Belden, House Speaker Bankhead, Rev. Garrett Stearly, Professor Theophil Spoerri, Willard Hunter, Rev. Ray Purdy, Secretary Lee Vrooman, Thomas Alva Edison, Alan Thornhill, Admiral Byrd, General John Pershing, Senator Owen Brewster, and others. The contents show visually the impact of Buchman, his principles such as the Four Absolutes, and his personal work on world leaders and events. It is richly sprinkled with footnotes and biographical data. It brings to the reader the life and breadth of the movement. There is hardly a name in Oxford Group history that cannot be found in the personalities and events depicted in this work. Seldom in earlier history are the characters available to us for actual viewing as in this case.

The Seven Letters of "A First Century Christian Fellowship."

Piece by piece, an entirely unique set of Oxford Group history treasures began to come my way, long after I had done most of my research. The first piece came from Jim and Ellie Newton and was a "Letter" that caught my attention because it called the Group "A First Century Christian Fellowship." But I gave it little study. Then Willard Hunter sent me a second "Letter" similar to the first and said it had just been discovered and was most valuable. The letters bore numbers that suggested there was a series. And I then contacted George Vondermuhll, Jr., who was a U.S. Oxford Group activist and preserver of many of its books and papers. George vowed to contact someone in England to see about other letters in the series. Sure enough, months later, Anne Evans of Dial House at Whitbourne Nr. Worcester, found the rest. And there were seven. Each was called "The Letter." Each stated it was published under auspices of "A First Century Christian Fellowship." Each bore a date—the dates running from 1927 to 1930. Each contained names and writers well known to me as Oxford Group activists of this era. And I'll take the time to show the value of the letters in that they are written by and for Oxford Group people and describe in simple, articulate terms, what they did in this period just preceding the beginnings of A.A.

Letter 1 (July 27, 1927). It said the letters would contain "articles, sermons, and stories of the changes in individual lives from time." It is expressed a hope that *The Letter* "may indeed prove to be a present day version of the Acts of the Apostles"—a phraseology

specifically noted when early A.A. was investigated for Rockefeller. This letter tells of a three-day House Party at Minnewaska, New York. It said, “The whole party was planned around the Bible Classes of Miss Mary Angevie of the Biblical Seminary in New York. Convinced as we are that “Bible Christianity” is the only kind that can transform life, we have long wanted a House Party where thorough Bible study would be possible. Miss Angevine, one of the most gifted Bible teachers of this country, gave two courses—one in Mark and one in Acts.” It described the daily program as follows: Quiet Time, Bible Class-Mark, Bible Class-Acts, Platform Meeting, Dinner, Afternoon Free, Informal singing, Supper, Meeting for personal witness, Group meetings. “Platform meetings” were led by Oxford Group people such as Sam Shoemaker, Garrett Stearly, Frank Buchman, Ray Purdy, Sherwood Day, and Hanford Twitchell—all later to be met and known by Bill Wilson. The topics were Sin, Confession, Conversion, Guidance, Personal Evangelism, Sermon, The Group, Personal Work Seminar, Stewardship, and Continuance. As can be seen, these items provided the heart of the Five C life-changing ideas that Wilson was to codify in A.A.’s Twelve Steps some 10 years later.

Letter 2 (December 25, 1927). *The Letter* opined that “the main general result of the Minnewaska Houseparty this fall was the conviction that was born that as individuals and groups we need to know our Bible better—that what we stand for is Bible Christianity, and that any individual or movement that would grow must be rooted and grounded in the truths of the Bible.” It also emphasized “learning how better to be used in the winning of individuals to Christ, conscious of the fact that the great vindication of the Message lies in its fruits, and that we ourselves must be constantly growing if people are to be changed. The letter is filled with the work of activists who went abroad, leaders such as Mary Reynolds, Loudon Hamilton, Howard Blake, Horace Lukens, Howard Rose, H. Alexander Smith, and Ray Purdy. There were pitches for the Bible Classes of Miss Mary Angevine and announcements of a number of forthcoming houseparties.

Letter 3 (Easter 1928). This letter focused on “Some Basic Principles.” These included “Fellowship;” “Consecration”—the need for unconditional surrender of the human will to the will of God manifest in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour,” “need for a continuous daily contact with God through the Bible, prayer, and listening for the voice of God’s Holy Spirit;” “Witness”—the guided sharing of self with and for others. Here you can see principles that Sherwood Day spelled out in his “principles of the group” and that Sam Shoemaker spelled out for AAs and their conventions. Note the idea of “continuous daily contact with God through the Bible, prayer and listening in quiet for the voice of the Spirit.”—ideas that Akron adopted and Wilson modified as he eliminated the Bible from the scene. This letter contained many more specifics about work abroad, at Sam Shoemaker’s church, and at houseparties. Shoemaker was holding a training group each Thursday for people interested in personal evangelism. The letter said “the aim of the group was and is two-fold. First, to show the newcomer the fact and the power of a vital experience of Christ, and second to teach how to share intelligently and so spread Christian experience.” The content of a House Party at Northampton was described as opening with a united Quiet Time, a period of Bible study before dinner, talks by Eleanor Forde, “Sin”; John Roots, “Surrender”; Howard Blake, “Christ as the Cure”; Howard

Rose, "Guidance"; F. C. Lawrence, "Stewardship;" and H. E. Nicely, "Continuance." Once again, the ideas that took root in Bill Wilson's Steps can be seen quite clearly. For the first time, the Letter mentioned the availability of the key books by Harold Begbie, Sam Shoemaker, Howard Walter, Donald Carruthers, Frank Buchman, Howard Rose, Eleanor Forde, and Cleveland Hicks.

Letter 4 (August 1928). Perhaps this contains the seeds of the "Group Inventory" that was to arise in A.A. years later. For the issue begins with some heavy group introspection written by A.S. Loudon Hamilton and titled "Some Basic Principles of Christian Work." He covered these points: (1) We need to recapture the genius of fellowship; to learn the art of living and working together. The theme was teamwork. (2) We must recapture the individual emphasis—"Marvel not when I say unto you, Ye must be born again." The importance of the change in an individual life must be understood. The hardest art to learn in the world, I find, is to put aside letters and books as a man comes into the room; be willing to give him your full time and attention; and avoid giving the slightest impression that you are "busy." (3) The principle of a vital life that will unite people of different occupations, of different social standing, or different intellectual accomplishments, and of different churches. (4) Avoiding over-emphasis on the intellectual—"teaches for doctrines the commandments of men." (5) Consecration. "What we are out for is a saint with power." Discipline in daily life—daily prayer, communion, and the Bible, confession of sin, recognition of sin, sharing ourselves sufficiently, reaching for Christ the people we meet in the daily round of life. Surrender—recognizing the difference between doing God's Work and God's Will. Much more on early Oxford Group history and Frank Buchman on the occasion of Buchman's Fiftieth Anniversary. Again, a listing of recommended books—all found in several Dick B. bibliographies.

Letter 5 (Christmas 1928) This letter begins with a report on the famous "South African Adventure" from which the Oxford Group itself derived its new name (as distinguished from the "Groups" and "A First Century Christian Fellowship). Rev. Ebenezer Macmillan emphasized how the young people who went to South Africa highlighted the "moral issue" in life changing. It was called "clear the ground." It meant getting your moral shortcomings out (bringing into the open anything that has injurious effect on your life), confessing it to yourself, to someone you can trust, and to God—a clear precursor of A.A.'s Fifth Step ideas. Macmillan enunciated a cardinal idea that A.A. incorporated in its step process—"in that moment the moral ground is cleared and you are free to meet with God and claim His guidance." He stressed "fellowship" which meant "absolute and continued honesty, first with ourselves and then with other people. We must be willing to share not only our time, our homes, our money, but to take down the mask and to reveal the moral and spiritual struggles of the inward spirit to which we are or have been subject." And you will find very similar language in the spiritual journal kept by A.A.'s Anne Ripley Smith, wife of Dr. Bob.

Then came the testimony of one of the students. He said, "These people were all talking about the power of Christ. . . . I decided to give myself to Christ. Power to do the right, power which made one brave. . . . No longer trying to work for one-self, but striving to do what is right. . . . Religion for the first time in my life is real and vital, no longer a

case of ‘thou shalt not,’ but dynamic: ‘thou shalt do everything that thou canst for the service of God’ Here is a phrase which Bill Wilson modified and inserted in the Big Book itself.

Favorable comments were made about John Roots’s article in the Atlantic Monthly titled “An Apostle to Youth”—detailing Oxford Group work. Also Howard Walter’s “Soul Surgery” which was not only one of the earliest Oxford Group writings but also defined the Five C’s—Confidence, Confession, Conviction, Conversion, and Continuance—which became the heart of A.A.’s Step process from Step Four to Step Twelve. Sam Shoemaker’s brother-in-law Kenaston Twitchell wrote a lengthy article on believing and Guidance of the Holy Spirit. Shoemaker’s assistant-to-be Rev. Jack Smith wrote about several personalities, including Jim Newton and Harvey Firestone—later to figure in early A.A. beginnings. There are comments about Rev. Irving and his wife Julia Harris who were given credit by Bill Wilson for much help on A.A. ideas. There are photos and articles and a list of the important Oxford Group books available at the book stall at Shoemaker’s Calvary House.

Letter 6 (October, 1929) This letter favors its readers with Table of Contents. It contains articles by many of the leaders whose works I researched—people like McGee Baxter, Ted Dorsey, Charles Haines, Sam Shoemaker, Frank Buchman, Sherwood Day, Cleve Hicks, Ray Purdy, John Roots, Hallan Viney, Allan Thornhill, Julian Thornton-Duesbury, Howard Rose, Eleanor Forde, and Garrett Stearly. This letter is a virtual handbook about how to conduct a group. This is important because I receive so many communications from AAs today asking how to conduct an Oxford Group group today. Here are a few of the suggestions in the letter: (1) A long quiet time. (2) Check for guidance as to what to do. (3) Pray about it. (4) Go into any group with faith and trust, and be ready for guidance. (5) Show an interest in each person present. The letter also contains numerous articles by numerous leaders and letters that were exchanged. Thus one can really see what Oxford Group people were talking about in terms of their lives, the Bible, the Group, God, Jesus Christ, loyalty, and teamwork. It is refereshing when you realize that much of the information fed to AAs came through the bitter mouthings of Bill Wilson rather than the voluminous records we have of books, articles, houseparties, journals, meetings, teachings, and correspondence.

The Letter 7 “The South African Adventure: A Miracle Working God Abroad” (April, 1930). There may be other letters, but my information indicates that this is the seventh and last letter that was published by “The Groups” under the name “A First Century Christian Fellowship.” The letter is surfeited with stories by Frank Buchman such as the “Bill Pickle” story. It deals heavily in the surrender to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. The Bishop of the Cathedral of Bloemfontein rendered an article on “God is the End. Jesus is the Way,” pointing out: “Thus when we are in Christ, we are now in a position to realize fellowship with God and man. As regards God, our fellowship takes the form of adoration, worship, and love. As regards man, our fellowship takes the form of service.” The Bishop gives the rudiments of daily quiet time, daily reading of scripture, daily prayer, daily surrender of sins, and sharing. And there must be nearly one hundred articles by rank and file Oxford Group people, telling what they do, what they believe, and how their lives have been changed through acceptance of Christ and establishing

fellowship with God and other believers. Again, I would emphasize that you learn from these early pieces of literature exactly what Rowland Hazard, Ebby Thacher, Bill Wilson, Dr. Bob, Anne Smith, Henrietta Seiberling, and Mr. and Mrs. T. Henry Williams were really reading and seeing and doing. You can learn it from my books. You can learn it from Oxford Group books. You can learn it from scholarly critiques of the Groups. And you can most assuredly get the daily picture from all seven of these letters. For, as my research and writing has unearthed, almost every word and phrase and technique of Bill Wilson's self-fashioned Twelve Step program is taken from the Oxford Group—whatever editing of views that Wilson chose later to add in fending off those who criticized the groups for “Facism,” for “sexual” aberrations, for heretical religious beliefs, and for authoritarianism. Actually, I have found that those who wrote in the yesteryear against the Oxford Group with vehement malice tend to be atheists, Roman Catholic clergy, and later A.A. activists influenced more by adoration of Bill Wilson than real information about the whole subject. Furthermore, these letters seem clearly to be the free-will expressions of highly intelligent people who accept Christ, study the Bible, believe in God, and dedicate their lives to learning and doing God's will and serving God and others. Once more, I disclaim any personal stake in the Oxford Group or belief in its precepts. I have simply discovered in almost fourteen years of research just how much of the Oxford Group of yesteryear can still be found in the Wilson A.A. ideas of today.

END