

A Commonly Unspoken Group Conscience

by Gary N.

Who was Richmond Walker? Who was Ed Webster? Who was Bill Pittman? Do any of these names ring a bell or have anything to do with Alcoholics Anonymous?

All three were prominent authors of AA books and “good AAs” while they lived. But if I were to walk into an Atlanta AA meeting, or for that matter, most any AA meeting throughout the country, a safe bet would be that few attending the meeting ever heard of them.

Richmond Walker wrote the first AA daily reminder book titled *Twenty Four Hours A Day* between 1946 and 1948, which he published himself anonymously for some time until the book became published by a then rather obscure treatment center in Minnesota that today is not obscure. In terms of volumes sold, Walker may be second only to Bill Wilson in published books relating to AA. Over 10 million of these books have been sold. Yet, few AAs today remember Richmond Walker, and reading from his book during a meeting may cause an uproar.

Ed Webster was a primary author of *The Little Red Book* written anonymously in 1946. It served as being second to the Big Book at many AA meetings and had been endorsed by Dr. Bob. Of this book, in 1950 Bill Wilson wrote: “*The Little Red Book* does fill a definite need and has wide circulation. Therefore, its usefulness is unquestioned. AA has a definite place for such a book. Someday I may try to write an introduction book myself which I hope might complement favorably with *The Little Red Book*. Here at the Foundation we are not policemen; we're a service, and AAs are free to read any book they choose.” A few years later, Bill Wilson published *The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, which he intended to “complement favorably with *The Little Red Book*,” not replace it. But today, it has been replaced at almost all AA meetings, and almost no one has heard of Ed Webster.

Bill Pittman, who died in 2007, wrote *Stepping Stones To Recovery* in 1988, which is a wonderful collection of local AA literature collected from intergroups and central offices throughout the country. What does the GSO write about the use of locally written AA literature at regularly scheduled AA meetings? “Central offices and intergroups do write and distribute pamphlets or booklets that are not Conference approved. If such pieces meet the needs of the local membership, they may be legitimately classified as ‘A.A. literature.’ There is no conflict between A.A. World Services, Inc. (A.A.W.S.—publishers of Conference approved literature) and central offices or intergroups—rather they complement each other. The Conference does not disapprove of such material” [underline in original]. When was the last time you attended an AA meeting that discussed a piece of literature created by an intergroup or central office? Who has heard of Bill Pittman?

How did the AA fellowship arrive today at a place that so often the commonly accepted, but unspoken, group conscience reasons that only Conference approved literature can be used at AA meetings? Worse, in a fellowship that is intended to practice “love and tolerance of others is our code,” would someone interrupt a discussion leader to stop them from sharing a piece of literature written by a drunk that wasn't Conference approved? The wishes of the group conscience aren't often stated on Conference approved literature before a discussion meeting begins. Many will automatically assume

such an interruption is mandatory. We sometimes remark there aren't any "AA policemen." Really? Try to read from a non-Conference approved piece of literature during a meeting. They'll find you! Not only will they find you, probably they'll try to shut you up and they'll feel entirely justified in doing so because of a commonly unspoken group conscience.

Please reference the Hindsfoot Foundation article on Conference approved literature for a solid explanation of how much of the AA fellowship has arrived at such a place that, it can safely be asserted, Bill Wilson or Dr. Robert Smith never would have imagined or recommended. How unfortunate today's unspoken group conscience can be (an unspoken group conscience is really an "un-conscience."). It tends to bury the written words of good AAs by effectively banning their literature from being discussed at AA meetings, and as a consequence, healthy messages concerning recovery may be prohibited and censored. But that won't stop the AA policemen from claiming an open mind if they're part of a step study.

In 1965, Bill Wilson spoke these words at the International at Toronto: "Simply because we have convictions that work very well for us, it becomes very easy to assume that we have all the truth. Whenever this brand of arrogance develops, we are certain to become aggressive, we demand agreement with us, we play God. This isn't good dogma; it's very bad dogma. It could be especially destructive for us of AA to indulge in this sort of thing."

This is NOT to assert that just anything should be read at an AA meeting. Tradition Four more than adequately provides the guidance and wisdom on the matter, for each group is autonomous and may read what helps them recover according to their group conscience. If only Conference approved literature should be read at your meeting, please say so! What is specifically addressed here: when the group conscience is NOT stated on literature at the beginning of a meeting, many in AA today seem prone to following a commonly unspoken group conscience that unfortunately risks resembling a "brand of arrogance."

Please address this issue at an upcoming group conscience, if you haven't recently. There may be books in common among your home group members that literally might break through a newcomer's fog, or provide refreshing insight for the long-timer. "We realize we only know only a little." In any case, please take steps to ensure that any potential AA policemen at your meetings be advised: censoring non-Conference approved literature through a commonly unspoken group conscience is "very bad dogma" that can be "especially destructive." Understand and accept this: the GSO does NOT disapprove of such discussions. If you interrupt such a discussion without the group conscience being clear, please be aware that you don't have the support of what our founders intended nor what our GSO recommends in writing.

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