

## 1. Greetings

2. I will go quickly through the slide presentation for the Tradition starting with a summary of Bill's essay (from the 12 & 12). Don't worry... if I go too fast, it will be available on my website at [www.onwhatslenderthreads.com](http://www.onwhatslenderthreads.com). My objective will be to hit the highpoints, so that we have plenty of time for discussion.

3. Discussions and questions. Everyone is invited to share anything that they have learned about that Tradition. I get so much knowledge from participants!

# Disclaimers about this workshop

*On What Slender Threads: A.A.'s Twelve Traditions from a Historical Perspective.* No need to purchase the book.

Audios and slides are posted on [www.onwhatslenderthreads.com](http://www.onwhatslenderthreads.com) under “Workshop Resources”

Made possible by General Service Office literature, published research of historians, and wonderful friends in A.A. world-wide.

Any inferences in this study are strictly my own and in no way reflect the opinion of Alcoholics Anonymous

In keeping with the Eleventh and Twelfth Traditions, I try to avoid using the last names of any alcoholics including Bill W. and Dr. Bob.

**We explored Traditions 1, 2, 3 , 4, and 5 – or how A.A. groups relate to each other**

**Unity and common welfare – both rest on the structure of our Society**

**Informed and spiritual decision-making by the group; not by individuals**

**The only requirement for membership [in A.A.] is a desire to stop drinking**

**Without harm to other groups, the group may try for sobriety in any way they “decide” (see Tradition 2)**

**As a spiritual entity, the group’s primary purpose is to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers**

**Proof that alcoholics could recover had been made. But it was by no means sure that such great numbers of erratic people could live and work together with harmony and good effect.**

**Everywhere there arose threatening questions of membership, money, personal relations, public relations, management of groups, clubs and scores of other perplexities. It was out of this vast welter of explosive experience that A.A.'s Twelve Traditions took form . . . .**

**12 & 12, pp. 17 - 18**



## Tradition 6

*An A.A. group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.*

*(Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions., 155.*

**The Original Point (Long Form):** *Our A.A. experience has taught us that:*

Problems of money, property, and authority may easily divert us from our primary spiritual aim. We think, therefore, that any considerable property of genuine use to A.A. should be separately incorporated and managed, thus dividing the material from the spiritual. An A.A. group, as such, should never go into business.

*(Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, 190).*

## The Original Point (Continued):

Secondary aids to A.A., such as clubs or hospitals which require much property or administration, ought to be incorporated and so set apart that, if necessary, they can be freely discarded by the groups. Hence such facilities ought not to use the A.A. name. Their management should be the sole responsibility of those people who financially support them. For clubs, A.A. managers are usually preferred. But hospitals, as well as other places of recuperation, ought to be well outside A.A.—and medically supervised. While an A.A. group may cooperate with anyone, such cooperation ought never to go so far as affiliation or endorsement, actual or implied.

An A.A. group can bind itself to no one.

## Tradition 6 – Bill’s Essay pp. 156 – 160

The moment we saw that we had an answer for alcoholism, it was reasonable (or so it seemed at the time) for us to feel that **we might have the answer to a lot of other things.**

Hospitals didn’t like alcoholics, so we thought we’d build **a hospital chain of our own.**

... we’d **educate the public**

We’d gather up derelicts from skid rows, sort out those who could get well, and make it possible for the rest to live in **a kind of quarantined confinement.**

Maybe these places would **make large sums of money** to carry on our other good works.

## Tradition 6 – Bill’s Essay pp. 156 – 160

rewriting the laws of the land

dark regions of dope addiction and criminality

depressive and paranoid folks; the **deeper the neurosis, the better we’d like it.**

cause laborers and capitalists to love each other

clean up politics

With one arm around the shoulder of religion and the other around the shoulder of medicine, we’d resolve their differences

our Society of Alcoholics Anonymous might prove to be the **spearhead of a new spiritual advance!**

## Tradition 6 – Bill’s Essay pp. 156 – 160

### bankrupt idealists

We are all perfectionists who, **failing perfection**, have gone to the other extreme and settled for the bottle and the blackout.

A.A. hospitals – they all bogged down because you **cannot put an A.A. group into business**

fling at education . . . . **people became confused.**

married to all kinds of enterprises, **some good and some not so good**

**Even in A.A., we found it imperative to remove the A.A. name from clubs and Twelve Step houses.**

**the deep-rooted conviction that in no circumstances could we endorse any related enterprise, no matter how good.**

## Tradition 6 – Bill’s Essay pp. 156 – 160

Some of the great distilling companies proposed to go into the field of alcohol education.

liquor should be enjoyed, not misused; hard drinkers ought to slow down; and problem drinkers—alcoholics—should not drink at all.

If they could find a good public relations man [in Alcoholics Anonymous], why wouldn’t he be ideal? **At first glance, it did look like a good thing.** Then doubt crept in.

use our member’ full name in all its advertising; he was to be described both as its director of publicity and as a member of Alcoholics Anonymous.

not only was an A.A. member to **break his anonymity as a public level**, he was to **link the name Alcoholics Anonymous to this particular educational project** in the minds of millions.

## Tradition 6 – Bill’s Essay pp. 156 – 160

The minute we saw this compromising fact for what it was, **we asked** the [A.A. member] how he felt about it.

Great guns! Of course I can’t take the job!

Nevertheless, **you still have a legal right to take this job.**

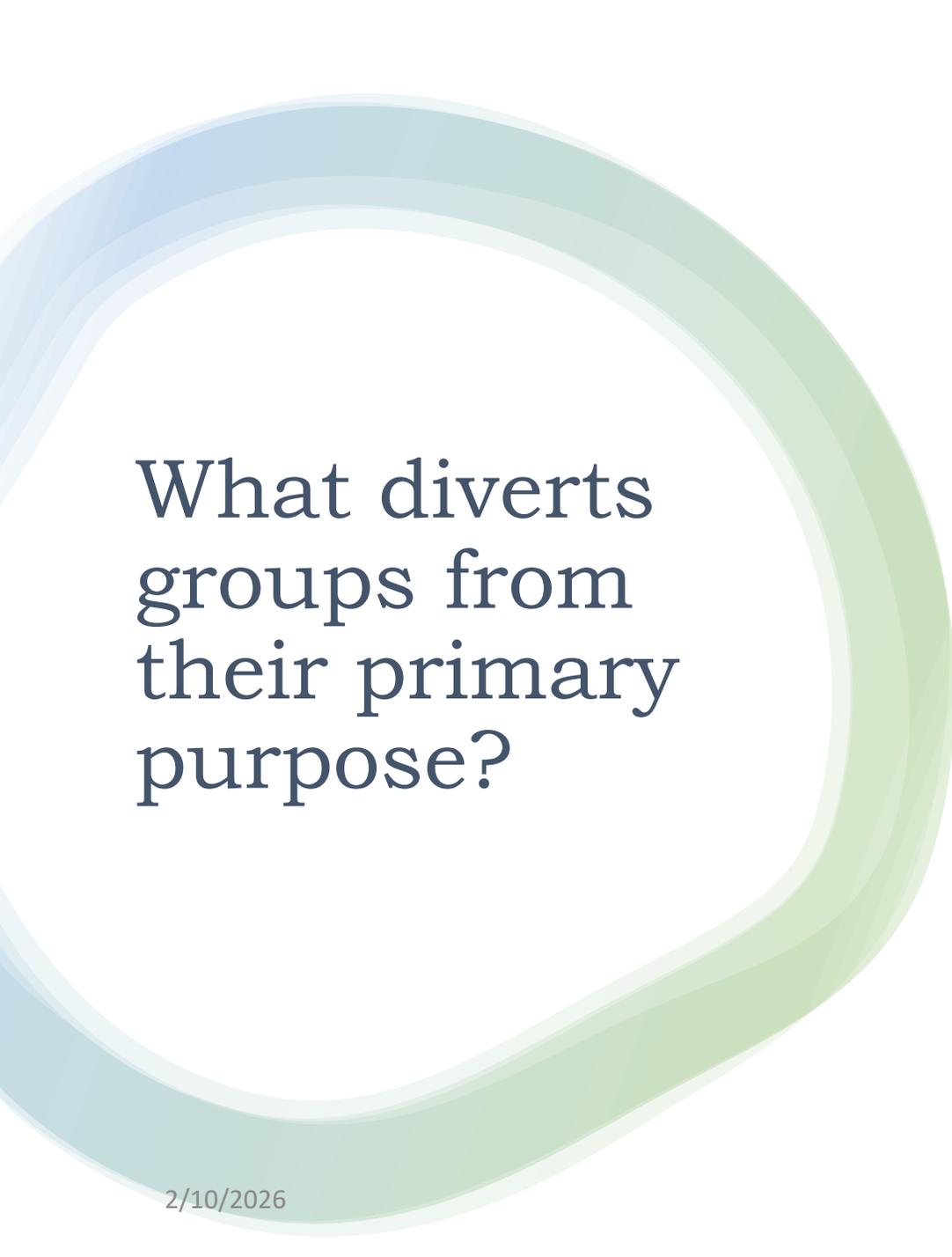
this is **no time for legalities.** Alcoholics Anonymous saved my life, and it comes first. I certainly won’t be the guy to land A.A. in big-time trouble, and this would really do it!

**We saw as never before that we could not lend the A.A. name to any cause other than our own.**

This near-beer is A.A.  
approved!

Really?

Nope!



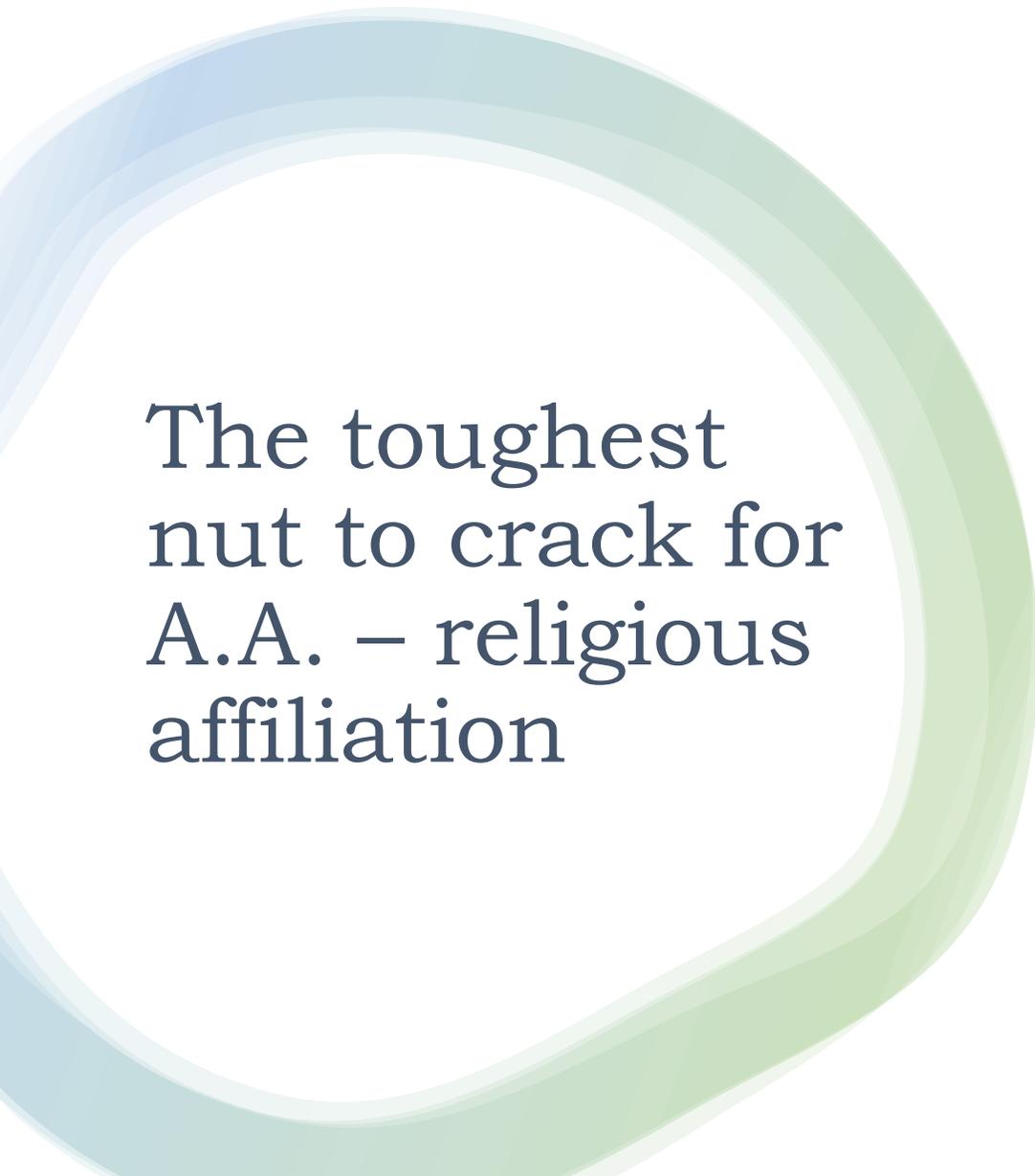
What diverts  
groups from  
their primary  
purpose?

Notice Bill made a particular point to apply non-affiliation

not only to “outside enterprises,”

but also to “related facilities.”

Before we explore A.A.’s “related facility” difficulties, we will examine “outside enterprises,” one of which continues to be problematic – religion in A.A.



## The toughest nut to crack for A.A. – religious affiliation

Bill wrote as if he wanted to have it both ways: non-affiliation with religion and spiritual affiliation with Christianity.

Disconnecting the Oxford Group from A.A.'s origins proved more difficult given its undeniable role in A.A. history.

A connection with the Oxford Group would deter alcoholics associated with other religions, particularly Catholic alcoholics, from getting involved with the new Fellowship.

New York (Bill) had separated long before the book came out.

In Akron, A.A. members were the Oxford Group, or at least many thought they were, until the book came out in 1939.

Then the book and the Fellowship was named ‘Alcoholics Anonymous.’

The older people in Cleveland/Akron realized that A.A. wasn’t any longer an Oxford Group, **but**

“we carried the label as long as the meetings were on at T. Henry William’s house.” *Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers*, 155

Perception about the Fellowship's association with the Oxford Group also came from the outside.

October 1939 American Medical Association (AMA)

“into the acceptance of divine guidance in place of alcohol.”

Dale Carnegie and Oxford movements, thus having “no scientific merit or interest.” (Schaberg, 436)

To make matters worse, the Akron Oxford Group and its alcoholics continued to be rankled with Bill albeit for conflicting reasons.

There was the impression that it was commercial.

There was no mention of the Oxford Group in the book.

The Twelve Steps replaced the four absolutes. *(Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers, 154 - 155.)*

Wait a minute! It was bad that it was a commercial venture, but they didn't get credit for it?

Moreover, in Akron, the very people who put Bill and Bob on their “Fellowship” feet were at odds with each other.

Dr. Bob was in the middle of a rapidly developing maelstrom.

Clarence S. and his hometown alcoholics separated from the Akron group in May 1939 forming in Cleveland the first group named Alcoholics Anonymous.

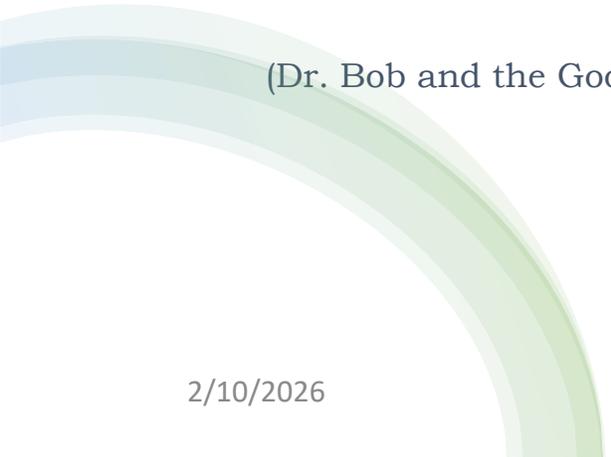
Finally, with mutual hard feelings and sadness, Dr. Bob broke off from the Oxford Group in December 1940 and started A.A. meetings in his own home.

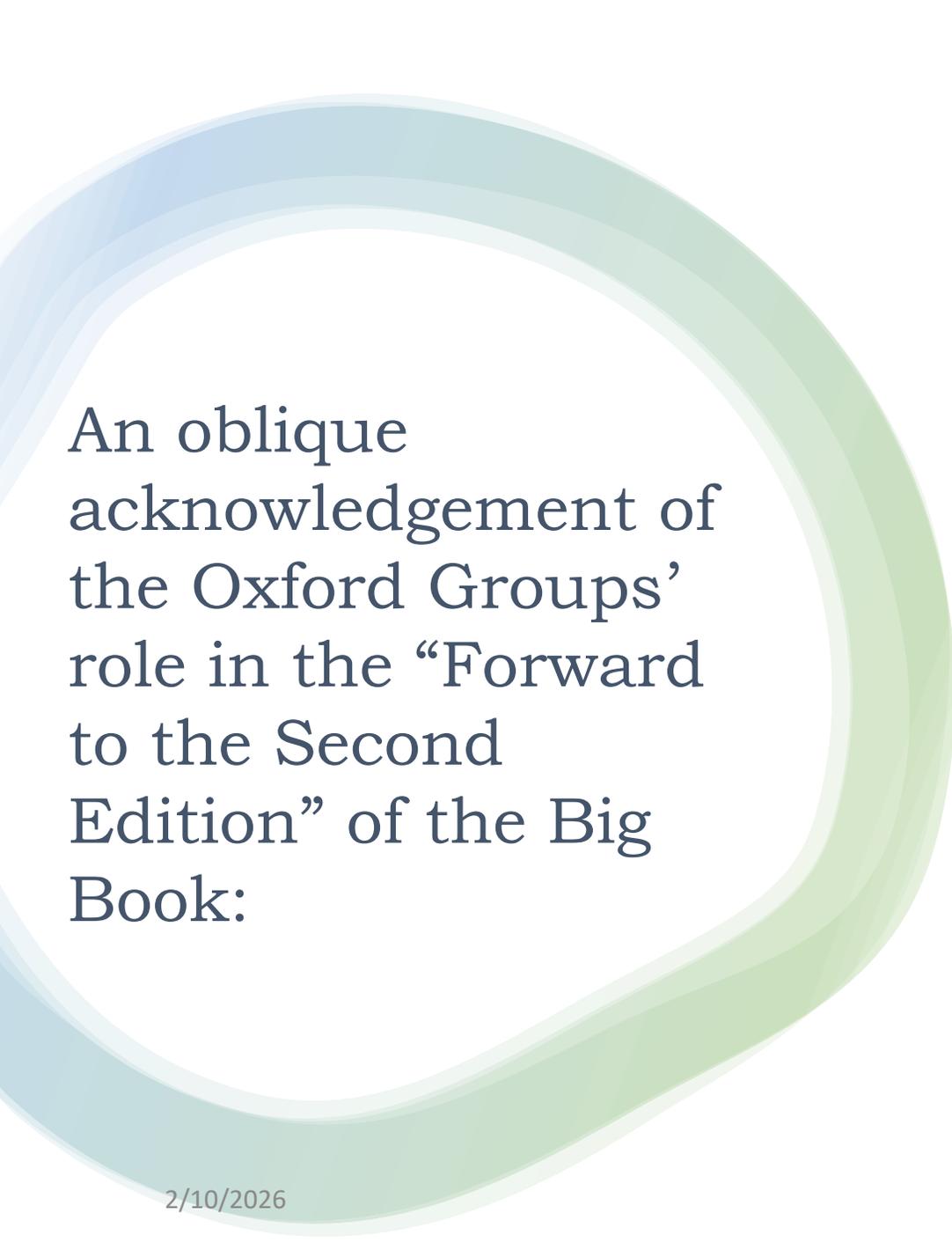


His regrets could not have been too overwhelming as he referred to the event, in a letter to Bill, as finally

“ . . . shaking off the shackles of the Oxford Group.”

(Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers, 218)





An oblique  
acknowledgement of  
the Oxford Groups’  
role in the “Forward  
to the Second  
Edition” of the Big  
Book:

... Six months earlier, the broker had been relieved of his drink obsession by a sudden spiritual experience, following a meeting with an alcoholic friend who had been in contact with the Oxford Groups of that day. . . .

Though he could not accept all the tenets of the Oxford Groups, he was convinced of the need for moral inventory, confession of personality, restitution to those harmed, helpfulness to others, and the necessity of belief in and dependence upon God. (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, xv-xvi)

Bill provided his usual “not a religious organization” disclaimer in the forward to the Second Edition.

And added Appendix V, “The Religious View of A.A.” (572)

Endorsements from a Jesuit priest, Father Ed Dowling;

a testimonial in the Episcopal magazine, *The Living Church*; and

a statement by Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick, an American pastor and central figure in the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy within American Protestantism.

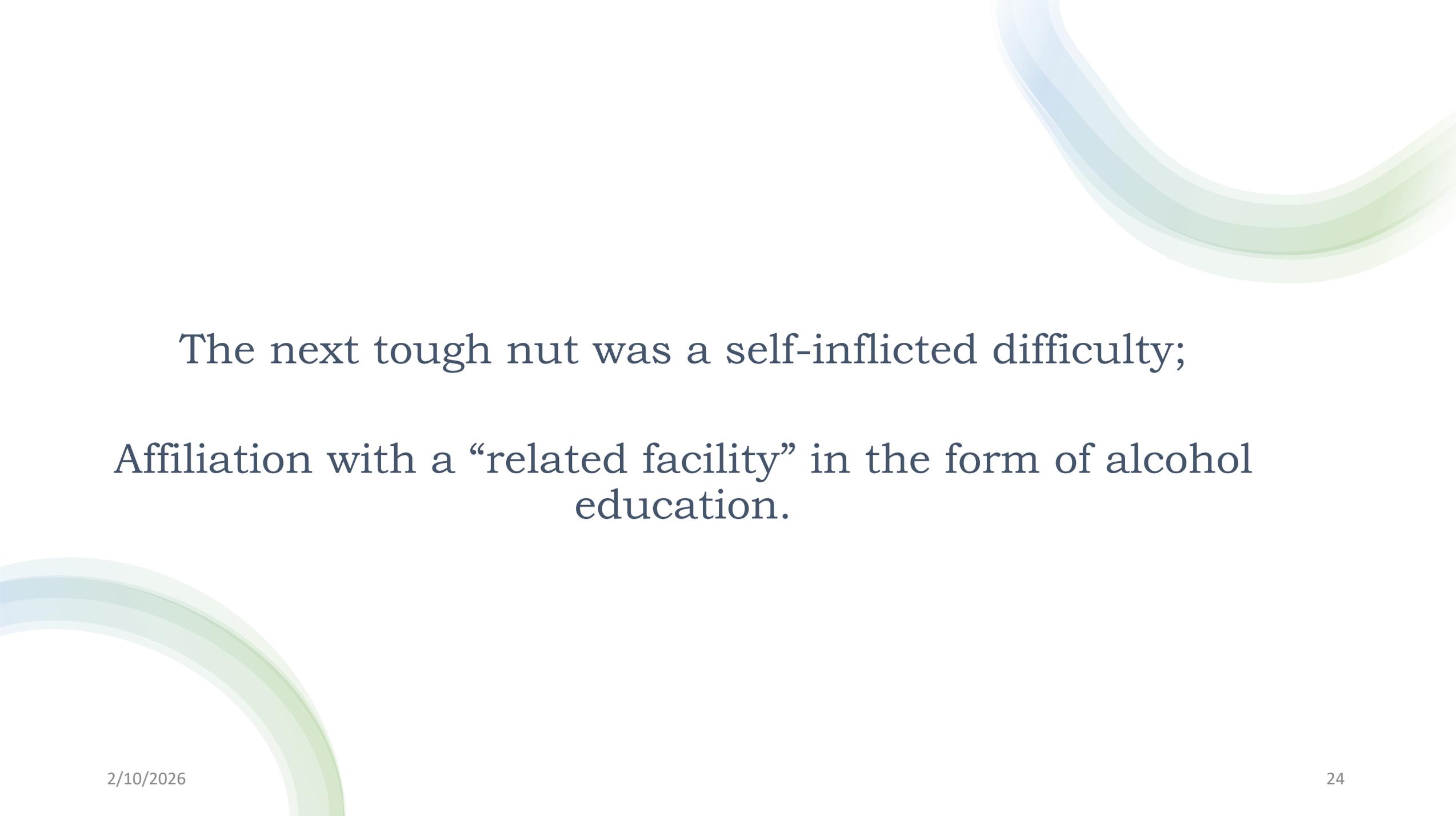
*God, the Best Seller* by Stephen Prothero

Religious affiliation was indeed a tough nut to crack, but the difficulty was understandable if not predictable.

Given Bill's frequent Christian references in the Big Book and in the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, it is not surprising that A.A.'s association with religion persists today.

It does not take long to find current articles online that declare A.A.'s religiosity.

A.A. has a long history of riding out disruptions with minimal harm and such critiques can be helpful to improving the program.



The next tough nut was a self-inflicted difficulty;  
Affiliation with a “related facility” in the form of alcohol  
education.



Alcohol  
education  
seemed like a  
good idea at the  
time . . .

A more difficult and complex entanglement with endorsement occurred between Bill, Dr. Bob, and Marty M.

The perilous combination of Marty's ingenuity and Bill's unreserved support for her ambitions to educate the public about alcoholism propelled the two go-getters toward unexpected upheavals on several fronts for A.A.

Marty M.'s story in the Big Book, "Women Suffer Too."

Four years sober, Marty attended the Yale School of Alcohol Studies in 1943.

“She particularly wanted to help women alcoholics, who she felt suffered ‘a double stigma.’” (*Pass It On*, 320)

Marty’s intelligence and charisma positioned her as a leader in the field of alcohol education.

Marty created the National Committee on Education on Alcoholism, Inc. (N.C.E.A.) in October 1944

But mistakes were made . . . .

1. A.A. cofounders allowed their names on NCEA letterhead (for the public good!).
2. Marty started breaking her anonymity at NCEA events gratefully attributing her sobriety to Alcoholics Anonymous.
3. An NCEA letter went out to the public soliciting funds for the organization.

The letter found its way to a few A.A. groups, which prompted Dick S., a Trustee on the Alcoholic Foundation, to warn Bill:

If this letter should ever go out to the A.A. mailing list quoting A.A. throughout and soliciting funds on a letterhead that carries both your name and [Dr. Bob's] as sponsors, no little hell would be popping. (*Pass It On*, 320)



Lessons were  
learned . . . .

As groups, we cannot endorse, finance or form an alliance with any other cause, however good;

We cannot link the A.A. name to other enterprises in the alcohol field to the extent that the public gets the impression we have abandoned our sole aim. . . .

To act otherwise will certainly imperil our unity, and to maintain our unity is surely our greatest obligation. (*A.A. Tradition: How It Developed*, 24)

Yale decided to no longer sponsor Marty's organization.

National Committee on Alcoholism (N.C.A.) in 1949

National Council on Alcoholism in 1957

Marty struggled for several years to keep the newly independent organization financially viable. (Brown & Brown, 212-213)

So goes the hazards of outside affiliations.

The N.C.E.A. debacle was a trifecta of missteps that would inform at least three A.A. Traditions that caution against outside affiliation, anonymity, and financial complications.

Compromising A.A.'s principles for the greater good would affect Bill's decisions on the Fellowship in the future.

Particularly when he abided by principles that could result in the deaths of struggling alcoholics.

This dilemma would have its most painful impact on Bill when he practiced the principle of anonymity.



## Acknowledging early contributions and avoiding affiliation

Bill used the story of the \$5,000 Rockefeller donation as a high impact metaphor for corporate poverty.

This may have been at the “expense” of other donors.

How could Bill overlook Charlie Towns of Towns Hospital?

Bill dried out three times at Towns  
His spiritual transformation was there  
He wandered around looking for drunks to help there

Mentioning that money was also contributed by Charles Towns would mean having to also explain in some detail who he was and why someone running a drying-out hospital was giving money to A.A. and, even more problematic, why A.A. was accepting money from him. (Schaberg, 98)

Towns generously provided \$500 in monthly installments to help Bill and Hank muddle through financially.

Towns continued to give more later on as the book was reaching the finish line. (Schaberg, 295 – 296)



Charles Towns claimed he had “never sought any credit nor publicity in this matter and I don’t care for any.”

. . . but it is a sad fact that this man—one of the great unsung heroes in the story of the writing of the Big Book—continues to receive so little credit for his critical role in making it possible for the book to be written.

(Schaberg, 296)



## Tradition Six's overlap with Tradition Eight

Therefore it seems to me that some of us must heed the call from other fields.

And those who do need only remember first and last they are A.A.'s; that in their new activities they are individuals only.

This means that they will respect the principle of anonymity in the press; that if they do appear before the general public they will not describe themselves as A.A.'s;

that they will refrain from emphasizing their A. A. status in appeals for money or publicity. (*A.A. Tradition: How It Developed*, 25)

## Clubs in A.A. evolve to become “related facilities” without A.A. affiliation

Bill’s pamphlet, *AA Tradition (19)* provides guidance underscored by the fumbling experiences of the very first club on West 24<sup>th</sup> Street in New York City.

Written in 1947, Bill first referred to problems with leadership, when he said:

A corporation was formed to take over the club room lease so we then had “officials.” Should these “directors” run the club or would it be the A.A. rotating committee?

Our first club was known, of course, as an “A.A. clubhouse.” The corporation holding its lease was titled “*Alcoholics Anonymous* of New York, Inc.” Only later did we realize we had incorporated the whole of New York State, a mistake recently rectified. Of course our incorporation should have covered “24<sup>th</sup> Street” only.

## The Long Form, part 1:

Problems of money, property, and authority may easily divert us from our primary spiritual aim. (12 & 12,190)

## Clubs in A.A.:

Acceptance of large sums from *any source* to buy, build, or finance clubs almost invariably leads to later headaches. Public solicitation is, of course, extremely dangerous. Complete self-support of clubs and everything else connected with A.A. is becoming our universal practice. (*AA Tradition: How it Developed*, 21)

## The Long Form, part 2:

We think, therefore, that any considerable property of genuine use to A.A. should be separately incorporated and managed, thus dividing the material from the spiritual. An A.A. group, as such, should never go into business. (12 & 12,190)

## Clubs in A.A.:

**This tangle slowly commenced to unravel**, as we began to get the idea that clubs ought to be strictly the business of those individuals who specially want clubs, and who are willing to pay for them. We began to see that club management is a large business proposition which ought to be separately incorporated under another name (*AA Tradition: How it Developed*, 20)

The Long Form, part 3 (Bill could not refrain from expressing an opinion about who should manage clubs):

Secondary aids to A.A., such as clubs or hospitals which require much property or administration, ought to be incorporated and so set apart that, if necessary, they can be freely discarded by the groups. Hence such facilities ought not to use the A.A. name. Their management should be the sole responsibility of those people who financially support them. For clubs, A.A. managers are usually preferred. But hospitals, as well as other places of recuperation, ought to be well outside A.A.—and medically supervised. (12 & 12,190)

Clubs in A.A.:

. . . that the “directors” of a club corporation ought to look after club business only; that an A.A. group, as such, should never get into active management of a business project. Hectic experience has since taught us that if an A.A. rotating committee tries to boss the club corporation or if the corporation tries to run the A.A. affairs of those groups who may meet at the club, there is difficulty at once. (*AA Tradition: How it Developed*, 20)

## The Long Form, part 4:

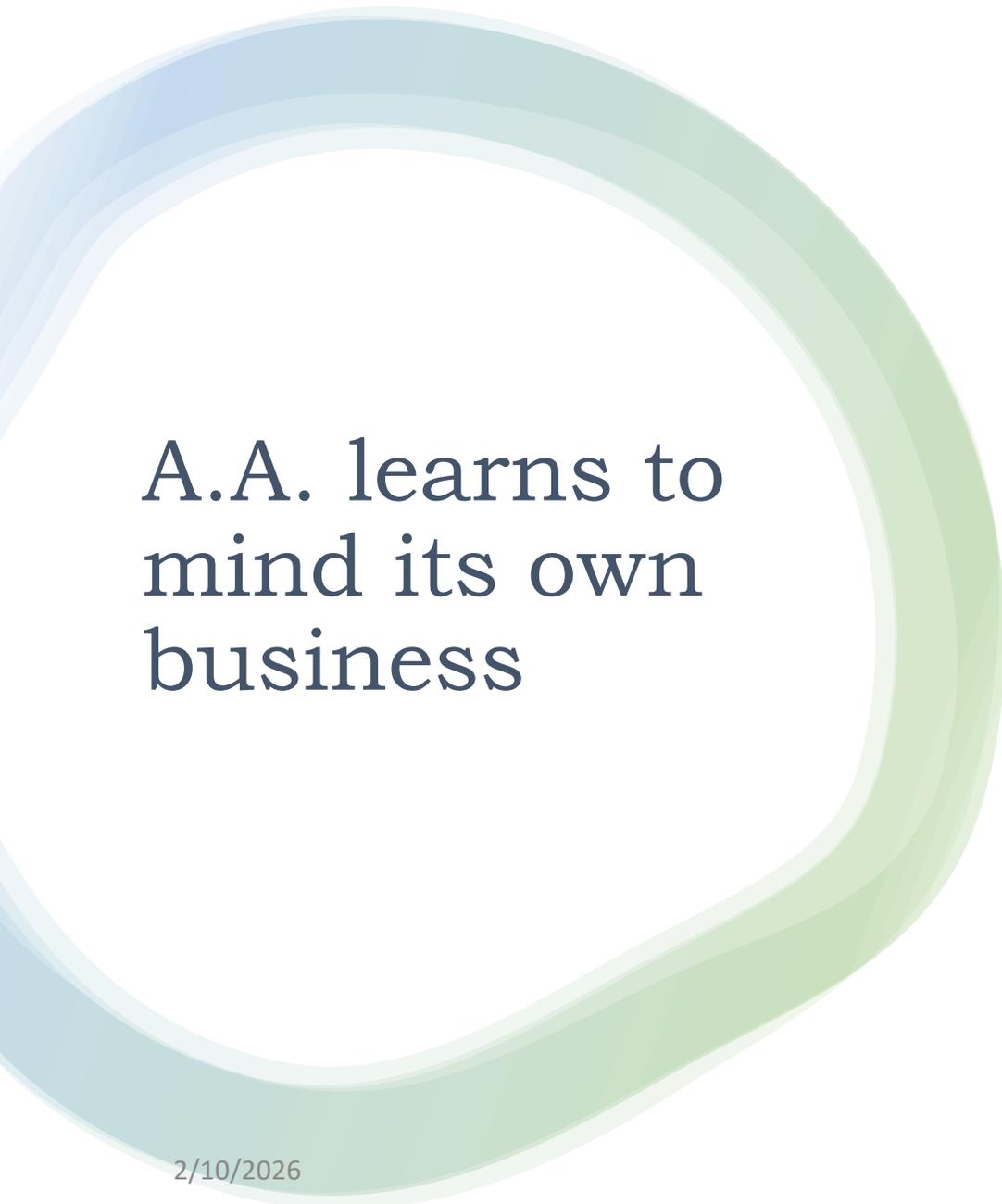
While an A.A. group may cooperate with anyone, such cooperation ought never to go so far as affiliation or endorsement, actual or implied. An A.A. group can bind itself to no one. (12 & 12,190)

## Clubs in A.A.:

The only way we have found to cure this is *to separate the material from the spiritual*. If an A.A. group wishes to use a given club, let them pay rent or split the meeting take with the club management . . . (*AA Tradition: How it Developed*, 20)

Every area, sooner or later, realizes that such concerns as intergroup meetings, hospital arrangements, local public relations, a central office for interviews and information, are things in which every A.A. is interested, whether he has any use for clubs or not. These being strictly A.A. matters, a central or intergroup committee has to be elected and financed to look after them. (AA *Tradition: How it Developed*, 20)

Well-run clubs continue to make recovery possible for many twelve-step programs. Groups can consult the General Service Office guidelines, *Relationship between A.A. and Clubs*.



A.A. learns to  
mind its own  
business

The principle of attraction rather than promotion bears fruit when it is applied to Tradition Six

Without affiliating A.A. with outside entities such as medicine, religion and research, those very same entities on their own incorporated ideas from A.A.

Other recovery groups modified the program to suit their concerns, and from that grew twelve-step programs for a wide variety of addictions.

Bill claimed that A.A. had even influenced politics and business.

Today we understand and accept this paradox: The more A.A. sticks to its primary purpose, the greater will be its helpful influence everywhere. (*Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, 109)



## Coming up: the Seventh Tradition

The more complex issues in Tradition Six are the problems of money, power, and prestige which can surface in a multitude of ways. The old adage that love of money is the root of all evil certainly contributes to a Tradition solely focused on this topic.

Would you like a weekly reminder?  
Put your email in the chat and I'll  
add you to the list.

Comments and questions?

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