

Tradition 2

Short Form Tradition 2: 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.

Long Form Tradition 2: For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience.

In 1948, there occurred an event that shook us all. It became known that Dr. Bob was suffering from a fatal illness. As nothing else could, this news drove home the hard fact the he and I were almost the sole links between our virtually unknown Trustees and the movement they served. The Trustees always relied heavily upon Dr. Bob and me for advice. They had taken a firm grip on money expenditures, but they necessarily turned to us every time that A.A. policy questions arose. Then, too, the groups of that time did not rely much on the trustees for the management of their service affairs; they were still looking to Dr. Bob and me. So here was a society whose total functioning was still largely dependent upon the credit and the confidence which, for the time being, its founders happened to enjoy.

The fact had to be faced that A.A.'s founders were perishable. When Dr. Bob and I had gone, who would then advise the trustee's; who could link our little-known Board to our thousands of groups? For the first time it was seen that only a representative conference could take the place of Dr. Bob and me. This gap simply had to be filled without delay. Such a dangerous open end in our affairs could not be tolerated. Regardless of trouble or expense, we had to call an A.A. general service conference and deliver our world services into its permanent keeping. It took little imagination to see that future collapse would be the certain penalty if we did not act boldly and decisively. Thus propelled by events, we did take the necessary actions. Now that the conference is in its 2nd decade, we find that our former fears of the troubles a conference might involve were largely groundless. The results of the conference have exceeded our highest expectations. It now stands proven that the A.A. groups can and will take the final responsibility for their world services.

There were other reasons for this basic shift of ultimate responsibility and authority to A.A. as a whole. These reasons centered around Tradition 2, which declares, "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."

Tradition 2, like all the A.A. traditions, is the voice of experience, based upon the trails of thousands of groups in our pioneering time. The main principles of Tradition 2 our crystal clear: the A.A. groups are to be the final authority; their leaders are to be entrusted with delegated responsibilities only.

Tradition 2 had been written in 1945, and our trustees had then authorized its publication. But it was not until 1951 that the first experimental General Service Conference was called to see whether tradition 2 could be successfully applied to A.A. as a whole, including its trustees and founders. It had to be found out whether the A.A. groups, by virtue of this conference, could and would assume the ultimate responsibility for their world service operation. It took five more years for all of us to be convinced that Tradition 2 was for everybody. But at St. Louis in 1955, we knew that our General Service Conference-truly representing the conscience of A.A. worldwide-was going to work and work permanently.

Perhaps many of ours are still vague about the "group conscience" of Alcoholics Anonymous, about what it really is.

Throughout the entire world today we are witnessing the breakdown of "Group Conscience." It is always been the hope of democratic nations that their citizens would always be enlightened enough, moral enough and responsible enough to manage their own affairs through chosen representatives. But in many self governing countries we are now seeing the inroads of ignorance, apathy and power seeking upon democratic systems. Their spiritual resources of right purpose and collective intelligence or waning. Consequently many a land has become so helpless that the only answer is dictatorship.

Happily for us, there seems little prospect of such a calamity in A.A. The life of each individual and of each group is built around our 12 steps and 12 traditions. We very well know that the penalty for extensive disobedience to these principles is death for the individual and dissolution for the group. An even great force for A.A.'s unity is the compelling love that we have for our fellow members and for the principles upon which our lives today our founded.

Therefore we believe that we see in our fellowship a spiritualized society characterized by enough enlightenment, enough responsibility and enough love of man and of God to ensure that our democracy of world service will work under all conditions. We are confident that we can rely upon Tradition 2, our group conscience and its trusted servants. Hence it is with a sense of great security that we old timers have now fully vested in A.A.'s general service conference the authority for giving shape-through the labors of its chosen delegates, trustees, and service workers-to the destiny that we trust God in His wisdom is holding in store for all of us. (Service Manual 6-9).