

Hank Parkhurst's Edits

Parkhurst was especially ruthless in editing his own chapter, "To Employers." This he seemed to do willingly, noting at the top of the final blank page in the front of the "Original Working Manuscript" that his first task as editor was "1—Business chapter should be rewritten."⁴⁹ Hank rewrote "To Employers" with a vengeance, changing words and phrases with abandon while constantly making bold deletions of sentences, large parts of some paragraphs, and even the entire section containing the excellent ten point summary at the end of the chapter. This is an unexpected bit of humility from Hank, but perhaps he was trying to set an example for Bill Wilson who was much more reluctant to change anything he had already written.

But the single most important change made to the book during the review process was the addition of four completely new paragraphs that were added to "Bill's Story." These were written out across the first two blank pages of the "Original Working Manuscript" in Hank Parkhurst's distinctive hand, (with a number of abbreviations that are completed below with [bracketed] letters):

Despite the living example of my fr[iend] there rem[ained] in me the vestiges of my old prejudice. The word God still aroused a cert[ain] antip[athy]. When the thought was expressed that there might be a God personal to me this feeling was intensified. I didn't like the idea. I could go for such concept[tions] as Cre[ative] Int[elligence], Universal M[ind] or Spirit of Nature but I resisted the thought of a Czar of the Heavens, however loving His sway might be. I have since talked with scores of men who f[e]lt the same way.

My fr[iend] sug[gested] what then seemed a novel idea. He s[ai]d, "Why d[on't] you choose your own conc[eption] of God?"

That stat[ement] hit me hard. It melted the icy intellectual mountain in whose shad[ow] I had lived and shivered many ye[a]rs. I stood in the sunlight at last.

It was only a matter of being willing to bel[ieve] in a P[owe]r gr[ate]r than myself. Nothing more was req[ui]red of me to make my beginning. I saw that growth could start from that point. Upon a found[ation] of comp[lete] willingness I mite [*sic*] build what I saw in my fr[iend]. Would I ha[ve] it? Of c[ou]rs[e] I w[o]u[l]d!⁵⁰

This entry raises a number of puzzling questions. Did Hank write it on his own? Or are all those abbreviations evidence that he was taking dictation from Bill? Were these words written out (or typed?) beforehand and then transcribed into the "Original Working Manuscript"? The only thing we know with certainty is that the insert was handwritten by Hank Parkhurst and approved by Bill Wilson for inclusion in his story.

While it is always possible this long insert had been previously written out by Bill, the idea of Wilson dictating this text to Hank is much less plausible. It just wasn't

Wilson's style to let a "first pass" go uncorrected (while Parkhurst was always much more confident about his own writing abilities). It is also possible Bill saw this as a necessary addition to correct an important omission from the earlier drafts of his story—perhaps something he had inadvertently left out. But, it should also be noted that this extremely open-ended and as-loose-as-possible approach to the Higher Power certainly sounds like something Hank would insist on adding to the book. However much the writing does not sound like a typical Hank Parkhurst effort, it is exactly the kind of position he had been so forcefully advocating for months.

✕ Besides Parkhurst's strong desire to emphasize just how creative people could be when it came to their conception of a "Power greater than myself," this new text also filled a significant gap in "Bill's Story." As noted earlier, the two earliest versions of his story taken together contained close parallels to eleven of the Twelve Steps, leaving out only the Second Step. This handwritten insertion admirably corrects that omission and may have been added once it was noticed that the all-important Second Step was completely missing from his personal story.

✓ Finally, there is the important question of whether or not this was something Ebby actually said to Bill when he visited him in Brooklyn in November 1934. The general consensus is that "Why don't you choose your own conception of God" is so far beyond the realm of anything preached by the Oxford Group that it is surely a later addition to the story.* To claim this critical part of the message of recovery had simply been forgotten and gone unmentioned up until this point—more than five years after the alleged conversation—strains Bill Wilson's credibility to the breaking point. The new text certainly fits well with the recently written Twelve Steps, but it hardly seems to be something that would have been said by Ebby Thacher in 1934.

✓ But, however historically inaccurate this long addition may be, it is an accurate reflection of the group's more recent experiences working with newcomers. Offering the option of adopting virtually any reasonable concept of God as a starting point of sobriety was something that had worked so successfully that it was deemed worthy of being explicitly included in the book, and this was perhaps the most dramatically effective place to make that point.

The Catholic Church Weighs In

One critically important review of the Multilith copy was made by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of New York. Most of the members of the Cleveland group that regularly drove to Akron on Wednesday nights were Catholics and they were being forbidden by their local priests to attend Oxford Group meetings; it was a clear violation of their membership in the Catholic Church. Nonetheless, they continued to attend the weekly Akron meetings—their sobriety depended on it—even if they did so with some reluctance and trepidation.⁵¹ In those days, Catholics who openly participated in Protestant services could be refused absolution for their sins by their parish priest

* See Bob K.'s *Key Players in AA History*, pp. 148–49 for an interesting discussion of this point and his note that Ebby "had no recollection" of ever saying such a thing at that meeting.