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Mr. Jim Estelle
Chairman of the Board
General Service Board of
Alcoholics Anonymous
3681 Mesa Verde Dr.
El Dorado Hills, CA 95762

Dear Jim,

The impetus for this letter comes primarily from a sign I once saw which read; "If something is wrong, it is wrong even if everybody is doing it – and if it's right, it's right even if nobody is doing it!" In other words, principles don't fail to work – people fail to work them.

I have received copies of the material transmitted by the SERVICIOS GENERALES DE A.A. SECCION MEXICO, as well as the response of several delegates which was prompted by this material, and the letters sent out by yourself and George Dorsey. To say that I was distressed by the recent turn of events is an understatement.

I want to be quick to add, at this point, that I have absolutely no hope that anything will change as a result of this letter or any other action taken in regard to these events. It has been my view that the AAWS board is acting very much like the active alcoholic—running full speed ahead toward the precipice shouting, "You can't stop me—I have a right to do this!" While the General Service Board, acting the part of the sick family member, is heard to entreat those who stand in witness, "If you would only understand, and not question what you see, this would all make sense." And just as in the case of the active alcoholic, nothing can be accomplished until the disaster has occurred and the denial of reality has been thoroughly smashed.

This does not, however, relieve me or any other AA member from the responsibility of pointing to the insane action and requesting a change of course. As you know, Jim, I have been following this activity of the AAWS board for some time. I have done my research—legal, spiritual, and practical, including calls to those who have been sued. Recently, Mexico has been added to that growing list. I remind you of this only to point out that my comments are not merely "off the cuff" or without a reasonable access to the facts.

These battles, in the legal arena, are not about integrity—because any review of the materials shows clear evidence of the lack thereof. They are not about carrying the message—for they are an attempt to restrict access rather than increase it. They are not about unity—for they set one A.A. member against another. They are, quite simply and unalterably about power—who controls what. Another phrase that describes this is "power, property and prestige." I seem to remember that this phrase appears somewhere in the literature we are fighting about.

Are these actions legal? Certainly they are. Are they the common actions of corporate citizens? Again, we must answer in the affirmative. Does the AAWS or GS board have the "right" to take this course of action according to our charter? Most assuredly. It is absolutely necessary that the boards consult the Conference prior to these actions? Not at all. By every legal and organizational means the boards are well within their "rights."

Let's look for a moment, at two other societies that have exercised these very same rights. The leaders of the Washingtonian Movement were well within their rights when they began to take sides in the issues of the day. Not one of their members could have argued, successfully, that this exercise of "rights" was not within the scope of powers delegated to the leadership. The mentality was in place—the die cast.

Our dear friends and organizational parents, the Oxford Groups, also found it necessary to exercise their "rights." They, too, felt that they were in a position to take what had so freely been given then and place it in the public arena to give credence to a position or cause. Again, nobody could have argued to the contrary—it was their right to decide what actions they would take.

On an individual basis, we alcoholics all have the "right" to drink. We can do so on any given day, or hour. Here, also, there is simply no argument which will stand to deny this "right." It has been my experience that *the very best exercise of a "right" is often to not use it*. Character, both spiritual and practical, is the **discretionary** use of ones talents and attributes. I have seen little discretion or reservation in the action taken by AAWS in the past few years

However, Jim, while I am distressed at the recent events—specifically the board actions, or lack thereof—I am not much worried for the future of our principles. In what I consider an act of Divine Intervention AAWS lost the copyrights to the first and second edition of our basic text. As I view the current state of things, I become more and more certain that God was doing for us what we would not do for ourselves—insuring that no person or group of persons could hold this vital work hostage. It will forever, with no thanks to those to whom it was entrusted, be available to all who want it.

In his book (which Bill read), [This Believing World](#)¹, Louis Browne compares the major religions and the path they have followed in their growth and propagation. He makes an interesting observation, having completed his review, that an organization created out of a spiritual experience which does not diligently follow its principles eventually comes to oppose the very thing it was created to promote. The primary purpose of Alcoholics Anonymous is the carry the message of hope to the alcoholic who still suffers. By participating in the events which lead to the confiscation of literature from the SERVICIOS GENERALES DE A.A. SECCION MEXICO, AAWS has begun to oppose the carrying of the AA message. "Just as we have freely received, so, too, shall we freely give" becomes merely lip service paid to the very thing which created our society—the Grace of a Loving God.

Williams James, author of [Varieties of Religious Experience](#)² echoes Browne's findings. He points out that the "organization" which collects around the spiritual experience

1 This Believing World – The Macmillian Company © 1926 (out of print)

2 The Varieties of Religious Experience – New American Library © 1958

eventually becomes a juggernaut. Exactly like the "juggernaut of self-will" described in our much fought over—but little read—literature. The definition of which is, "an irresistible destructive force³."

To rely on yet another "friend" of AA, Reinhold Niebuhr, we are told in his writing on the subject of God's justice and mercy; "The best law of the day (Roman Law) and the best religion of his day (Hebraic monotheism) are implicated in the crucifixion, *though the latter expected to be the righteous victor who would gain a triumph over its unrighteous foes...*"⁴ This last reference, in italics, seems to state almost the exact frame of mind now held by AAWS. How many more 'crucifixions' are needed before we learn the hard lesson that we cannot, and should not, legislate access to what has been freely given us?

The final quote I will offer, Jim, is; "He who lives by the sword, dies by it." Is that why the General Service Board has purchased indemnity insurance? Does the board expect to "die by the sword" of litigation? If the principles hold true, and they have since the beginning of time, then this perception is the first correct one evidence by the board. What boggle my mind, and those of others I have talked to, is that the board would continue in its current course *while anticipation it's own demise*. This goes far beyond the insanity of alcoholism.

More and more, Jim, the groups are being left with few alternatives. Most of what is happening is literally incomprehensible to the average AA member. Not because it is happening—but because it is happening in AA! We are quickly becoming the very thing we sought to avoid through the application of our Twelve Traditions and Twelve Concepts. At some point the groups and members must come to realize that the only solution left to them is to cast off their service structure and take the risk of living in chaos rather than suffer under a malignant anarchy.

Well, I'm sure you are very tired of reading this by now – so I will close. Even though your letters to the Fellowship imply that you and I see differently, I do thank you for reading this lengthy letter. While I cannot condone your actions, I do think it unfortunate that you find yourself in this situation.

Respectfully Yours

Dennis Bauer
Past Delegate Panel 41/Area 39

cc: Ester Hall, Delegate Area 36

3 The new Lexicon Websters Dictionary - © 1972

4 The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr – Yale University Press ©1986