

[Article 30]

## **Alcoholism—A Cure: The God Factor**

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### **Abe Lincoln, George Washington, and Early A.A.**

For almost all of A.A.'s later years, experts in just about everything but the Bible have been assuring alcoholics and addicts that there is no cure for alcoholism. And I have addressed the topic, with many many quotes from commentators, in my new book, *God and Alcoholism: Our Growing Opportunity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (<http://www.dickb.com/Godandalcoholism.shtml>). In this article, I'll just review with you the remarks of those who know something of the Bible and something of early A.A. and who reject the idea that there is "no cure." Their names and status may surprise you.

#### **Abe Lincoln:**

Let's begin with this remark in 1863 by President Abraham Lincoln:

We have grown in numbers, wealth, and power as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. . . . Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace. Too proud to pray to the God that made us!

#### **George Washington:**

Lincoln was not alone in such reliance. From the prayer journal of our first president George Washington comes the following:

O eternal and everlasting God. . . . Direct my thoughts, words and work, wash away my sins in the immaculate blood of the lamb, and purge my heart by thy holy spirit, from the dross of my natural corruption, that I may with more freedom of mind and liberty of will serve thee, the ever lasting God, in righteousness and holiness this day, and all the days of my life. . . pardon my wanderings, & direct my thoughts unto thyself, the God of my salvation; teach me how to live in thy fear, labor in thy service, and ever to run in the ways of thy commandments. . . daily frame me more & more into the likeness of thy son Jesus Christ.

#### **U.S. Currency and Coins:**

"In God we trust"

#### **And then there was A.A.'s Dr. Bob:**

If you think you are an atheist, an agnostic, a skeptic, or have any other form of intellectual pride which keeps you from accepting what is in this book, I feel sorry for you. . . . Your Heavenly Father will never let you down!

Did early AAs forget what these dudes were saying? Not on their lives!

## **What the Early Crowd were Saying about God**

### **Bill Wilson:**

Bill Wilson wrote in the First Edition of his Big Book:

We never apologize to anyone for depending upon our Creator. . . . All men of faith have courage. They trust their God (p. 81)

In writing about Fitz Mayo, Bill put the following in italicized capital letters:

WHO ARE YOU TO SAY THERE IS NO GOD? (p. 69).

Cleveland A.A. pioneer “Abby” had “challenged” Bill Wilson to tell him about A.A. and “to talk about ‘this cure, this group of rummies’.” Abby told Bill he “wanted to know what this was that worked so many wonders.” In Abby’s own words: “and hanging over the mantel was a picture of Gethsemane and Bill pointed to it and said, ‘There it is’ (Big Book, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., pp. 216-17; Mitch K., *How It Worked*, pp. 138-39). This “picture of Gethsemane” was, of course, a portrayal of Jesus whose transforming power and accomplishments had worked so many signs, miracles, and wonders—as reported in the Bible (e.g. John 20:30; Mark 16:17-20; John 2:11; Acts 2:22, 43).

### **A.A.’s Grapevine:**

The AAs’ medicine is God and God alone. This is their discovery. . . . It is free as air—with this provision: that the patients it cures have to nearly die before they can bring themselves to take it (*Volume II: Best of the Grapevine*, pp. 202-03)

### **Liberty Magazine’s article “Alcoholics and God”:**

Is there hope for habitual drunkards? A cure that borders on the miraculous—and it works!. . . [The article reported in 1939 that AAs will almost always say:] “I don’t care what you call the Somebody Else. We call it God. . . . But the patient can have enough confidence in God—once he has gone through the mystical experience of recognizing God. And upon that principle the Alcoholic Foundation rests” (p. 6).

### **Rev. Harry Emerson Fosdick’s endorsement in “Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age”:**

They [AAs] agree that each man must have his own way of conceiving of God, but of God Himself they are utterly sure” (pp. 322-23).

### **Early A.A.'s Friends among the clergy and religious :**

Rev. Sam Shoemaker: "You need to find God" (Shoemaker, *Realizing Religion*)

Fr. Ed Dowling: "We know AA's Twelve Steps of man toward God" (Fitzgerald, *The Soul of Sponsorship*).

Sr. Ignatia: "The next step [after surrender] is to humbly turn to God. Ask and you shall receive." (Darrah, *Sister Ignatia*)

Dr. Norman Vincent Peale: "I never met anyone who did not think that the 'higher power' of A.A. was God!" (Personal interview with Dick B.)

### **The Big Book on alcohol:**

Remember that we deal with alcohol—cunning, baffling, powerful. Without help it is too much for us. But there is One who has all power—That One is God. May you find Him now!

## **God can Heal the Alcoholic**

### **The Creator:**

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). Is He any less powerful today? Was He any less powerful in 1935 when A.A. was founded?

### **Nothing impossible with Yahweh, the Almighty God:**

". . . With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26). "For with God nothing shall be impossible" (Luke 1:37). Why did A.A.'s Big Book say that probably no "human" power could relieve alcoholics of their plight? Answer in early A.A.: "God can and will."

### **Who healeth all thy diseases:**

"For I am the Lord that healeth thee" (Exodus 15:26). ". . . Who healeth all thy diseases" (Psalm 103:3). Did God write an amendment to the Bible that said: "This alcoholism, that's too tough for me; this "disease" they speak of is just beyond my power?"

### **Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven:**

It is God's will that His children be healed. Early AAs stated clearly the "sermon on the mount" contained the underlying philosophy of A.A. Were their fingers crossed when they spoke of being cured of their alcoholism? Did Matthew 6:10 have an exception that removed alcoholism from God's will.

**But deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever**

When Roman Catholics, Protestants, and other believers say the “Lord’s Prayer” in church, out of church, or in A.A., are they silently excluding the power of God to heal, to cure, to deliver? Not unless they are hypocrites when they say in A.A.: Keep coming back. It works!

### **Pride, “Self-sufficiency,” and Unbelief have offered little to the alcoholic**

Bill Wilson penned some powerful prose that seems to have been shelved in favor of an impotent god who can only worry helplessly as the “incurable” alcoholic self destructs. In his better moments, Wilson said:

First of all, we had to quit playing God. It didn’t work.

Being all powerful, He [God] provided what we needed, if we kept close to Him and performed His work well.

[Alcoholics had] a form of lunacy which only God Almighty could cure (Dick B., *The Good Book and The Big Book*, 2d ed., p. 51).

God had restored his sanity. What is this but a miracle of healing? Yet its elements are simple. Circumstances made him willing to believe. He humbly offered himself to his Maker—then he knew.

We agnostics and atheists were sticking to the idea that self-sufficiency would solve our problems. When others showed us that “God-sufficiency” worked with them, we began to feel like those who had insisted the Wrights would never fly.

When we became alcoholics, crushed by a self-imposed crisis we could not postpone or evade, we had to fearlessly face the proposition that either God is everything or else He is nothing. God either is or He isn’t. What was our choice to be?

T. Henry Williams, in whose home the early AAs met and who led many of their meetings, said this:

Our conception of God makes all the difference in the world as to our attitude toward others. Either we accept the fact that there is a God and put Him on the throne in our lives and community or we deny His existence and climb up and usurp the throne for ourself. (Dick B., *The Akron Genesis of Alcoholics Anonymous*, 2d ed., p. 69).

Then there were those verses in Corinthians which was a book Wilson favored:

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency *is* of God (2 Corinthians 3:5).

And God *is* able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all *things*, may abound to every good work (2 Corinthians 3:8).

### **There was a Cure, said the Pioneers—the power of God**

And I often wonder what unbeliever caused Bill Wilson to change his tune. He wrote in his Big Book that there was no cure—after scribbling pages and pages about the power of God. And he ultimately got far out of harmony with his own beliefs and statements and those of other pioneers and observers of the early A.A. miracles. Here is the real picture, in summary form:

**Dr. Bob:** “Straightaway, Bob called Akron’s City Hospital and asked for the nurse on the receiving ward. He explained that he and a man from New York [Bill Wilson] had a cure for alcoholism” (Dick B., *God and Alcoholism*, p. 59).

**Bill W:** [about A.A. Number Three]: “Bill D. walked out of that hospital a free man never to drink again. A.A.’s Number One Group dates from that very day” (Dick B., *God and Alcoholism*, pp. 59-60); [to Bill D.’s wife]: “Henrietta, the Lord has been so wonderful to me, curing me of this terrible disease, that I just want to keep talking about it and telling people” (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., p. 191); [to T. Henry Williams in 1954]: “it was a form of lunacy which only God Almighty could cure” (Dick B., *The Akron Genesis of Alcoholics Anonymous*, 2d ed., p. 13).

**Bill D:** “That sentence, ‘The Lord has been so wonderful to me curing me of this terrible disease that I just want to keep telling people about it,’ has been a sort of golden text for the A.A. program and for me” (Dick B., *The Golden Text of A.A.*, pp. 9, 55-61).

**Dr. William D. Silkworth** [author of the doctor’s opinion]: specifically told a parishioner of the famous Dr. Norman Vincent Peale that the parishioner/alcoholic named Chuck could be healed by the Great Physician Jesus Christ (Peale, *The Positive Power of Jesus Christ*).

**Pioneer Clarence H. Snyder** [sober in 1938 and sponsored by Dr. Bob] reiterated the early A.A. beliefs of his fellow alkie as to their cure by the “Great Physician” (Mitch K., *How It Worked*, pp. 6, 71, 138, 157, 235)—and the “Great Physician” was a common reference to Jesus Christ.

**Rev. Sam Shoemaker** [whom Wilson called a “co-founder” of A.A.]: “We can all have a share in letting such miracles [as the healing of the little boy] happen, if we link ourselves to the living power of God” (Shoemaker, *By the Power of God*, p. 18).

There are many more references in early A.A. to the cure of alcoholism by the power of God. The article in *Liberty Magazine* of 1939 specifically so states. The Christian healing books in Dr. Bob’s Library so state (Dick B., *God and Alcoholism*, pp. 62-71; *Dr. Bob and His Library*, pp. 35-40, 83-85). The De Kruif article in the *A.A. Grapevine* so states. If so, have we—in the interest of pills and therapy and treatment and incarceration become, as Abraham Lincoln lamented, so “self sufficient” as to have forgotten prayer to the Creator as the first, best cure!