

Presentations Lay Groundwork for Next 50 Years

Overview of copyrights of the book

Alcoholics Anonymous

The first presentation/discussion of the 1986 Conference took place on Monday morning. The topic was of vital concern to Conference members in considering A.A.'s future. Shepherd Raimi, general service trustee, moderated the session.¹

Update on A.A.'s copyrights

The copyright on the first edition of the Big Book lapsed in 1967, and the copyright on the new material in the second edition lapsed in 1983—both because of a failure to renew them in a timely fashion. There was a mistaken belief that registering the copyright on the second edition in 1956 served to revive the copyright on the first edition; the misconception continued, with respect to the second edition, when the third edition was copyrighted in 1976.

The news of the copyright loss generated several immediate concerns: What would happen if every major publisher produced its own version of the Big Book in direct competition with A.A.W.S., Inc.? Also, what would happen to A.A.'s unique message of recovery and spiritual growth, as defined in the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*? How might we prevent distortion or even simple erosion of our message without copyright protection?

While still recovering from the first shocking news, the other shoe fell: Initial reports, quickly supported by hard evidence, confirmed that an outfit called C.T.M., Inc., intended to produce replicas of the first edition of *Alcoholics Anonymous* for \$25 a copy. The A.A. General Service Board, the A.A.W.S. board, and G.S.O. took a number of actions demanded by the situation.

First, an intelligent response to C.T.M. was defined. After consulting with our copyright attorneys in Washington, D.C., it became clear that, although the first and second editions of the Big Book were in the public domain, several viable courses of action against C.T.M. were possible involving infringement of our registered trademark, viz., the words "Alcoholics Anonymous," and federal fair-trade statutes, which preclude advertising and packaging a product so that the public confuses it with that of the complainant, in this case, A.A.W.S., Inc. It now appears that C.T.M. did not profit from the venture, that it distributed between 2,000 and 2,500 copies of its product, and that it does not intend to continue in business.

¹ All presentations in this section have been condensed. Copies of the original presentations may be obtained from A.A.W.S., Inc., Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, N.Y. 10163.

But what was to be done about the royalties to Lois Wilson prescribed in a 1963 agreement between Bill and A.A.W.S., Inc.? We and Lois reaffirmed the intent of Bill and the 1963 A.A.W.S. board by negotiating an amendment providing for the continuation of the 1963 agreement as though the copyrights were still valid and guaranteeing that Lois and A.A.W.S., Inc., would each hold the other harmless for the loss of the copyright in 1967.

A.A.W.S., Inc., had to reconsider how to respond to future requests to reprint, translate, adapt, or otherwise use materials contained in the first and second editions of the Big Book. Our counsel strongly urged we continue to consider requests to use Big Book materials but suggested using alternative language when responding.

The interim plan and related actions are as much as could be accomplished in fulfilling our mandate under the "Right of Decision." The essential elements of an overall strategy respecting the loss of the Big Book copyrights will be defined by the 1986 Conference.

Tom Jasper (G.S.O. services director)

Trustees' Literature Committee's survey on Big Book derivatives

Although the impetus behind this consideration of alternate formats of the Big Book is the loss of our copyright, the question of derivatives has been with us for a long time. Conference after Conference has considered this question, but no actions were taken. We seemed to favor no change—having only one version of our Big Book. In many ways, the loss of the Big Book copyright has proved to be a boon: It has led to taking our inventory on our ways of functioning far beyond the intensive inventory we have taken on Conference-approved literature. And, in particular, we have considered the Big Book.

The trustees' Literature Committee spent the past year considering as many of the implications of the copyright loss as they could imagine and actions which might be taken in the event that any one of a number of scenarios occurred. Our major consideration came down to the possibility of alternate formats of the Big Book and the recommendation that we publish a fourth edition, containing enough new material to be copyrightable and clearly designated in a number of ways as the official text of A. A. We felt that one way to preserve the integrity of our message is to provide A.A. members with formats they might want and/or need instead of allowing others to meet these needs. Thus a survey of the delegates was undertaken and, after consultation with them, a survey of random groups. The results are as follows:

Big Book alternate formats

	Delegates	Random groups
Pocket edition Soft-cover, first 11 chapters	25 (2)	44 (1)
with Dr. Bob's story Hard-cover, first 11 chapters	29 (1)	33 (2)
with Dr. Bob's story Deluxe, leather bound	19 (4)	18 (3)
Deluxe, boxed, gift edition of the above	16 (5)	7 (6)
Of the 91 delegates, 70 responded; of the approximately 290 random groups, 44 responded. Although there are still reservations about publishing anything but the Big Book in its present form, there was an impressive willingness to consider other derivatives, many of which could serve needs that the present single format does not serve, e.g., a soft-cover version for prisoners.	21 (3) 14 (7) 15 (6)	15 (4) 8 (5) 18

