

June 1946

Trustee Vote Fixes Policy On Gift Funds

By Bill

Discussing this topic in last month's *Grapevine* we made the following observations:

(a) That the use of money in A.A. is a matter of the gravest importance. Where its use ends and its misuse begins is the point we should vigilantly watch.

(b) That A.A. is already committed to a qualified use of money, because we would not think of abolishing our offices, meeting places and clubs simply for the sake of avoiding finances altogether.

(c) That our real problem today consists in setting intelligent and traditional limits upon our use of money, thus keeping its disruptive tendency at the minimum.

(d) That the voluntary contributions or pledges of A.A. members should be our principal, and eventually, our sole support; that this kind of self support would always prevent our clubs and offices from getting out of hand because their funds could readily be cut off whenever they failed to serve us well.

(e) That we have found it generally wise to separately incorporate those special facilities which require much money or management; that an A.A. group is a spiritual entity, not a business concern.

(f) That we must, at all costs, avoid the professionalization of A.A.; that simple 12th Step work is never to be paid for; that A.A.s going into alcohol therapy should never trade on their A.A. connection; that there is not, and never can be, any such thing as an "A.A. therapist."

(g) That A.A. members may, however, be employed by us as full time workers provided they have legitimate duties over and beyond normal 12th Step work. We may, for example, surely engage secretaries, stewards and cooks without making them professional A.A.s.

Continuing now the discussion of professionalism: A.A.s frequently consult local committees or The Alcoholic Foundation saying they have been offered positions in related fields. Hospitals want A.A. nurses and doctors, clinics ask for A.A.s who are social workers, universities ask for A.A.s to work in the field of alcohol education on a non-controversial basis and industry wants us to recommend A.A.s as personnel officers. Can we, acting as individuals, accept such offers? Most of us see no reason why we cannot.

It comes down to this. Have we A.A.s the right to deny society the benefit of

our special knowledge of the alcohol problem? Are we to tell society, even though we might make superior nurses, doctors, social workers or educators in the field of alcohol that we cannot undertake such missions for fear of professionalizing A.A.? That would certainly be far fetched - even ridiculous. Surely no A.A. should be barred from such employment because of his membership with us. He needs only to avoid "A.A. therapy" and any action or word which might hurt A.A. as a whole. Aside from this he ought to be just as employable as the non-alcoholic who would otherwise get the job and perhaps not do it half as well. In fact, I believe we still have a few A.A. bartenders. Though bartending, for obvious reasons is not a specially recommended occupation I have never heard anyone cry out that these few members are professionalizing A.A. on account of their very special knowledge of barrooms!

Years ago we used to think A.A. should have its own hospitals, rest homes and farms. Nowadays we are equally convinced we should have nothing of the sort. Even our clubs, well inside A.A., are somewhat set apart. And in the judgment of practically all, places of hospitalization or rest should be well outside A.A. - and medically supervised.

Hospitalization is most definitely the job of the doctor backed, of course, by private or community aid. It is not a function of A.A. in the sense of management or ownership. Everywhere we cooperate with hospitals. Many afford us special privileges and working arrangements. Some consult us. Others employ A.A. nurses or attendants. Relationships such as these almost always work well. But none of these institutions are known as "A.A. hospitals."

We have also had some experience with farms and drying out places which, though outside A.A. and medically supervised, have nevertheless been managed and financed by A.A. members. Some of these operations have done well, others very badly. And with one or two conspicuous exceptions, the worst possible set-up has been that in which A.A. groups, with group money and management, have gone into the "drying out" business. Despite exceptions, these "A.A. hospitals" seem the least promising of all. The group which takes one on usually finds that it has contracted an unnecessary responsibility and a heart breaking amount of dissension. Being a group project it cannot be "taken or left alone." Either it has to be abandoned or it remains a raw sore on the body politic. These experiments have well demonstrated that the A.A. group will always have to be a spiritual entity, not a business concern. Better do one thing supremely well than two things badly!

Now what about donations or payments to A.A. from outside sources? There was a time, some years ago, when we desperately needed a little outside aid. This we received. And we shall never cease being grateful to those devoted friends whose contributions made possible the Alcoholic Foundation, the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* and our Central Office. Heaven has surely reserved a special place for everyone of them. They met a great need, for in those days we A.A.s were very few and very insolvent!

But times have changed. Alcoholics Anonymous now has more than 24,000 members whose combined earnings this year ought to be many millions. Hence a very powerful feeling is spreading among us that A.A. ought to be self-supporting. Since most members feel they owe their very lives to the movement they think we A.A.s ought to pay its very modest expenses. And isn't it, they ask, high time that we commenced to revise the prevalent idea that an alcoholic is *always* a person who must be helped - usually with money. Let us A.A.s, they say, be givers. We are not helpless now. Neither are we penniless any more. Were it possible to publish tomorrow that every A.A. group had become fully self-supporting, it is probable that nothing could create more good will for us than such a declaration. Let our generous public devote its funds to alcohol research, hospitalization or education. Those fields certainly need money. But

we do not. We are no longer poor. We can, and we should, pay our own way.

Of course, it can hardly be counted an exception to the principle of self-support if a non-alcoholic friend comes to a meeting and drops a dollar in the hat. It is doubtful, too, if we should refuse the relative who sends in his \$5 mite; a token of appreciation for the recovery of someone close. Perhaps we would be ungracious to refuse his gift.

But it is not these small tokens of regard which concern us. It is the large contributions, especially those that may carry future obligations, which should give us pause. Then too, there is evidence that wealthy people are setting aside sums for A.A. in their wills under the impression we could use a great deal of money if we had it. Shouldn't we discourage them? and already there have been a few alarming attempts at the public solicitation of money in the name of Alcoholics Anonymous. Few A.A.s will fail to imagine where such a course could lead us. Every now and then we are offered money from so called "wet" or "dry" sources. Obviously dangerous this. For we must stay out of that ill starred controversy. Now and then the parents of an alcoholic, out of sheer gratitude, wish to donate heavily. Is this wise? Would it be good for the alcoholic himself? Perhaps a wealthy A.A. wishes to make a large gift. Would it be good for him, or for us, if he did so? Might we not feel in his debt and might he not, especially if a newcomer, begin to think he had bought a ticket to that happy

destination, sobriety?

In no case have we ever been able to question the true generosity of these givers. But is it wise to take their gifts? Though there may be rare exceptions, I share the opinion of most older A.A.s that acceptance of large donations from any source is very questionable - almost always a hazardous policy. The struggling club may badly need a friendly gift or loan. Even so, it might be better in the long run to pay as we go. We must never let any immediate advantage, however attractive, blind us to the possibility that we may be creating a disastrous precedent for the future. Strife over money and property has too often wrecked better people than us temperamental alcoholics!

It is with the deepest gratitude and satisfaction that I can now tell you of a recent resolution passed by our general service committee, the Trustees of The Alcoholic Foundation, who are the custodians of our national A.A. funds. As a matter of policy, they have just gone on record that they will decline all gifts carrying the slightest obligation, expressed or implied. And further, that the Alcoholic Foundation will accept no earnings which may be tendered from any commercial source. As many readers know we have been approached of late

by several motion picture concerns about the possibility of an A.A. film. Naturally money has been discussed. But our Trustees, very rightly I think, will take the position that A.A. has nothing to sell; that we all wish to avoid even the suggestion of commerce, and that in any case AA, nationally speaking, is now self-supporting.

To my mind, this is a decision of enormous importance to our future - a very long step in the right direction. When such an attitude about money becomes universal throughout A.A., we shall have finally steered clear of that golden, alluring, but ever treacherous reef called *Materialism*.

IN the years that lie just ahead Alcoholics Anonymous faces a supreme test - the great ordeal of its own prosperity and success. I think it will prove the greatest trial of all. Can we but weather that, the waves of time and circumstance may beat upon us in vain. Our destiny will be secure!