



Our Primary Purpose Forum

The Voice of the Alcoholics Anonymous Minority Opinion

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“The well-heard minority, therefore, is our chief protection against an uninformed, misinformed, hasty or angry majority.” (From Bill’s comments on Concept V “The Right of Appeal.”)

Alcoholics Anonymous at the Crossroads (Part 2)

In November's issue we printed the letter from Royal S. (Past Trustee) to Mr. Leonard V. Harrison (Alcoholic Foundation). The letter written in 1950 referred to a document that was adopted by the Board of Trustees in 1948. Below is that document. Comments will follow and there will be a link to our temporary new home for the on-line OPPF where readers may also post comments.

Dennis M. Co-editor

A STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES GOVERNING THE POLICIES AND ACTIVITIES OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THE ALCOHOLIC FOUNDATION (Adopted by Board of Trustees July meeting 1948)

During the past months the Trustees of the Alcoholic Foundation have made a critical review of problems arising from the phenomenal growth of the A.A. Movement and from the swelling routine activities of the Foundation. In connection with that review the Trustees reached certain conclusions which are set forth below.

Basically the Trustees regard themselves as servants of A.A., first, in performing these secondary tasks which are necessary to support the principal objectives of the individual members of A.A., and secondly, in preserving the stability and integrity of the A.A. Movement. They affirm the aim of the Foundation to limit its organization and activities to the bare essentials required to perform its important but limited duties. The Trustees were also guided by their desire that the Foundation grow as little as possible while the Movement expands boundlessly in its healing mission to all who seek recovery from the ravages of alcohol.

The unanimous conclusion reached by the Trustees is that they can discharge their duties and avoid confusion as to the lines of responsibility affecting the Trustee function and the administrative function in matters of policy and execution by continuing to perform their services as they have heretofore done.

The discussions referred to were likewise fruitful in that they involved a re-examination of first principles, an emergence of a common understanding concerning them and a resolution to adhere to them.

These discussions also indicated that the rapid growth of the A.A. Movement with its attendant problems makes highly desirable a periodic evaluation of ideals and examination of practices lest its spiritual birthright be impaired. The Trustees, therefore, believe it would be of value to older members, and informative to newer members, to set forth at this time the principles which they have reviewed, by which they are guided, and which require repeated reaffirmation; and to restate the function of the Alcoholic Foundation in its relation to the A.A. Movement and its members.

At the outset we must distinguish between the A.A. Movement which is not an organized body and the activities of the Foundation which is an incorporated body dedicated to serving the members of A.A. individually and collectively through its subsidiary facilities.

The Movement is exclusively a spiritual endeavor whose only aim is to attain personal recovery and to carry the message of the way to recovery to others. The Movement is the all-important thing. It is in no sense governed by the Foundation which, in truth, is entirely guided by the Movement.

The Movement is a spiritual entity, comprising in substance the individual members of A.A. and the Groups, in the local activities of which most, but not all, members participate. The precepts of A.A. grew out of experience, the experience of individuals and the experience of Groups. So far, the basic principles of A.A. are reflected, as to personal rehabilitation, in the Twelve Steps to Recovery; as to its relations, in the Twelve Points to Secure Our Future, sometimes called the Twelve Points of Tradition.

The Movement represents a spiritual ideal in process of growth. It can be imperiled by secular problems of money, property and authority. These problems are involved with organization. Development of organizational structure is intimidating to A.A. as a Movement. Organization, therefore, has been and should continue to be kept to a minimum. As the Movement grows the need for Organization diminishes. Most of the problems of relations are coming to be handled by local and regional groups and committees, functioning autonomously, which is as it should be.

The Twelve Points of Tradition developed out of concern for the common welfare of A.A. They are applicable at all levels: individual, group, regional and central. Among other things the Twelve Points reaffirm out of experience that God alone is our ultimate authority; that we have but one primary purpose-- to carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers; that the principle of Anonymity has primarily a spiritual significance -- to practice a truly humble modesty; that A.A. should remain forever non-professional and that only special services in extraordinary circumstances should be paid for; that the least possible organization is required; that all contributions are to be purely voluntary and the accumulation of excess funds discouraged; and that matters of business, policy, money and property should be separated from the spiritual concerns of A.A. to the extent of delegating such affairs to appropriate instrumentality.

The Alcoholic Foundation is such an instrumentality at the national level. The Trustees (Directors) comprise five non-alcoholics and four alcoholics. The Trustees are subordinate to the Movement; they do not initiate activities nor administer them, nor, in the first instance, deal with questions of "medium" gravity. They do have

jurisdiction over matters of large contract and important policy and in all matters they constitute a tribunal of final decision.

The Trustees are primarily custodians of money, policy and tradition. More concretely, they have custody of the funds contributed by Groups and derived from the sale of the book Alcoholics Anonymous and the monthly publication The A.A. Grapevine, although the latter is not yet self-supporting; they maintain a general headquarters office to deal with inquiries from individuals and Groups; they conduct certain necessary business and legal affairs; they endeavor to protect the Movement from objectionable publicity where the problem cannot feasibly be handled at a local level; in general, they strive to safeguard the established tradition and policies derived from the thoughts and experiences of members everywhere.

Again, more concretely, the Trustees feel that they will best safeguard the established tradition of A.A. by seeing to the application of the Twelve Points of Tradition to A.A. activities at their central point, insofar as practicable, in the following respects; compliance in spirit and letter with the principle of Anonymity; rotation in office or position; observance of appropriate standards in compensation of paid workers; limitation of volume and scope of activities at the general headquarters office; and inauguration of a program of gradual decentralization of headquarters activities to the end that the responsibility of "carrying the message" may be gradually assumed by local groups and committees.

Finally, the Trustees feel that in order fully to carry on the duties with which they are charged the independence of the Foundation must be observed in respect of its constituency and its proceedings.

It is the considered judgment of your Trustees that if the A.A. Movement remains unshackled by the fetters of organization and is kept free from the corroding effect of political procedures which stem from over-organization; it will grow in vast numbers and beneficent influence among those who are open to its message.

Document provided by Royal S.
Past Trustee

Comment on article:

This was voted on and accepted by the Board of the Alcoholic Foundation which carries the impression that some group conscience was involved from the members and groups themselves. It would be interesting to see if the vote was unanimous or not and also to see how the Rockefeller people voted on the board.

The entire A.A. movement at the time seemed to place more importance on A.A. as a spiritual entity that today. This is shown with this statement in the document; "The Movement represents a spiritual ideal in process of growth." I really doubt they would even have contemplated a public lawsuit for any reason which is also demonstrated by the group conscience a few years later of an early Conference that Bill wrote about in Warranty Five of the Twelfth Concept.

Another important point is the idea of decentralizing the duties and responsibilities of the Alcoholic Foundation and the NY Headquarters as the A.A. movement grows. They took seriously the notion of lest possible organization possible. What we have today is almost the exact opposite of the vision of the early A.A. members and their Trusted Servants. This feeling is exemplified by this statement;

"As the Movement grows the need for Organization diminishes. Most of the problems of relations are coming to be handled by local and regional groups and committees, functioning autonomously, which is as it should be."

“Local groups and regional committees functioning autonomously” is a far cry from criminal and civil litigation against groups and members functioning autonomously. What they are saying in reality is “you can no longer function autonomously unless you conform to what ‘we’ consider to be your duties. I personally don’t think the excuses offered by our A.A. corporations for litigations, and threats of litigations to members, groups and websites has a basis in anything to do with copyright infringement but rather one of control and conformity. The copyright issues are just a legal tool for control against those A.A. groups that do practice autonomy. Tradition Three states: “Nor ought A.A. membership ever depend upon money or conformity.” The way it is now if the groups don’t conform they will need a lot of money to defend their autonomy in courts.

Dennis M.
OPPF Co-editor

Other Minority Opinion sites:

<http://aamo.info/>

<http://gsowatch.aamo.info/>

Past and issues of OPPF:

<http://www.aamo.info/oppf/>

AA Big Book Study Group:

<http://aabbsg.de/>

AA History:

http://aabbsg.de/chs/history_links.htm

http://silkworth.net/mitchellk/mitchellk_library.html

Anyone can post an article or opinion on a minority opinion issue. Article may be edited if included in a future issue of the newsletter at:

<http://my.aainfo.org/tiki-index.php?page=OPPF+Current>

Or email us and we will send you the edited article for your approval before we include it at:

oppf@aamo.info

Any AA member or AA group may use, copy, distribute any material in the OPPF. But we ask that you respect that this is to be used only within Alcoholics Anonymous.

--Thank You,

--Dennis M. -- OPPF Co-Editor

Come on folks don’t be shy send in you views, comments, and letters.

Contact us at: oppf@aamo.info