

AAL and ELS/WELS . . .

The *Lutheran Sentinel* (ELS) recently had a wonderful opportunity in its "Pastor, I have a question" column (March 1993). This was the question: "I have concerns about the AAL. Is it proper to be associated with them? AAL supports not only confessional Lutheran synods but also the liberal bodies. If AAL supported only true Lutheran churches, which adhere to the teachings of Scripture, then I would have no problem supporting or representing them." Imagine! The question itself provides most of the reasons for the correct answer: No, it is not proper! More than that: it is sinful unionism to be associated with them.

The ELS columnist did not, however, give this God-pleasing reply. Instead, he began by saying, "If AAL or Lutheran Brotherhood was a 'church' organization, the church fellowship passages would apply in demanding unity of doctrine before participation." He went on to liken AAL with federal or state governments which often distribute tax dollars in ways Christians can not approve, claiming that since it is not unionism when the government supports things which Christians do not approve it is also not unionism when fraternal insurance companies do the same. As support, a portion of AAL's 1983 position paper is cited, in which the AAL simply makes the claim that neither its purpose or method in assisting Lutheran congregations and church bodies is "church-like" or "based on doctrinal or confessional considerations." The ELS columnist concludes by advising readers not to elevate these insurance companies [AAL and LB] over other insurance companies by implying that they are officially recognized arms of a synod or of a local congregation. For the ELS it is a matter of freedom, and should not be laid as a "conscience matter" on fellow brothers and sisters in their churches.

We have heard these excuses before. If an organization is not a "church organization" or "church-like" by its own definition, then God's warning against religious unionism does not apply! One cannot help wondering if the ELS uses the same measuring stick with Boy and Girl Scouts and the lodge! I have not heard these organizations defined as church organizations or "church-like," whatever that means! Just because the AAL and LB may not identify themselves as "church-like," it does not necessarily follow that they are not. Page 19 of the February 1993 *Northwestern Lutheran* (WELS), under the heading "Also in the news," reports grants from AAL to Northwestern College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary totaling \$49,900, for

promoting the pastoral ministry for second-career students and financial assistance to students and faculty; and a grant of \$92,000 to the WELS Home Mission Board from LB, to provide financial assistance for outreach efforts. Surely, no one can deny that this involves the support of church work; surely, no one could successfully claim that this is "cooperation in externals"!

It is not helpful to compare fraternal insurance organizations with federal and state governments. There is a big difference, for one thing, in that membership in a fraternal organization is entirely voluntary. One needs to keep in mind that when you take out insurance in a fraternal group, you are not merely making a commercial purchase or investment; rather, you are becoming a member of the organization. As a member, one has responsibilities; one votes for officers and approves corporate policies and the apportioning of surplus funds. Membership involves one in everything that the organization does. Therefore, members of AAL and LB cannot claim that they are not personally responsible for supporting the work of false-teaching churches through grants, even though the 1983 AAL statement says they can!

Contrary to what the ELS columnist states, it is not "binding consciences" to warn against and resist such religious unionism (Rom. 16:17-18).

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