

Report Of The Committee On Grants As Submitted To The Ten Districts, 1978

By Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Committee on Grants

Introduction

A memorial from the Dakota-Montana District addressed to the Forty-fourth Biennial Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod requested that “the Synod appoint a committee to study in the light of scriptural principles the expediency of the current practice of WELS requesting and applying for gifts, grants, and matching funds from any source outside of WELS” (BoRaM_1977, p. 174). The Synod responded to this request by resolving “that a committee be formed to study the concern expressed in the Dakota-Montana Memorial” (*Proceedings_1977*, p. 46). The present membership of this committee was elected from a slate of ten candidates nominated by the floor committee that formulated the resolution.

I. History of the Question

It was especially grants received from the Aid Association for Lutherans (AAL) in the past decade and a half that gave rise to the questions under study. The AAL for many years had the policy of selling insurance only to members of congregations belonging to the former Synodical Conference. In 1961 the Wisconsin Synod suspended fellowship relations with The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. In view of the fact that the synods whose members were joined in the AAL no longer were in confessional fellowship, the AAL resolved that beginning January 1, 1966, insurance would be sold to members of all Lutheran bodies.

This announcement resulted in protests by several pastors of the Wisconsin Synod, particularly since the funds the AAL distributed in its fraternal program would now be distributed also for projects of church bodies with whom our Synod was not in fellowship. It was pointed out that the wording of the AAL bylaws spoke of the association as one in which Christians were “drawn together through the bonds of the Lutheran faith.” Such expressions in the bylaws became a matter of concern to our Conference of Presidents (COP). In his report to the Synod’s 1973 convention, the president of our Synod stated that “the Conference of Presidents resolved to address a letter to the AAL Board of Directors requesting a revision of a bylaw which states, as we understand it, that we are associated in a spiritual fellowship with all members of the Aid Association for Lutherans” (*Proceedings_1973*, p. 21). Reacting to this report, the convention commended the Conference of Presidents for its efforts in safeguarding our fellowship principles.

In response to the request of our COP, the AAL on February 6, 1974, amended the bylaw. The following year the president of our Synod reported on this action of the AAL to the Synod in convention. He likewise reported that efforts were made to word “the reports in the CORRESPONDENT and in YES in such a manner that the bylaw revisions are reflected in them” (*Proceedings_1975*, p. 23). He also pointed out that these changes had moved the Conference of Presidents to lift “the moratorium on applications for fraternal grants from the AAL,” a moratorium that had been in effect since 1973 (*Proceedings_1975*, p. 23).

The 1976 convention of the Dakota-Montana District, in submitting its memorial to the Synod, stated that on the matter of requesting and receiving grants, “it has become apparent that there is great concern and varied opinion throughout our district and possibly the Synod.” Our president in his report to the Synod likewise said: “We must frankly confess that unanimity

concerning this matter does not exist in the Conference of Presidents (*Proceedings* 1977, p. 23). The Synod responded by electing a committee and requesting it to report to the districts in 1978.

II. Procedures Followed by the Committee on Grants

The committee held its initial meeting on September 24, 1977. Further meetings were held on November 19, 1977, January 13-14, February 17, March 3, and April 8, 1978. The president of the Synod made his entire file of correspondence and other documents pertaining to this issue available to the committee. The committee studied all Scripture references in the documentation, pro and con, and other passages added by members of the committee itself. It also examined the Lutheran Confessions and church history for anything pertinent to the question. A notice was placed into the *Northwestern Lutheran* inviting correspondence from all who wanted to address themselves to the question. Thirty-three communications were received in response to this notice. All were read privately by the committee members and then discussed in committee meetings. In addition, the committee asked the president of the Dakota-Montana District to designate two men to speak to the committee in reference to their district's memorial. To gain a clear understanding of the procedures employed in securing grants, the committee invited the executive secretaries of the Commission on Higher Education and of the General Board for Home Missions, as well as the president of Wisconsin Lutheran College, as resource personnel.

In drafting this report, the committee made no effort to respond directly to the position of any one person or group. Rather it sought out principles from God's inspired Book and examined how these were applicable to the questions that had given rise to this study. The committee hopes that those who have communicated with it will recognize that the points they raised were not ignored.

In approaching the study of this subject, the committee members were conscious of the fact that they were not coming to their assignment without having given previous thought to these matters. Perhaps most of our pastors, professors, and teachers have in some way expressed their views on the questions raised by the memorial, or at least have given thought to them. We, nevertheless, sought to approach our assignment with minds open to the Word of our Lord. It was our prayer that the Lord would grant us the wisdom to apply His truth faithfully to the assignment before us.

As we share the results of our study, we pray that all who read the report may hold previous judgments in abeyance. We pray that all may examine the pertinent words of Scripture in the spirit which says: "Speak Lord, for thy servant heareth." If we are agreed on the principles of Scripture that speak to the assigned subject, we can be sure that the Lord will help us to apply these principles in a God-pleasing way.

III. Principles Regarding Support of the Church's Work

In our investigation of the scriptural principles, a number of questions presented themselves. Self-evidently, we wish to know:

1. What does Scripture teach about Christian stewardship?

In the most general terms Scripture declares that good trees bear good fruit (Luke 6:43-45). From the beginning, Christians practiced the love Jesus enjoined on His followers by contributing from their financial resources to help one another (Acts 2:45; 4:34,35). This kind of stewardship simply and self-evidently is a fruit of faith. When writing to the church at Corinth,

the Apostle Paul calls such giving a “grace.” “As you excel in everything, ... see that you also excel in this grace of giving” (II Cor. 8:7). When giving is regarded as a “grace,” it will be generous even though the resources are slim. Paul invites the Corinthian Christians to follow the example of the church in Macedonia. “Their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity ... for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints” (2 Cor. 8:2,4).

Scripture also describes this kind of stewardship as a God-given responsibility. The work of the church, to proclaim the Gospel in Word and sacraments, is to be supported by the church. The general rule “that those who preach the Gospel should receive their living from the Gospel” (1 Cor. 9:14) is God’s command and applies to the church of all ages. There can be no question that under normal circumstances the first and most important source to which the church ought to look for support is its own membership.

This being so, may a person infer that the church is duty bound not to accept help, much less to solicit it, from sources outside its own membership? Must the church, rather, limit itself to the fruits of faith for carrying out its mission? In other words,

2. Does Scripture make the congregation of believers the exclusive source of support for the church?

While the Bible contains many injunctions that God’s people should give gladly and freely of their own, there are no passages which expressly prohibit Christians from accepting or requesting resources from outside the church.

In the New Testament, where liberty rather than prescription in such matters is the rule, Christians have been entrusted by God to form their judgments according to what is beneficial and constructive for the spiritual upbuilding of the congregation. In the Old Testament, where prescription rather than liberty in the practical life of God’s people is generally the rule, the same silence obtains in regard to whether the church may or may not look for help from the outside.

The Old Testament, however, furnishes an example where the church took advantage of support from outside sources, and this with divine approval. When the Jews were released from captivity in Babylon to return to their homeland and to rebuild the Temple, the King of Persia under impulse of the Lord (Ezra 1:1) not only called for the voluntary offerings of Jews to support the holy enterprise, but he also urged the Jews to request aid for this work from their neighbors, whoever these might be (Ezra 1:4), and the Persian king’s decree was carried out as he ordered (Ezra 1:6). Later, a similar decree was issued by a subsequent Persian king (Ezra 6:1ff.), with the additional provision that the work of Temple construction be funded by royal revenues accruing from the taxes of the provinces of his kingdom (Ezra 6:8). In addition to these grants of money, the same king supplied for the Temple worship the sacrificial animals and other supplies as required by the Lord (Ezra 6:10). During the reign of a later Persian king, further gifts of silver and gold and sacrificial animals were made from the royal treasury for support of the Lord ‘a work (Ezra 7: 12-20).

In all these examples there is no indication in the Bible text that the Jews refused the lavish gifts offered by these outsiders, or that the Lord commanded such gifts to be refused. Yet in the context of this same story there is an example where the Jews *did* refuse help proffered by outsiders (Ezra 4:1-3), but for a notably different reason, which will be discussed later. For the present, it is sufficient to conclude that Scripture does not make the congregation of fellow Christians the exclusive source of support for the church.

Yet Bible passages are frequently quoted to assert that the church has been enjoined, then by example, to turn away from outside help and to support its mission exclusively by the freewill offerings of its people. Hence, it is fitting to ask:

3. Are the scripture passages frequently quoted in support of this position applicable?

Three Bible passages need special scrutiny because of the frequency of their use. The first, in Genesis 14, deals with the example of Abraham, who refused to take any goods from the king of Sodom. Here, the whole sequence of events after Abraham's return from the war shows that the issue went deeper with him than not accepting material wealth from a heathen king. In the light of the special promise, it was God who would bless Abraham (Gen. 12: 2). Though the king of Sodom offered wealth, Abraham would not take what the Lord of the promise had not said was his. In this context, Abraham's refusal of the king's offer could have repeated itself with any other ruler of the land, whether a member of the Lord's congregation or not. On the other hand, Abraham felt no compunction about using some of Sodom's goods during the return from the military campaign, nor did Abraham deny a portion of these goods to his confederates (Gen. 14:24). Their lives were not bound up like Abraham's in the Messianic promise.

Furthermore, Abraham's dealing with Melchizedek must not be overlooked. Though Abraham would not keep even a shoelatchet of the war booty for himself, he gave 10 percent of all to Melchizedek, and Melchizedek accepted the gift (Gen. 14:20). There is no reason to question that this gift was taken from the war booty. The issue in this story is not whether the church may receive gifts from the world. Rather, this story presents the man of faith and bearer of the promise who on account of the promise, would look only to the Lord to fulfill that promise in all its ramifications (Gen. 12:2,3).

A second passage frequently cited deals with Abraham's insistence on paying the full price for a family burial lot. The negotiations between Abraham and the property owners (Gen. 23:10-16) must be read and appreciated in their natural setting of time and place. These people are simply doing business in a true-to-life oriental manner. After the customary polite preliminaries ("I'll give it to you." "No, I wouldn't think of it"), the two parties get down to serious business. The real price is quoted; it is accepted, and the business is settled. This passage is not pertinent to the question whether the church should receive gifts from the world.

A third example much used to condemn reception of funds from any other source than the freewill offerings of fellow Christians is the Temple cleansings reported in the Gospels (John 2: 13-16; Matt. 21:12,13; Luke 19:45,46). There are valid reasons for labeling money-making schemes in behalf of the church improper and unwise. The Temple cleansing, however, is a sermon against merchandising of another, more critical, order. The Lord furnishes His own commentary on the action He took when He cleansed the Temple. By quoting the passage from Jeremiah 7 Jesus was scoring a religious worship grown formal. People were going through the outward motions of devotion to God, but as blood descendants of Abraham and members of the stock of Israel (see Matt. 3:9) they felt no need to repent or even to change their sinful life styles. Jesus told them that by their merchandising with God's grace they were converting His Father's house into a den of robbers. The buying and selling in the Temple were merely the visible eyesore of a religion gone sterile.

When Scripture is used to urge or determine a certain course of action, it is always wisdom to view the single Bible passage or single Bible story in its entire natural setting. When this rule is followed, the Scripture passages, for example, which warn against the "taking of gifts" (Exod. 23:8; 2 Chron. 19:7; Prov. 15:27; Eccles. 7:7, a.o.) will not be absolutized as

prohibiting the seeking or receiving of any kind of gifts. Rather, the passages will be recognized as a warning against bribery. If bribery is the purpose of the gift-giving, then the individual Christian as well as the entire congregation will be on guard and will turn away.

Much mischief has been done in the church through the selective use of Scriptures. A good example of this is furnished by the Pharisees whose ideas of proper God-service brought them into murderous conflict with Jesus. They criticized Jesus for His actions because these conflicted with what they thought was right, and they backed up what they thought was right with the Bible passages which they needed to prove their case. But they used the Scripture selectively. In doing so, they lost sight of, indeed, they became blind to, what Jesus pointed out as the larger message of the Scriptures in this connection, namely, that God will have mercy and not sacrifice.

The Pharisees had developed such a tunnel vision in regard to the Sabbath law, for instance, that they could neither appreciate nor understand what David did when he was hungry (Matt. 12: 3,4), and why in so doing David was not breaking God's Law. They were so mired in the outward keeping of the Sabbath rest that in their convictions about proper God-service they could find no place for a "work" of mercy on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:9-14). They were so intent on sticking fast to the passages proving their piety that they had become deaf to the pleadings of the prophets (Isa. 1:10-20). Using Scripture selectively is fraught with many dangers. Most seriously, it can deflect people's attention from Him who stands at the center of Scripture.

When we follow the example of the Master Teacher of Scripture, then we see that the question of whether the church may look for help to support its mission from sources outside the church ought to be removed from the context of right or wrong and placed where it belongs, in the realm of Christian liberty. This poses another question:

4. What does Scripture teach about Christian liberty?

In its broadest sense, Christian liberty applies in matters where God has not spoken, where God has not told man what to believe and do. Such liberty allows a Christian to be a completely free lord of all, and a servant to no man. On the other hand, such liberty also persuades a Christian to be a perfectly dutiful servant of everyone. In the exercise of this liberty, a Christian will say: "Do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival" (Col. 2:16). In the exercise of this liberty, a Christian, however, will also say: "Everything is permissible for me, but not everything is beneficial" (1 Cor. 6:12). In either case, the aim of Christian liberty as of all Christian life, is that "nobody should seek his own good but the good of others"; that "whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, it all for the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:23,31).

When applying these general guidelines for Christian liberty to the individual circumstance, Scripture again shows that the God-pleasing way is the way of mutual respect, patience, and love.

In matters where they are truly free, Christians must guard against imposing judgments upon one another.

In matters where they are truly free, Christians must guard against forcing their own exercise of piety on the community of fellow Christians.

In matters where they are truly free, Christians must guard against requiring of others what they require of themselves.

In matters where they are truly free, Christians must guard against the idea that they may follow a certain course of action only if a Bible passage permits it, or must avoid a certain

practice because there is no Bible passage which allows it. Such thinking does violence to the whole cause and nature of Christian liberty.

Of the practical exercise of Christian liberty Scripture says: “One man’s faith allows him to eat everything, but another man ... eats only vegetables ... The man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does ... One man considers one day more sacred than another, another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind ... Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another (Rom. 14:2,3,5,13). On the other hand, because patience and love stand at the very heart of Christian liberty, Scripture also cautions: “Be careful ... that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak ... If what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall” (1 Cor. 8:9,13).

It must be quickly added, however, that a vast gulf separates “offending” or “causing someone else to fall into sin” from “not liking what someone else does” and therefore passing judgment where judgment should not be passed (Rom. 14:13). In the second case, the person has suffered no danger to his own faith or behavior. Rather, he is annoyed. Yet people will seize on their annoyance as a weapon for tyrannizing fellow Christians. They claim offense where offense in the true scriptural sense of endangering faith does not exist. Thus they do violence to Christian liberty, if not also to Christian love.

On the other hand, there are circumstances when receiving support from outside sources for the work of the church is no longer a matter of liberty for the church. The question is therefore in place:

5. When does help from the outside cease to be a matter of Christian liberty?

The reception of gifts from the outside may, and indeed does, often encourage Christians to be more generous in their own giving. In particular cases and places, however, the reception of gifts from the outside can have an opposite effect. It can encourage the Old Adam to assert himself in taking his ease and becoming stingy in Christian stewardship. It can put the freewill fruits of faith to flight. In such cases, help from outside sources is working harm to that particular church group. Then Christian wisdom will dictate that steps be taken to remedy the condition.

It is also possible that help from the outside may create an impression of unity in faith and worship where no such unity exists. This was clearly the reason why the proffered help of the Samaritans toward rebuilding the Temple was turned down (Ezra 4:3). Although the Jews accepted help from the Persian kings and from the people at large for the Temple building and the Temple worship (Ezra 1;6;7), apparently because there were no implications of unity in the faith, they felt obligated to refuse the overtures of their neighbors, the Samaritans. Acceptance of the latter would encourage the Samaritans in their idea that they were of one faith and worship with the Jews when in fact they were not. Accepting the help of the Samaritans would thus have been offensive in the true biblical sense of the word. Under such conditions, the church will turn back help offered by outsiders.

In examining the principles regarding support of the church it may be of passing interest, if not also of some value, to ask:

6. What was the practice of the church in the past in these matters?

How the church has acted through the years in regard to the support of its work has depended on the nature of the resources available to the church and how these resources were

controlled. There have been times and circumstances when no other support were apparently available than that received by direct contributions of the faithful (Acts 2:45; 4:34,35). There have also been times and circumstances when the support of the church came almost entirely from the government or from foundations and perpetual endowments. Were these last-named practices bad or sinful?

During the 1500s many revenues from properties, foundations, endowments, and fees fell into the custody of cities or of congregations which sided with the Reformation. It also happened that representatives of the city government tussled with representatives of the church for control of these lucrative sources of money. Who owned these revenues: the state, the church, or the heirs of the original donors?

In one documented case (*Luther's Works*, AE 45:169-195), Luther had been invited to give his aid and counsel in such a controversy. He supported the claims of the congregation against those of the city elders. Revenues derived from the income-producing property in question, endowments, rents, tithes, fees from bridge tolls, etc., should flow into the church treasury. These revenues would assure the congregation of a steady source of income for a variety of purposes, which included salaries to the pastors of the congregation, support of Christian education, and relief of the poor and aged. This would make it unnecessary, Luther writes, to "seek or accept anything more from the people of the parish unless it be unsolicited, voluntary, free offerings and gifts" (LW 45:186-187). Apparently, the church of Luther's day could also always use financial help over and above what was contributed directly by the members.

Other examples may be found in the documents of the time showing that funds flowed into the church treasury from sources outside the church. These sources included fees from fishing rights on the river (LW 49:58, note 7), revenues from the government (LW 49:137), or direct grants from city hall (LW 49:138).

These examples are cited not as if they offer an exact parallel to cases in our time, or as if they give the church unlimited authorization to accept, solicit, and acquire funds from outside sources by any or all means. We live in a different society with different laws and customs. We live under a different economy. However, such cases from church history do urge us to be cautious about absolutizing the ways and means by which, according to Scripture, the church must be supported. But whatever ways and means of supporting the church we may adopt and accept under the liberty which we have in this matter, Christians will always want to carry out their exalted mission on earth in a manner that does not cheapen the Gospel or compromise it, or that does not give the impression that they are yoked together with others in a unity of faith and worship where no such unity exists.

IV. Application of the Principles that Govern the Source of the Church's Support

No disagreement exists among us on the scriptural principle that Christians out of the love born of faith will cheerfully support the proclamation of the Gospel in the varied forms and ways to which the Holy Spirit guides them. From our study of Scripture it is clear that the Bible nowhere makes the freewill offerings of Christians the exclusive source of the church's support. A thorough study, in their full context, of oft-cited passages which seem to make the love-gifts of Christians the only source of support of which the church may avail itself, reveals that they do not prove what they are intended to prove. Accordingly, we cannot say that on this score the receiving of grants or gifts from outside sources is either sinful or not expedient. Strong

preferences and feelings as to what is a good and proper practice in this area also cannot be made valid grounds for passing judgment on those who do not share our preferences or feelings.

Having stated this, we have now come to the point where we must apply what has been established to some very pertinent questions.

1. Does the church's receiving financial help from outside sources inhibit Christian stewardship?

The church must ever be alert against practices that, as far as we can see, may become a hindrance to the stewardship life of its membership, for stewardship is an integral part of Christian sanctification. The question asked therefore represents a concern the church must have.

The validity of the concern does not, however, make the question an easy one to answer. Since the answer requires evaluating practical situations, the judgments of people may vary. Nor is the statement that it *may* have inhibiting effects on stewardship a compelling answer. Here the committee can, therefore, only express its own judgment, and grant that not everyone will evaluate evidence in the same way. In this connection, the committee would first call attention to the fact that a distinction can be drawn between a single congregation and the Synod at large in the matter of receiving gifts or grants.

A local congregation may find that large gifts coming regularly even from one of its own members result in a deterioration of the stewardship of the other members, as they learn to depend on the one generous donor. But it will always remain difficult to determine at what point or, to put it in another way, at what dollar amount our members will be adversely affected in their Christian giving.

What may prove harmful to Christian stewardship within a local congregation need not prove harmful on the synodical level. Since on the synodical level the needs of the church are in fact unlimited, even large gifts received from individual members need not have the effect that they would in a local situation. What is true of large gifts from our own members seems equally true of any gifts which are received from a corporation or foundation.

A look at the present stewardship situation on the synodical level seems to be convincing. Though the dollar-amount of financial aid received from the AAL in the last few years is no mean sum, yet it is a small amount when compared with the budgetary and special funds that our members supply through their love-offerings. Moreover, we cannot say that the practice of Christian stewardship has lagged and that growth in the grace of Christian giving has been retarded because of the funds we have accepted from the AAL. Quite the opposite seems to be the case. God in His incredible goodness toward us has caused our members to follow the apostolic admonition: See that you also excel in this grace of giving" (2 Cor. 8:7). They have responded with gifts of faithborn love that have increased year after year as opportunities for our constantly expanding Gospel-work were presented to them. Clearly, there is no evidence that Christian stewardship on the synodical level has been stifled by the financial aid we have accepted from outside sources.

We freely concede that receiving grants made by groups outside our membership may pose a threat to healthy stewardship among us. For that very reason we must exercise constant vigilance and self-discipline. We must keep minds and hearts alert and consciences tender, so that we do not allow an unwholesome dependence on financial aid from the outside to develop among us. Moreover, we must maintain constant vigilance, so that our stress on personal Christian stewardship does not degenerate into mere formality.

A few examples may reinforce the need for this caution. Suppose a department of the Synod or an association of congregations is considering a new phase of work. Suppose, then, that

at once the question is asked: “How large a grant can we count on to finance this venture?” Then those involved should ask themselves: “What is wrong? Why are we looking first to aid from the outside, instead of relying on the gifts of our members, the faithful stewards who ‘have first given themselves to the Lord’ (2 Cor. 8:5)?” We must be careful never to let a dependence on outside help take over, lest our membership be discouraged from a joyous, full exercise of the grace of faithful stewardship.

It should also be noted that the AAL, for example, is alert to the possibility that a church group or synod may become dependent on grants for its programs. For that reason it has set up definite guidelines that place a restriction on the kind of projects for which it will offer assistance. For example, it will not allot funds for budgetary purposes. This obviates the danger that a synod or groups within it may rely on the AAL to supply funds for the ongoing, essential needs of their Gospel-work. Unlike the Lutheran Brotherhood, the AAL does not vote funds for the establishment of home mission congregations or for subsidies to maintain such congregations. Nor does it want to make grants for projects that may be started with AAL funds and then, after that first funding, may have to be discontinued because they are beyond the current giving capacity of the synod or group that initiated them.

Generally, corporations and foundations do the same, perhaps even requiring a percentage to be raised by the church for the project toward which support is to be given. All programs of matching funds also follow this principle.

Your committee would, however, like to mention a concern which it has with regard to stewardship on the congregational level. We view with misgiving the rather steady encouragement which the AAL, through its publication YES, gives to local branches to engage in various fund-raising activities. Though the projects in most cases are worthy ones, these efforts can have an adverse effect on the stewardship life of the congregation if the urge “to make money for the church” dampens the desire of the membership to give money out of faith and love toward the Savior. We cannot help asking: Is it possible that this promotion of money-making endeavors on the local level may do more harm to a healthy stewardship life than receiving grants on the synodical level? This will have to be watched and controlled locally. The congregation within which an AAL branch functions should through its members be able to restrain the branch from practices that are contrary to sound stewardship policies.

2. Does the church’s receiving financial help from outside sources compromise its confession?

Receiving support from an individual or an organization does not in itself establish a confessional fellowship. The fact that the king of Persia contributed toward the building of the Temple while also continuing to support his heather worship did not compromise the confession of God’s people. To receive funds from a fraternal benefit society or a foundation or other organization that also supports projects of churches with whom we are not in fellowship does not in and of itself establish a spiritual fellowship between us and these other church bodies. Therefore, accepting such funds need not compromise our confession.

Receiving support may, however, under certain conditions compromise one’s confession. When the Samaritans wanted to contribute toward the rebuilding of the Temple as an expression of unity (Ezra 4:1-3), accepting such support would have compromised the confession of the Israelites.

Does the receiving of funds from the AAL bring us into spiritual fellowship with all the members of that organization, many of whom are not in confessional unity with us? The wording of the bylaws previous to their change gave that impression. They spoke of the AAL as “an

association of Christians drawn together through the bonds of the Lutheran faith.” Local branches were to provide members “opportunity ... to share in programs of Christian fellowship.” It is not surprising that many consciences in our Synod were disturbed when the membership of the AAL no longer included only such who were in confessional fellowship. The Synod’s Conference of Presidents came to gripe with the matter and presented our concerns to the leadership of the AAL. This resulted in a removal of all such expressions from the bylaws. In 1974 the president of the AAL, in an interview published in the fall issue of the AAL’s CORRESPONDENT, said: “It is not our purpose to be a church body, or a Lutheran institution carrying out church work or an arm of the church.”

In view of this change, we conclude that grants received from the AAL do not bring us into religious fellowship with those who are not in doctrinal unity with us. The grants are not an expression of religious unity. Since the AAL has made the changes which we asked for, it is not fair, just, or charitable to speak and act as though no change had taken place and as though objections on the score of unionistic involvements were still valid.

The question may be asked whether the recent advertisement that appeared on the back cover of the 1978 *Yearbook* of our Synod is not evidence to the contrary. The caption, “Join AAL and help bring JESUS to the inner-city,” leads the reader to believe that by joining the AAL he is joining a group that is doing church work. A number of members of our Synod, both pastors and laymen, wrote to the committee and expressed their deep concerns. These were shared by the members of this committee. When these concerns were conveyed to the president of the AAL by our Synod president, his response was immediate and unambiguous. He wrote as follows:

As I have indicated previously, AAL is not a part of the church and it is not our role to do the work of the church. It is one of our purposes “to enable Lutherans and their families to aid themselves and others with programs of assistance to Lutheran congregations and their institutions.” The inner-city Vacation Bible School grants are a good illustration of carrying out that purpose. It is unfortunate that a headline says something that the grant did not say.

It is the members of WELS congregations who deserve the credit for bringing Jesus to the inner city. AAL can and should say only that we provided some financial assistance to you. That is what we say in our bylaws and what we mean. To say something else in a headline is clearly contrary to AAL policy, and even one such instance may cast doubt on our real intentions.

We should take the AAL at its word.

But doesn’t the word “fraternal” and its use in connection with the word “Lutheran” make of the AAL a confessional fellowship that brings into fraternal relation people with differing confessions? Such conclusions have been drawn. We should therefore be clear on what the term “fraternal” means when applied to an insurance association. When an insurance company calls itself a “fraternal benefit society,” the word “fraternal” has no confessional connotation. It does not indicate that the members of the society are brothers in the sense that they are united in confessional fellowship.

The legal definition of “fraternal” can be stated as follows: “A fraternal is a corporation, society, order, or association without capital stock (non-profit) which exists for the benefit of its

members and their beneficiaries, which has a branch or local unit or lodge system with a representative form of government, which makes provision for payment of death, disability, annuity, or endowment benefits, or combinations of such benefits, and which engages in socially redeeming activities (benevolence programs).” From this definition it is evident that the word “fraternal” has no spiritual or theological connotations as used in the insurance industry.

As to its restriction of membership to Lutherans, the AAL in 1974 expressed itself through its president as follows: “Membership in AAL is restricted to Lutherans and their families. There’s a good reason for it. The whole idea of fraternal benefit societies is to bring together groups of people with like interests so they can better meet their own financial and social needs.” Again, the emphasis is not on confessional unity, which is not present, but on “like interests.” What these interests are, remains undefined beyond the wording, “financial and social needs.”

All of the above persuades us that receiving grants from the AAL does not in and of itself compromise our confession.

The situation with the Lutheran Brotherhood is quite different. The “Corporate Philosophy” statement of the Lutheran Brotherhood, which is a restatement of its constitution, contains two statements which cause misgivings for all who wish to remain obedient to the scriptural principles regarding fellowship. These statements, intended to reflect “the ultimate purpose to be served by Lutheran Brotherhood,” are:

“To aid the Lutheran Church in extending the Christian faith” and

“To promote the spiritual, intellectual, and physical welfare of its members.”

These sentences make it plain that the Lutheran Brotherhood presents itself as a spiritual fellowship united in the confession of a common faith (“the Lutheran faith”), in short, a church, and therefore fulfilling its purpose by doing church work. The Lutheran Brotherhood sees itself as “extending the Christian faith” (mission work) and “promoting the spiritual welfare of its members.” As long as this policy remains unchanged, we can draw only one conclusion: Yes, we would be compromising our confession by receiving grants from the Lutheran Brotherhood and by becoming members of it. We would be remiss in our report if we did not warn against involvement with the Lutheran Brotherhood in any manner.

3. May the church apply for financial help from outside sources?

The example of help received from “outside sources” by God’s people in rebuilding the Temple and the absence of any prohibition against such help in the Scripture leads us to answer that, unless other factors enter in, we are here involved in a matter of Christian liberty. Our Synod has, for example, always considered it a matter of Christian liberty to accept from the government tax-free status or police and fire protection.

On the other hand, we believe it to be an offense to the Gospel when the church indiscriminately seeks out and requests financial support from individuals, corporations, or foundations that have in no way offered assistance. Such a course of action brings reproach on the Lord Jesus and His church.

A practical question is whether applying for grants, for example from the AAL, is a reprehensible form of asking for funds. To answer Yes seems to involve a misunderstanding of what is involved in “requesting” grants. We would therefore outline the procedure that is followed.

As a fraternal life insurance company, the AAL is expected to support charitable activities. Since it offers funds to churches and schools for selected projects, we need not

consider the required application for such funds as disgraceful begging on the part of the church. Similarly, the Siebert Foundation of Milwaukee is required to distribute its income to Lutheran causes within Wisconsin and makes it known that it has funds available. We do not find that an application for such funds brings disgrace on the church or the Lord Jesus. Likewise, if a corporation informs its workers that it is willing to match the funds which they give to a church project, a filing of the necessary forms to take advantage of such offers hardly constitutes a "seeking" of support that brings reproach on the Christian and his church. The fact that the procedure for dispensing funds requires some form of application is no different from the application a church must fill out to establish its tax-exempt status under the laws of the state. From all this, it is evident that the "requesting" of grants is such only in a formal, technical sense, and cannot fairly be described as "begging."

There are some who take exception to making a public acknowledgment of such grants. Since the giving of such credit is not mandatory, we do not believe that we must fault those who feel impelled by a sense of courtesy to acknowledge a grant publicly.

There is a final question that does not concern itself directly with the assigned subject of applying for grants but asks about the implications of membership in a fraternal society. Since this question has been raised, we include it here in our report.

4. Does each member in a fraternal organization become responsible for the use to which every grant is put?

This question is asked because the AAL distributes grants to institutions and church bodies with whom we are not in confessional agreement and which we cannot conscientiously support. Can a Wisconsin Synod member with a good conscience belong to a fraternal society that makes grants to projects within erring church bodies?

It has been said that the purchase of insurance from the AAL is the same as the purchase of an automobile from General Motors. In a business transaction of this type the buyer is not responsible for the distribution of profits and the use to which they are put. The comparison, however, does not cover parallel situations. In a fraternal society the individual not only does business with the organization, but becomes a part of it. He becomes a part of the organization much like the person who purchases stock in a corporation. As a member, he elects the board of directors which determines the policies and procedures in his behalf and is responsible to him.

What policy for distributing grants will be acceptable to the members of a fraternal society like the AAL? The society must remember that it is not a church organization and that its members are not expressing confessional unity through their membership. For this reason, we would object if the distribution of funds were made on the basis of a confessional test. It would be a confusion of the AAL's position as a non-religious fraternal society if it distributed benefits to groups or organizations on a confessional basis.

What basis for distribution can then be used? In the case of the AAL the answer is that it distributes to projects within organizations from which it draws its membership. These are the various Lutheran church bodies. It distributes grants to projects in all of them, not because they will be used according to a certain confessional position, but because there are members in the fraternal society from each of those groups. It wants to return the benefits to the groups whose members by their insurance premiums have generated the money available for grants.

Accordingly, the AAL distributes funds to ALC projects because it has members from the ALC, to Missouri Synod projects because it has members from the Missouri Synod, to Wisconsin Synod projects because it has members from the Wisconsin Synod. This appears to be

an equitable procedure by which the AAL avoids stepping into a religious role that it does not have nor want to have.

Concluding Cautions

In drawing its conclusions, the committee is convinced that there are several general cautions that it must emphasize by repetition. Stewardship and fellowship are the critical factors involved in the question before us.

First, every congregation, every institution, and every agency within our church body must ask itself what effects such financial aid may have on the God-pleasing, faith-induced stewardship of the members of the church. Effects may differ widely, depending on the nature, location, organization, and makeup of the congregation or institution. Primary to the concern about stewardship is that nothing be done to inhibit or discourage the free giving of our members as they support all phases of the church's work.

Secondly, there is the matter of fellowship. Whenever opportunities for outside financial help are made available to the church, we must determine whether the organization offering such assistance is claiming to perform church work in so doing and is taking on the functions of a church. We must determine whether, in accepting or applying for such assistance, we are entering into a spiritual fellowship with the organization in question. Scrutiny of the philosophies and purposes of such organizations is in place.

In concluding its study, the committee is aware of the need for constant watchfulness and self-discipline on the part of all. The church must always be on guard against elements that would in any way subvert its mission on earth. Changes may well take place in the future, so that the committee's specific conclusions may no longer be valid. We are ever to "watch and pray" (Matt. 26:41).

In matters of Christian liberty, different areas and groups in the church may at times come to conclusions in which they differ from one another. When this happens, it is vital to the maintaining of Christian charity and God-pleasing harmony that we not be found guilty of judging one another. Through the Apostle Paul, God warns against the danger of transforming Christian freedom into a moralistic set of do's and don'ts (Rom. 14; 1 Cor. as Gal. 5:1). Conversely, it behooves us to respect the convictions of those who feel conscience-bound to abstain from that which is indifferent.

Finally, a word of caution is in place about the use of Scripture for supporting or disproving a point. Extreme care must be taken to avoid being selective in the choice and use of Scripture presages. The overriding concern of the committee was to let the whole counsel of God speak. When studying the Scripture passages which related to the assignment, the committee concerned itself that the respective passages were examined in their total context.

Our fervent prayer is that God, in His wisdom and divine care for His church, may sanctify to Himself the work here done in His Name so that it may be for the edification of His church.

Prof. Armin Schuetze, Chairman
Teacher John Bauer, Secretary
Rev. Werner H. Franzmann
Prof. Theodore J. Hartwig
Rev. Harold E. Wicke

Reference: BoRaM DO. 192-194, Committee on Grants Addendum

Subject: Report of the Committee on Grants

Resolution No. 4

WHEREAS 1) a portion of the constituency of Synod has expressed concern over “the expediency of the current practice of WELS requesting and applying for gifts, grants, matching funds from any source outside the WELS” (BoRaM 1977, p. 174); and

WHEREAS 2) the Synod in convention in 1977 elected a committee to study this question; and

WHEREAS 3) the committee has made a thorough study of the scriptural and practical aspects of this question and submitted its report to the districts (RTTD, 1978, p. 183-197; BoRaM, 1979, p. 192-194); and

WHEREAS 4) your floor committee has made a thorough study of the Report of the Committee on Grants; and

WHEREAS 5) the report clearly shows that the requesting and receiving of such gifts and grants are a matter of Christian liberty; and

WHEREAS 6) the report emphasizes that constant watchfulness and self-discipline are necessary and God-pleasing in exercising our Christian liberty; and

WHEREAS 7) your committee has thoroughly studied Memorial 79-6 relating to the Report of the Committee on Grants; therefore be it

Resolved, a) that we endorse in substance the Report of the Committee on Grants; and be it further

Resolved, b) that we thank the Committee on Grants for its report.

Pastor Paul E. Pankow, Chairman

Pastor Wernor E. Wagner, Secretary