

DISCUSSION OF THE WSC LITERATURE COMM. REPORT

In his report to the Fellowship in November of 1987, the Chairperson of the World Service Conference Literature Committee raises a number of points that would bear further discussion. This is not to say that the Chairperson of the Committee was not making an honest attempt to explain the actions of the Committee. I believe that he was. However, I am not sure that his perceptions suffice. We are each other's eyes and ears. It appears to me that there are a number of points that have very alternate interpretations of validity, appropriateness, need and function. In the following, I hope to present some of these alternative perspectives to facilitate members' discussion prior to further decisions on the fourth edition of our Basic Text.

The first point I would like to address is the source of the motion brought to the WSC that set in place the entire process that brought us the fourth edition. In the Literature Chair's report he states that the motion instructing the WSO to have the Basic Text edited was proposed by the World Literature Committee. The motion apparently was not brought by an RSR. In the traditional N.A. service structure, a motion brought by an RSR would represent the group conscience of that region, or an area or a group. It would not have been created in committee and sent to the WSC without having first been reviewed by the membership. So here we have the apparent beginning of this whole situation - somehow the membership was not involved directly.

Next we move on to the wording of the motion that the World Literature Committee proposed. The problems that this addict finds in the motion are: the nature of the wording, the nature of the process, the nature of the need, the question of Ultimate Authority and the difficulties of having one addict revising our book.

I think it can be clearly seen that the wording of the motion makes a casual interpretation by many addicts difficult. The chances of taking the motion, or parts of the motion, to mean one thing when in fact the intention of the motion is another is clearly a possibility. Again I am not implying that this was intended. I am however saying that this was in fact possible. In the dictionary I was surprised to find that some of these words or usages of these words did not mean what I thought they meant.

I thought of professional as having to do with 'doing something with great skill'. I had not considered that this also meant 'doing something with great skill, for money'. The implication to me now is that we could not do something with great skill, for free. The word 'correct' implies that there is something wrong with our Basic Text, which I question. The word 'gender' I took to have something to do with sexual gender. As it turns out the word apparently refers to structural issues throughout the text. If I had not referred to the word 'gender' in the dictionary, there is no way in the world that I would have guessed at the meaning of the word as it was being used in the motion. The same problem occurs with the words 'grammatical errors'. I would have taken this to be referring to fine tuning of the punctuation and other minor changes such as breaking up run-on sentences into several sentences. As it turns out, again, I was wrong. These words cover a range of possible changes. With those two words alone you have virtually a free hand in restructuring the whole thing. The editor is now empowered to change 'that which does not conform to the prescribed rules of grammar'. Interestingly the word

grammar means, 'the system of word structures and word arrangement of a given language at a given time'.

The editor ultimately decides what the rules of the game are, and no matter what the chosen 'system', it obviously gives the editor a lot of room to move.

The motion also defines the process of revising our Basic Text. For some reason, we the members of Narcotics Anonymous, are entirely excluded from the process. The WSO is the party that is being directed to revise the book. My understanding of our service structure includes a belief that the WSO is not a part of our service structure. The WSO is a corporation. Although the WSO does market our literature and other paraphernalia, the WSO has never been responsible for the writing of our literature. We have. We the members of the Fellowship are the ones who have written and rewritten our literature through and with the assistance of our service committees. I am confused as to why the WSO would be directed to revise our most important piece of literature, bar none.

The question which perhaps should have come first is "What is the need for a revision of our Basic Text." Here we have a book, which has played a major role in saving the lives of tens of thousands of addicts, and it appears that we have become obsessed with changing it. In many other areas of my recovery an old adage applies: 'If it works, don't fix it.' Our Basic Text worked. Worked fine. We had made some changes through the process of group conscience, but they were subtle changes. We as a Fellowship had not demonstrated an overwhelming desire to totally rework the entire book.

The last point that I would like to address regarding that motion is the very idea of having one or several professionals rewriting our Text. No matter how skilled the writers, they are doomed to write from their individual

perspectives. Since the writer is stated in the Chair's report to be a member of our Fellowship, writing alone, it is clear that what we got was one addict's interpretation of Narcotics Anonymous. When he (or she) decided that something needed changing, they changed it. When something seemed like it should not be in the book, it was deleted. Although it would seem on the surface to be good that the editor was a member of our Fellowship - the member is an addict. And an addict alone is in bad company. To empower one addict with the job of revising our Basic Text was not a good idea. Even a small group of addicts would be a problem.

This book was not the result of one addict or a small group in the first, second or third editions, but rather was the result of gathering all of the many perceptions and experiences of the membership of our Fellowship as a whole. Any intent to make changes in the book requires us to follow the same process if we also intend to maintain the quality and validity of the Basic Text. We have been through all this before. An individual (or several) were empowered with the writing of 'It Works' and that was a disaster. How in the world did we end up in this position again?

The next area of concern I would like to discuss is that of the forum in which the motion was proposed and passed. Although I have never attended the World Service Conference, it has been described by a number of those who have attended as a very crazy week. Committees, formal and improvised meet day and night. Members running desperately short on sleep making decisions that affect the Fellowship as a whole. Issue after issue jumping out for consideration and debate. It is easy to see how our trusted servants might not recognize the importance, and potential for problems, inherent in a motion to 'edit' our Basic Text. Even if the motion was presented first in the WSC Agenda, it is easy once again to recognize how it might be thought of as innocent, or ignored altogether.

We have become a Fellowship practically drowning in issues. The Literature Committee itself is an example of that. There are many literature projects in various stages of completion, all under way simultaneously. The Literature Committee has been forced to create a priority list in order to make some sense of it all. There are currently 4 separate books that are either in the process of being assembled or revised, or are waiting in the wings for the initial assembly. Segments of the Fellowship would like to see one or more of these books the priority.

In addition to those four books, we are yet to complete the Approval

version of our service manual, and we are constantly in the process of creating or revising various pamphlets. The only way that any member, or committee, can devote the time required to work on any one of these is to ignore all of the others. It takes a lot of time to work on literature, as any member knows who has done so. There is no way in the world that we can handle the sheer number of projects we are attempting to work on without problems. At the very least (or perhaps most importantly) members with something to offer on one project are unable to offer their input as they are actively working on another project at the same time. It would appear that we need to slow down generally in the area of literature creation and revision.

So it is not surprising that the motion at the WSC '85 or any other motion for that matter, might pass. We simply have too much going on all at once, in many areas of concern, and our ability to evaluate all of this material is limited. The human mind (and certainly this human mind) can only deal with so much, and then it starts to break down into confusion. In an effort to function, I start to block out many of the issues and concerns of our Fellowship, so that I can actually make an offering. We need to recognize and respond to our limitations. We can certainly come up with a thousand issues/proposals/projects/concerns, but I do not think that we can deal with them responsibly as a Fellowship.

In his report to the Fellowship, the Literature Committee Chair addresses at length, conceptual issues that were found in our Basic Text. I wonder why the Literature Review Committee, or the professional editor, felt there was any reason for concepts to be addressed at all. The motion to edit the Text as it was commonly interpreted, did not mention anything having to do with concepts. Why could the edit not have simply cleaned up whatever minor grammatical flaws as appeared to need cleaning up. It is clear that in revising the Basic Text, the editor did change concepts in the book, seemingly out of a lack of understanding of what those concepts were rather than out of any perceived flaw in the original concepts. Who decided that concepts as such were within the realm of the original motion to edit? I do not understand why a minor editing of the material was ruled out, and there was a felt need to address any and every possible problem that could be found in the Text. It seems to me that it was a bit arrogant on the part of someone to assume that they could improve on the concepts that the book already presented, whatever the form. This was a book after all that had played a major role in the recovery of tens of thousands of addicts. Just how flawed could the concepts be? And having decided that the conceptual changes could not be handled without totally rewriting the book, why didn't they simply abandon the project altogether? Why was it that the Fellowship had not felt a need to address these 'conceptual' problems? Is it possible that they were not important?

Regarding one of the specific 'conceptual' problems mentioned in the Literature Chair's report, what kind of 'Tradition problem' was the brevity of Chapter Six? What does that mean? What does the length of any chapter have to do with an edit?

The Chair discusses grammatical errors not being used to justify any of the changes made in the Basic Text. What was used to justify the complete deletion of individual lines from the book? What justification of any kind was used to rearrange paragraphs in the

book? The newcomer ends up in the position of not being able to follow the readings from the Basic Text at the beginning of a discussion, if the material is being read from an earlier edition. Newcomers look up from their fourth editions totally confused. They are unable to locate the paragraph that is being read because it has been moved. Did putting the newcomer in that unenviable position cross anyone's mind when the rearrangement of paragraphs was occurring? It is the newcomer after all who buys the current edition of our Basic Text. The newcomer is the most important person at the meeting, and the book that the newcomer is purchasing is at times completely out of sync with all other editions of our Basic Text.

Communications keeping the Fellowship abreast of developments in the editing of our Basic Text are mentioned in the report. Although, again, I have never attended the WSC, I have been active in service at the personal, group and area levels since 1985 and yet I never read anything in any of our various 'communications' to indicate that the Basic Text was in the process of being radically changed. In the report it is stated that we all knew what was going on. Wrong. Some of the people who are most upset are those who read and reread those 'communications' from the WSO and the WSC. They didn't know what was going on with the fourth edition. I did not know what was going on with the fourth edition. With all of the many and varied issues and efforts and activities that our Fellowship has come to be muddled in, none can be thought of that would more directly affect the members of our Fellowship and yet somehow WE did not understand what was going on.

The rather broad area of 'judgement calls' is mentioned. Who among us, the membership of Narcotics Anonymous, would

think it appropriate for one or several of us to decide which lines, ideas, experience or concepts in the Basic Text third edition revised should not be included in the Basic Text fourth edition? Yet those are 'judgement calls' that were made.

The application of our 12 Traditions is obviously of paramount importance to a project like this. The Literature Chair is right in pointing out that we need to apply our Traditions to our actions. There are however several of our Traditions, the application of which could have saved us much of the pain this entire situation has brought. For instance, I can think of nothing that could have been more disunifying than rewriting our Basic Text, and only seeking input from the membership of Narcotics Anonymous following publication. I truly believe that a loving God had no opportunity to work on this project. He was excluded from the moment that GROUP CONSCIENCE was excluded. We certainly could have used our Ultimate Authority on this one. **No committee should be autonomous in matters affecting N.A. as a whole. In fact no committee should ever be autonomous period.** Yet somehow the Literature Review Committee was. I am yet to find a single addict in our local Fellowship here in Michigan who was involved in the process of editing our Basic Text for the fourth edition. **It was impossible for the rewriters of our Basic Text to demonstrate direct responsibility to the Fellowship without risking a review of the edited text by the Fellowship.** There was no review of the fourth edition until it had been published in its final form and distributed. I am yet to find a single member here in Michigan who had seen a draft of the fourth edition, at any stage of development. The drafters of the original motion to edit the book dragged the Fellowship into a controversy within the Fellowship. Last and most important, what happened to the foundation of all our Traditions. If we are indeed equals in recovery,

why is it that no one asked me what I thought of the changes to my Basic Text? If we are equals how is it that several addicts became the final arbiters of what needed to change, or to be eliminated from our Basic Text? They effectively became the ultimate authority.

The World Service Conference Literature Committee has proposed that we no longer employ professional writers in the creation of our literature, but that we continue to employ professional editors in the revision of our literature. With this experience to guide us, I would think we might want to stop employing professionals of any kind in the creation or revision of our literature. We have to ask ourselves at some point **who we are creating our literature for.** Just how perfect does our literature have to be in order to work? Who is setting the standard? My understanding was that our literature was to serve the addict who still suffers, and the members of Narcotics Anonymous. We are not publishing literature for the general public, or for university addiction courses. All should be welcome to read and use our literature if they should choose, but need we follow their 'prescribed rules of grammar'?

I hope that discussion of the fourth edition continues. A less heated and more reasonable discussion certainly, but also a broader discussion of what it is we are doing with Fellowship literature and other related issues. We apparently are in need of specific guidelines within our service structure that help prevent the unilateral disposition of decision making authority. We need to discuss how our service structure can be made more directly responsible to the Fellowship. **The service structure is in place to serve the membership and our goal, to carry the message to the addict who still suffers. May we better provide the necessary services.**