

First Pre-conference Assembly
March 9, 2024
Topic 2

2) How Should We Treat the Writings of A.A.'s Founders?

February 7, 2024 Letter from the G.S.O. of Alcoholics Anonymous

A TENTH STEP FROM THE TRUSTEES ' LITERATURE COMMITTEE

We appreciate and thank all who took the time to discuss the “proposed” questions and provided sharing. However, we realize that for the vast majority, our correspondence was unclear as to its intent and that caused confusion. We apologize for this confusion.

The November 13, 2023, correspondence enclosing “proposed” questions was not intended to be a “survey.” Instead, we hoped the questions would spark discussions at the local level. And that the local sharing would be provided to the Area Delegates.

However, in a subsequent meeting with the delegates, it was stated that the sharing could be forwarded to the General Service Office. As a result, many in the Fellowship sent us individual letters relating their viewpoints on the matter.

We realize now that this invitation confused matters and inadvertently circumvented the Conference process wherein the Area Delegates bring to the Conference the sense of their respective Areas.

We have gathered the sharing received and will provide this sharing to the regional trustees who will in turn distribute to the Delegates in their Region. You may be interested to know that there is a sharing session planned for this year's General Service Conference on this very topic “ –How Should We Treat Writings by A.A.'s Founders.” To be clear, this is just a sharing session – not a voting or policy making discussion.

While we admittedly missed the mark with the November 13 correspondence, one silver lining is that members are discussing this important subject. We hope you continue to discuss in your local areas and connect with your Area Delegate. For more information about the Conference process and how we work together “to help the alcoholic who still suffers,” you may want to access the pamphlet “Circles of Love and Service” <https://www.aa.org/circles-love-and-service>.

With gratitude for your service and participation.

The Trustees' Literature Committee (2023-2024)

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Why this Letter?

On November 13, 2023, the Board's Literature Committee asked that questions be submitted to AA members regarding the Founders' writings, and that these questions would be submitted to Area Assemblies to generate discussion among members and groups.

The results of these discussions were then to be forwarded to the delegates for submission to the General Service Office. None of this happened. Not in Area 87 nor in the 92 other areas of the Conference. That's why we received a letter on February 7, 2024 (quoted above) expressing a sincere desire to make amends on the part of the Board Committee on Literature for the communication of November 13, 2023, which was unclear as to its intent, leading, in the Council Committee's view, to confusion. The Committee wished to express its regret for this misunderstanding.

Instead, many members forwarded individual letters to share their views on the question of the founders' writings.

For my part, I only became aware of this request on December 6, 2023. For lack of information and in my eagerness to respond as quickly as possible to the request of the Board's Literature Committee, I took the initiative, with the advice of some members in the area, to write a general opinion on the subject, which I sent to the Conference Literature Committee on December 20, 2023 in all 3 languages. Here are the contents of this opinion:

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Question 1. Do you think that A.A. Founders would object to or embrace revisions to their writings? If yes, why? If not, why?

Answer: We have no idea. We can't assume anything. The Big Book is a collective work for which Bill was the referee, and 400 people were asked by him to give their comments before sending the final manuscript to the printer.

Question 2. Do you think the Founders' writings are effective in reaching new members? If not, what measures do you think can be taken to resolve this issue?

Answer: It takes at least two alcoholics to form an Alcoholics Anonymous group. It's suggested that you don't try it alone. Reading the Big Book alone? Two heads are better than one. That's why we recommend reading it with your sponsor, or with someone who has been through the experience.

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Also, the essay "Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions" is simply part of our history. Trying to amend the text is historical revisionism, an unhealthy fad these days.

The writings of our Founders may be in our rear-view mirror, but they are still, and perhaps even more, relevant than ever.

Membership is stagnating, if not declining, and it's not the fault of our founders' writings. Sometimes, I wonder if we act like AA bureaucrats, not the hands-on people our founders were. It would be nice to stick to the basics rather than looking for problems where there are none.

Question 3. What reasons would you consider for changing our Founders' writings?

Answer: There are none. All the writings of our founders are simply part of our history, our collective memory.

Question 4. How do you feel about changing A.A. Founders' writings to replace outdated references?

Answer: To think, as some do, that this tiny discontented minority will grow and become the norm, is nothing short of cynical and delusional.

Question 5. What suggestions do you have for preserving the Founders' writings, along with keeping pace with our current A.A. Society and its future?

Answer : See the current Conference Bylaws at item 3: But no change in Article 12 of the Charter or in the Twelve Traditions of A.A. or in the Twelve Steps of A.A. **may be made with less than the written consent of three-quarters of the A.A. groups**, as described in the Resolution adopted by the 1955 Conference and Convention.

The same principle should apply to the writings of our founders, that is, **may be made with less than the written consent of three-quarters of the A.A. groups.**

Question 6. Should there be a special Conference process for approval of changes to our Founders' writings? (e.g., super, or qualified majority – 75%, and/or 2-year consideration process.)

Answer: No. We can't change anything except **may be made with less than the written consent of three-quarters of the A.A. groups.** A motion or a floor action to this effect should be taken at the next Conference in April 2024.

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Question 7. What additional ideas, thoughts or suggestions can you share about changing or not changing the Founders' writings?

Answer: Footnotes will do just fine.

The question of our founders' writings concerns first and foremost the original texts, i.e. in English. For both French and Spanish speakers, our material is a translation of the original. By definition, a translation is the transposition of a written text from one language to another, conveying the message as faithfully as possible. A translation is therefore an interpretation, a transposition of an original work.

The AA message in French has existed only since March 1963, with the publication of the first French edition of the Big Book. Until the 3rd edition of the French-language Big Book, the task of translating our publications into French was carried out by volunteer French-speaking members. The history of translation in the francophone Fellowship of A.A. has had its ups and downs, culminating in the early 2000s with the G.S.O. take-over of the French translation of our Conference-approved publications. Also, since 2017, the corpus of A.A. literature in French has achieved a very professional quality of interpretation and translation, since it is now entrusted to professionals, A.A.'s "special employees". We now have quality control of the French language, which we are all delighted about. As for Spanish and the 70-plus other languages, I am not familiar with their particular history, but I'd like to think that theirs is not very different from our own.

The original basis of this request was one of the items proposed on the agenda of the 73rd General Service Conference and also, this year, of the 74th GSC, consisted of a motion to end attempts to alter Bill's writings as contained in the book *The Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions* as well as the basic text contained in *Alcoholics Anonymous* (the Big Book).

The current opposition is therefore partially based on on a resolution of the 2002 Conference (52nd Conference) which unanimously recommended that the text of the book *The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* written by Bill Wilson remain as it is, recognizing the Movement's feeling that Bill's writings should be preserved as they were originally published.

19 years later at the 71st General Service Conference (2021), two resolutions called for, among other things, the following changes in the book *The Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions*: resolution 18 concerned changes on page 117 from the phrase "opposite sex" to the word "partner"; resolution 19 concerned changes on page 66, from "No one wants to be angry enough to murder, lustful enough to rape, gluttonous

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enough to ruin his health” to “No one wants to commit the deadly sins of anger, lust or gluttony.”

Suggested items on the agenda of the 73rd General Service Conference called for Bill's writings for The Twelve Steps and The Twelve Traditions to be restored to their original text, also including the reinstatement of the original text of the introduction. We're talking mainly about articles 45, 64, 112, 120, 167, and 184 reproduced below.

In 2024, five other suggested articles expressed the same concerns, namely articles 11, 36, 46, 55, and 84 reproduced below.

Also, in 2024, articles 61, 76, 82 and 102 called not only for the integrity of the texts in The Twelve Steps and The Twelve Traditions to be preserved, but also the integrity of the basic text in the Big Book. These four articles are also reproduced below.

So today, we're asked to redo our homework and ask you, our members, what do you think of all this?

Should we preserve the integrity of our founders' writings?

Should we adapt them to our times?

Or should we simply rewrite them in simple, clear, non-gendered language, etc., as the Conference is about to do with the Big Book, and thus keep the original texts intact, produce a new publication, and in this way keep everyone happy?

What are your ideas, thoughts and suggestions on this subject?

I remind you that this is a matter of sharing on the question "How should we treat the writings of A.A.'s founders?" in preparation for a sharing session at the 74th Conference, and not for a vote or policy-making discussion.

Proposed Agenda Items (PAI) 2023

PAI 45: The 2002 Conference unanimously recommended the Advisory Action that the text in the book, Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, written by Bill Wilson remain as is recognizing the Fellowship's feeling that Bill's writings be retained as originally published. We propose that changes made by the 71st General Service Conference: Advisory Action 18 for changes to page 117 phrase "opposite sex" with the word "partner" Advisory Action 19 changes to page 66, "No one wants to be angry enough to murder, lustful enough to rape, gluttonous enough to ruin his health" with "No one want to commit the deadly sins of anger, lust or gluttony" in the book Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, be returned to their original text. Note: This would include the Introduction be returned to its original text.

PAI 64: That the changes to Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions enacted by the 71st General Service Conference be reversed and the text of Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions return to the form as published prior to the 71st General Service Conference. Specifically: 1. On page 117, return the second full paragraph to the following text: "Nearly every sound human being experiences, at some time in life, a compelling desire to find a mate of the opposite sex with whom the fullest possible union can be made - spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical. This mighty urge is the root of great human accomplishments, a creative energy that deeply influences our lives. God fashioned us in that way. So, our question will be this: How, by Ignorance, compulsion, and sett-will, do we misuse this gift for our own destruction? We A.A. 's cannot pretend to offer full answers to age-old perplexities, but our own experience does provide certain answers that work for us. • Remove the footnote on that page 2. On page 66, return the first tun paragraph to the following text: "Some who feel they have done well may dispute this, so let's try to think it through a little further. Practically everybody wishes to be rid of his most glaring and destructive handicaps. No one wants to be so proud that he is scorned as a braggart, nor so greedy that he is labeled a thief. no one wants to be angry enough to murder, lustful enough to rape, gluttonous enough to ruin his health. No one wants to be agonized by the chronic pam of envy or to be paralyzed by sloth. Of course, most human beings don't suffer these defects al these rock-bottom levels." Remove the footnote on that page. Further, that no changes to the Big Book, Alcoholics Anonymous, as described in the 1997 Conference Action and others, or Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, as described in the 2002 Conference Action be implemented due to the strong sentiment that Bill Wilson's writings remain untouched

PAI 112: We propose that all uses of gendered language in all Alcoholics Anonymous written works use degenderized language, unless discussing an actual specific individual, as well as unless it is in a personal story.

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PAI 120: To maintain unity the text in the book, Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, written by Bill Wilson, remain as is, recognizing the Fellowship's feeling that Bill's writings be retained as originally published. If revisions to pages 117 and 66 have been published they should be restored to the original version of the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions

PAI 167 : Changes to Bill W.'s writing in the book, Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, made in 2021 be returned to the original text: -The change to Page 117, replacing the phrase "opposite sex" with the word "partner" and adding the footnote "This sentence has been updated from the original text to reflect the inclusivity of the Fellowship." be returned to the original text. And -The change to Page 66, replacing "No one wants to be angry enough to murder, lustful enough to rape, gluttonous enough to ruin his health." with "No one wants to commit the deadly sins of anger, lust or gluttony." and adding the footnote "This sentence has been updated from the original text to generalize the possible consequences of extreme emotion." be returned to the original text.

PAI 184: To rescind the changes made to the book Twelve Steps + Twelve Traditions by the 71st GSC so the historical content of Bill's writings can remain with the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Proposed Agenda Items (PAI) 2024

PAI 11: Consider a request to rescind the changes made to the book Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, 12x12, by the 71st GSC so the historical content of Bill's writings can remain with the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous.

PAI 36: That the changes to Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions enacted by the 71st General Service Conference be reversed and the text of Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions return to the form as published prior to the 71st General Service Conference. Specifically: 1. On page 117, return the second full paragraph to the following text: "Nearly every sound human being experiences, at some time in life, a compelling desire to find a mate of the opposite sex with whom the fullest possible union can be made - spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical. This mighty urge is the root of great human accomplishments, a creative energy that deeply influences our lives. God fashioned us in that way. So, our question will be this: How, by ignorance, compulsion, and self-will, do we misuse this gift for our own destruction? We A.A.'s cannot pretend to offer full answers to age-old perplexities, but our own experience does provide certain answers that work for us." Remove the footnote on that page 2. On page 66, return the first full paragraph to the following text: "Some who feel they have done well may dispute this, so let's try to think it through a little further. Practically everybody wishes to be rid of his most glaring and destructive handicaps. No one wants to be so

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proud that he is scorned as a braggart, nor so greedy that he is labeled a thief. no one wants to be angry enough to murder, lustful enough to rape, gluttonous enough to ruin his health. No one wants to be agonized by the chronic pain of envy or to be paralyzed by sloth. Of course, most human beings don't suffer these defects at these rock-bottom levels." Remove the footnote on that page. Further, that no changes to the Big Book, Alcoholics Anonymous, as described in the 1997 Conference Action and others, or Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, as described in the 2002 Conference Action be implemented due to the strong sentiment that Bill Wilson's writings remain untouched.

PAI 46: The 2002 Conference unanimously recommended the Advisory Action that the text in the book, Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, written by Bill Wilson remain as is recognizing the Fellowship's feeling that Bill's writings be retained as originally published. We propose that changes made by the 71st General Service Conference: Advisory Action 18 for changes to page 117 phrase "opposite sex" with the word "partner" Advisory Action 19 changes to page 66, "No one wants to be angry enough to murder, lustful enough to rape, gluttonous enough to ruin his health" with "No one want to commit the deadly sins of anger, lust or gluttony" in the book Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, be returned to their original text. Note: This would include the Introduction be returned to its original text.

PAI 55: The 2002 Conference unanimously recommended the Advisory Action that the text in the book, Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, written by Bill Wilson remain as is recognizing the Fellowship's feeling that Bill's writings be retained as originally published. We propose that changes made by the 71st General Service Conference: Advisory Action 18 for changes to page 117 phrase "opposite sex" with the word "partner" Advisory Action 19 changes to page 66, "No one wants to be angry enough to murder, lustful enough to rape, gluttonous enough to ruin his health" with "No one want to commit the deadly sins of anger, lust or gluttony" in the book Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, be returned to their original text. Note: This would include the Introduction be returned to its original text

PAI 84: The 2002 Conference unanimously recommended the Advisory Action that the text in the book, Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, written by Bill Wilson remain as is recognizing the Fellowship's feeling that Bill's writings be retained as originally published. We propose .that changes made by the 71st General Service Conference: Advisory Action 18 for changes to page 117 phrase "opposite sex" with the word "partner" Advisory Action 19 changes to page 66, "No one wants to be angry enough to murder, lustful enough to rape, gluttonous enough to ruin his health" with "No one want to commit the deadly sins of anger, lust or gluttony" , in the book Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, be returned to their original text. Note: This would include the Introduction be returned to its original text.

Proposed Agenda Items (PAI) 2024 - 12/12 & Big Book

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PAI 61 : Create a new policy regarding Bill W's writings to guide any proposed changes that would include the following guidelines: 1) The first 164 pages of the Big Book, Alcoholics Anonymous, the Preface, the Forewords, "The Doctor's Opinion", "Dr. Bob's Nightmare" and the Appendices remain as is. 2) The text in the book Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, written by Bill Wilson, remain as is.

PAI 76 : Create a new policy regarding Bill W's writings to guide any proposed changes that would include the following guidelines: 1) The first 164 pages of the Big Book, Alcoholics Anonymous, the Preface, the Forewords, "The Doctor's Opinion", "Dr. Bob's Nightmare" and the Appendices remain as written. 2) The text in the book Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, written by Bill W., remain as originally written.

PAI 82 : Going forward, any recommendation (seconded motion) before the General Service Conference (GSC) floor for consideration as an Advisory Action, by either a GSC Committee or floor action, that seeks to: 1) Change or revise the Preface, Forwards, Doctor's Opinion, first 164 pages, Dr Bob's Story or Appendices to the book Alcoholics Anonymous. 2) Change or revise any of the original writings of A.A.'s founders, including but not limited to: Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, AA Comes of Age, and Bill Wilson's essays on the Twelve Concepts. 3) Change or revise the text of the Twelve Steps, or Twelve Traditions, or Twelve Concepts for World Service. 4) Create future translations to Plain English Language of any of the above writings or classes of writings. would be tabled prior to discussion and vote until next year's GSC and in the meantime announced as a "Tabled Recommendation before the GSC floor" as follows: 1) Included in the preliminary conference report given to delegates following the conference 2) Included in the final conference report for that conference 3) Included with conference Proposed Agenda Items (PAIs) distributed to all delegates of the following years conference following which, at the next year's GSC, the recommendation would be un-tabled to allow floor discussion and vote to proceed.

PAI 102 : Create a new policy regarding Bill W's writings to guide any proposed changes that would include the following guidelines: 1) The first 164 pages of the Big Book, Alcoholics Anonymous, the Preface, the Forewords, "The Doctor's Opinion", "Dr. Bob's Nightmare" and the Appendices remain as written. 2) The text in the book Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, written by Bill Wilson, remain as originally written.

Prepared by:

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