

Tradition Two

This article was written by Sydney R., a member of the World Service Board of Trustees, in August 1984. It represents her views at the time of writing.

Our Second Tradition tells us that "For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants, they do not govern."

This is the only tradition in which a specific reference is made to God, and the key to understanding this tradition is in understanding the relationship of our trusted servants and our group conscience to our ultimate authority.

As addicts, with our natural propensity to fulfill our egos first, to lead rather than to follow, to always have the right answers and the last say, we must constantly work to remember that we are only messengers of God's will as it is expressed in our group conscience; we are not the message. We must constantly search our motives to determine whether what we express is for the good of the fellowship as a whole, and not for the gratification of our individual egos or "special interests" within a group, area, region, or committee. Without that awareness, and the willingness to sublimate our own desires to the expression of our ultimate authority, a loving God, the fellowship splinters and divides against itself.

There's a direct relationship between this concept of a group conscience being the expression of the will of a loving God and how trusted servants perceive and perform their duties. Trusted servants should convey and carry the group conscience and ~~not their own wills~~. The groups they represent must place their faith in their trusted servants and believe that the people they choose to serve are guided by the principle of this tradition. When trusted servants

fail in their purpose to carry forth the group conscience and try to govern on self-will, the strength of this tradition is weakened.

The principle of this tradition also applies in reverse. When the group fails to support its trusted servants to carry out their duties, Tradition Two is similarly undermined. We easily understand the accountability that trusted servants have to the fellowship; it is equally important to understand the concept of the fellowship's accountability to its trusted servants. A trusted servant must be given the respect and authority to exercise the group will in accordance with his or her understanding of the group conscience.

I would like to share an example to illustrate the difference between "group conscience" and "group will" and how easy it is to confuse and violate this tradition when our ultimate authority is not recognized as an integral part of it.

The activities committee of a certain area raised a great deal of money through one of its functions. With what they believed were good intentions, the members of this committee took a "group conscience" to send a portion of the money raised directly to the WSC, bypassing both the area and region they directly served.

Their rationale was that their region had not donated funds to the WSC with any regularity and in fact had barely been able to maintain a prudent reserve to carry out its own business. The committee, frustrated by this state of affairs, justified its decision by asserting that they were the only body who contributed rather than depleted donations, and that in this way they could make certain "their" donation would be filtered up.

At the next area business meeting, the committee confidently presented its financial report and plans for distribution, certain they would be met with praise. Instead, they were confronted by immediate dissension. The area responded by telling the committee it had not only acted autonomously, but had overstepped its authority, ~~lacking the faith to allow either the area or regional representatives to~~ carry out their responsibilities as trusted servants. The meeting ended in chaos and conflict, with hurt and resentments on both sides.

At the next activities committee meeting, after much discussion between individual members, it was finally agreed to conform to the guidelines of the area and unconditionally turn over all donations in the accepted fund flow manner. Although they didn't realize it at the time, the group opinion of the committee had turned and was surrendered to the ultimate authority, a loving God as He was expressed in a group conscience.

A few months later, that conscience was reflected in the group purpose of the region which, contrary to the committee's fears and far beyond their faith,

made a large contribution to the WSC. Had the committee acted according to its self-righteous opinion and desire to govern rather than to serve, disguised as "group conscience," the donation still would have been sent to the WSC, but the discord and distrust it would have created would not have been worth the contribution. When group conscience was truly expressed, by allowing God to work through the committee, trust and unity were re-established within the area and regional membership.

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