

Why A Study of the Fraternal Life Insurance Organization Aid Association for Lutherans?

[Delivered to the Tenth Convention of the Church of the Lutheran Confession, held at Immanuel Lutheran College, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, July 11-14:1972.]

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The Church of the Lutheran Confession was organized and dedicated “to facilitate the exercise of true Christian fellowship and to help maintain the same through mutual strengthening and fraternal vigilance, in keeping with the will of God, 1 Cor. 1:10; Eph. 4:1-3; Heb. 10: 23-24. To protect this fellowship against the encroachment of error and unionism through united testimony and doctrinal discipline, as it is written, 2 Tim. 4:2-3a; 2 Thess. 3:6; Rom. 16:17. Cf. also Titus 3:10; 2 Cor. 6:14-18.” (Article 2, Purpose, paragraphs C and D of the Constitution of the CLC.)

When by the grace of God the moment of decision came for us to terminate our membership in heterodox church bodies on the basis of God’s Word, we had to confess that God’s Word had always been clear on this matter, even before the day of personal decision became clear to us. We did not by our termination of church fellowship make this or that church body heterodox; before God, this had already taken place when official pronouncements and statements had been inscribed on those church bodies’ banners. When we subsequently banded together again as a group of confessing Lutheran Christians under the organization known as the Church of the Lutheran Confession, we reminded ourselves that the skirmishes amid battles to maintain a true visible church here on earth were not over. We told ourselves that there would be many moments of truth, that eternal vigilance is the price of truth, and that we should earnestly contend for the faith once delivered unto the saints, (Jude 3).

I remember in my seminary days attending a Lutheran Synodical Conference meeting in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Already then, in the 1940’s, the controversy was going on in a once truly orthodox conference. At that time, Prof. Edmund Reim, then dean of Thiensville Theological Seminary of the Wisconsin Synod, observed that we, who had by birth and early instruction been brought up in the truth, might easily take for granted that we automatically possess and confess it. He exhorted the fathers, pastors, professors, teachers and delegates that the truth is something we must also contend for and that this is an on-going battle, else the truth of God’s Word becomes a dead letter in our lives, in our churches and in our church bodies. The sorry history of Lutheranism in the last several decades bears this out.

The fact that the CLC has, through its relatively short history, had to concern itself with what we might call “finer points” of this or that doctrine of God’s Word is the mark of a truly confessional church. The fact that open and free discussion of doctrine and practice has become an on-going thing in our midst and that parliamentary jockeyings are not been used to bury an issue is, after all, the sign of brotherly concern against the encroachment of error and unionism through united testimony.

But why, you ask, at this late date be come concerned about AAL? The thought may arise that we are on the verge of becoming a fanatical group, ready to jump on just about anything for the purpose of keeping our people in a constant state of foment. We admit that there are many dangers of orthodoxy, as there are dangers of a dead orthodoxy. But let us study the matter before passing a hasty judgment on our deep concern over the unionistic make-up of AAL.

To begin with, the concern over the spiritual implications and the unionistic endeavors of AAL is not new in our midst. At the time when I joined the CLC, not only did I hold several small policies with AAL, but I had been local branch secretary of Branch #2 for several years. During the “good-old-days” of the Synodical Conference it seemed like the thing to do; namely, to take out life insurance with an agency that was church affiliated and sold policies with the sales-pitch that, not only were you protecting your family, but a large percentage of the profits of the company would go into the coffers of your particular church body. It sounded like good stewardship to be helping yourself and your church at the same time. As time went on, there began to appear more and more disturbing elements in AAL. I personally contacted agents for AAL and expressed my misgivings as to the fraternalism that was involved with churches that were not united in the one true faith. With the break-up of the Synodical Conference, we were told that the structure of this fraternal life insurance company was going to be altered and that an equal and fair distribution of profits would be given to the CLC, so that actually we were not, as voting members of the AAL, contributing to anybody but ourselves. There were those who even made a trip to the central office of AAL in Appleton, Wisconsin, to find out more about the spiritual involvement of these who held policies and voting membership. No direct answers were forthcoming to allay our fears.

To obtain its non-profit status in the eyes of the government, AAL’s bylaws stress that “it was chartered as a fraternal benefit society, not as a life insurance company,” (Pamphlet, p. 5). In order to maintain its non-profit status, the active participation of the local branch is stressed. In keeping with the articles of incorporation as “a fraternal organization,” which secure for AAL tax exemption of “a fraternal and benevolent association,” the pamphlet (p. 4) states: “All certificate holders are members of Aid Association for Lutherans and one of its local units called ‘a local branch.’ —Traditionally, these units are identified with congregations.” These branches are to be composed of policy holders in local congregations of a particular area. The moment you move, the AAL agent seems to be the first person to call on you for the purpose of lining you up with the local branch in the area in which you live. One agent told me that he considered himself a sort of assistant to pastors in keeping people with the church in this mobile society in which we live, and furthermore, if he could get my membership list for solicitation, he would direct many members my way.

It is paramount that the local branches send yearly reports to the home office regarding the various projects of fraternal concern that have been carried out, together with local branch election results and the ballots that each branch is to cast for the election of the National Board of Directors. Another point that is stressed is the participation of the branch officers in the area seminars and conferences sponsored by the area agencies. At the time I was a branch secretary, I sent several letters of protest regarding these seminars, since they involved prayer fellowship with adherents of false doctrine. Each branch was given “brownie points” on the basis of seminars attended, local projects pursued, bake sales, suppers, etc., sponsored by the local branch for fraternal concern. Usually these items would then appear in the AAL Branch Notes sent to each policy holder. I might add that I never received a reply to my protests; they simply were ignored. The local branch that I represented was yearly docked the commission it was to receive from the home office, also the small fee that was to be paid to the local branch secretary for his services rendered in keeping those reports coming in to the head office.

At its inception, the scope of AAL’s operations was strictly limited to members in good standing of congregations belonging to the constituent synods of the Synodical Conference. After 1962-63, this was changed in the by-laws to members in good standing of congregations

belonging to synods *formerly* belonging to the Synodical Conference. It was no secret that the directorship and management of AAL were actively working in the direction of the ecumenical movement, especially as it concerned the major and large Lutheran church bodies. More and more the "AAL Correspondent" (AAL's official paper), featured articles by leading liberal Lutherans from the LC-MS, ALC and the LCA. Its series of "Men on a Mission" praised and lauded the work of false teachers and church leaders. So it came as no surprise that on January 1, 1966, the new policy was this: "There's no change in principle or organization, but as of Jan. 1, 1966, Lutherans who are members in good standing of congregations of the *American Lutheran Church*, and the *Lutheran Church in America* also are *eligible for membership* in AAL." (Pamphlet, p. 2, also President's letter of Nov., 1965). Its program now is pan-Lutheran, while its goals and principles are the same; namely, "to conceive and implement action giving membership expression to *spiritual and material values of life* as best befits an *organization of Christians drawn together through the bonds of the Lutheran faith*." (Goals, point 2, taken from the special issue No. 447 of V. 63 under the title, "A Sketch of Successful Service" with the sub-title on the front cover, "How AAL for Lutherans has Succeeded in Serving its Members—and Why.")

A study of this program became necessary for the faculty at ILC because eligible students were inquiring concerning applying for AAL scholarships and because such applications required the endorsement of the respective department heads representing our school. This study, presented in the form of an outline prepared by the sainted Prof. Edmund Reim, was discussed at a meeting of the ILC faculty on November 29, 1965. This outline is available for your study and evaluation. After this discussion the faculty arrived at specific conclusions, to wit:

From the foregoing it should be clear that

- the work that AAL is doing in these programs is *church work*, involving particularly the work of *missions* and the *training of workers* in the vineyard.
- the work is joint *church work*, in an area that involves more than externals.
- that even before the change that is to go into effect January 1, 1966, it was *joint work with such as were no longer joined* in the confession of their faith, hence *unionistic* in character.
- that after the end of this year it will be *work done in the name of Pan-Lutheranism*, and in the furtherance of its cause.

It is therefore evident that

- as a school we cannot solicit support from this source without denying the scriptural principles to which our CLC stands committed.
- as for our students, we can for the same reason neither recommend nor endorse these scholarships, but must rather warn against the offense which could result from acceptance of this aid.

These conclusions met with the approval of the Faculty, and were submitted to the Board of Regents of ILC and to the President of our Church of the Lutheran Confession.

When certain members of Bethel Ev. Lutheran Church of Spring, Texas, became aware of the fact that our faculty at ILC would not endorse applications for the scholarship program of AAL, they became disturbed by their own personal involvement as policy holders and voting

members of such an organization. Hence a study was initiated by the pastor at the insistence of concerned lay members of Bethel. The study started with the Church Council at their June 11, 1971, meeting. The result was that the Church Council came to agreement on some definite conclusions on the basis of God's Word, to wit:

Whereas, the work that AAL is doing in its program is church work, i.e., joint church work with such as are not united in the confession of their faith, hence unionistic in character;

THEREFORE, it is obvious that the Word condemns membership in and/or support of AAL.

That, since membership in AAL is shown to be wrong from God's Word, nothing more can be added. References: Eph. 5:11-12; 2 Cor. 6:14-18; Matt. 18:19; Matt. 7:15; 1 Tim. 6:3-5; 1 John 4:1; Romans 16:17-18; Eph. 5:8-11.

At its voters' assembly, held on July 18, 1971, the following resolution was passed unanimously: "RESOLVED, that we at Bethel Ev. Lutheran Church Spring, Texas, therefore cannot give endorsement to AAL, and encourage our members to alleviate themselves of any connection with Aid Association for Lutherans."

Since it had been expressed that we confer with our brethren in the faith regarding our conclusions, the pastor of Bethel Ev. Lutheran Church of Spring, Texas, brought the matter to the attention of the Wisconsin Pastoral Conference, which graciously allotted time for a study of this matter. They in turn addressed themselves to the president of the CLC, asking that this subject be placed on the program of the General Pastoral Conference to be held in April at St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Austin, Minnesota. President Robert Reim gave the assignment to Prof. Gordon Radtke, who gave a concise and forthright presentation of the unionistic character of AAL. Several of the brethren approached President Reim and me seeking ways and means of bringing this to the attention of all our people so that, in knowing what AAL really is, and in applying God's Word to this troubled area, we might all speak the same thing and there be no divisions among us. Subsequently, President Reim asked the essayist to prepare a study for the CLC convention to be held at ILC, July 11-14, 1972, so that our lay people might "prove all things," test these things whether they be true and scriptural, good, useful, and God-pleasing.

At this point, a word of caution is in order so that we do not go in the direction of excesses which destroy the freedom of a Christian. Here, if ever, the distinction made with such excessive care by our dogmatists between things essential and accidental applies. Stockholders in some industrial concern, members of labor unions, certain purely civic commercial clubs, or any number of purely human organizations occasionally will do something unlawful or in some way serve the flesh; but—this is the essential point—they do not make such acts part of their announced purpose and program. There certainly is a world of difference between purchasing a certain item made at a Catholic supply store and joining the fraternal organization, Knights of Columbus, with its avowed aims, purposes and pledges of furthering the propagation of the Catholic faith. On the one hand, no religious unionism is involved, for we are simply paying a fair market price for a desired commodity, (How the book store dispenses its profits is of an accidental nature, unless, of course, you have to sign a pledge card to this effect); on the other hand, we are speaking about joining a fraternal organization with definitely prescribed goals and aims spelled out, holding voting membership, and hence becoming responsible as a member for those aims and goals. Whether such voting membership is used or not is immaterial. Here we are

not dealing with cooperation in externals, but with a religious fraternalism which involves religious unionism. AAL makes a big point of this that dividends accrued from its policies are put into the church work of all Lutheran church bodies, with the exception of the CLC, and this because we do not desire to endorse nor subscribe to their unionistic activities. When the Lord says, "Come out from among them," "Be ye separate," "Avoid them," "Touch not the unclean thing," this also includes any type of fraternalism and financial support we give them or which we receive from them.

AAL loves the word, "Fraternalife." Actually what AAL is doing is using the Gospel and the fellowship of the Gospel to sell insurance, then using part of the profits to undermine that same Gospel and to destroy any God-pleasing fellowship in the Gospel. The last "AAL Correspondent" speaks of the "Behnken, Fry, Schiotz Fellowship." While Pres. Behnken did not take a firm stand in those days when it would have meant so much for confessional Lutheranism, he was given grace to confess in his latter days that Missouri had departed from the truth. Pres. Fry died an outspoken false prophet, and Pres. Schiotz has worked most of his life to undermine the Gospel. I cannot be associated with a fraternity that places these destroyers of Lutheranism on a pedestal.

During the study of AAL, we also found it necessary to examine the constitution and by-laws of the Lutheran Mutual Life Insurance Company, Waverly, Iowa. This started out as a church-related organization, but since has completely changed its set-up and become a regular stock, government-taxed life insurance company like Prudential, Mutual of Omaha, Aetna, etc. It has retained the name Lutheran because of its origin and since it works primarily among Lutherans, but not exclusively. It is not a fraternal life insurance company like AAL. About the only objection that I could find was the fact that its board of directors are required to be Lutheran, just why, I don't know.

The point is this, that we be careful not to create a principle which fits certain cases but is not of universal application. Here the words of Paul apply. He reminds the Corinthians that he had warned them against companionship with fornicators and against "touching the unclean thing," adding that the prohibited association "with fornicators of this world or with the covetous or extortioners or idolators" is not absolute; otherwise, he says, you would have to leave this world entirely. "Then must ye needs go out of the world," I Cor. 5:10. The ancient Roman world was full of guilds, societies, corporations, and associations of every description, none any better than those of today; and yet nowhere does the New Testament state that a Christian would be held responsible for the entire record of inadvertent evils that slip into these societies. It must be shown from God's Word in every case that the evil is inseparable from such an institution in all its forms.

We remember how the leaven of false doctrine gained entrance and status in the LC-MS when cooperation in spiritual work with the ALC, the NLC, the LWF, and LCUSA was condoned under the name of "cooperation in externals." Church work, however, is no "external" matter. In the CLC we are agreed that if pulpit, altar and prayer fellowship are involved, cooperation with other Lutheran bodies, who are not agreed with us on the doctrines of Scripture, is out of the question. It is the same kind of unionism to cooperate with such Lutherans in publishing joint church papers, missionary literature, and the like. We do not contribute to the support of Concordia Lutheran Seminary in St. Louis, Mo., nor do we want a heterodox Lutheran on the staff of our LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN, or on the faculty of ILC in Eau Claire, Wis. We readily agree that such cooperation in spiritual matters would also be rank unionism. For this very reason we cannot condone lodge membership on the basis that the man no longer attends the lodge

meetings, but wants to continue membership because of a fraternal life insurance policy that would be hard to replace. Many of us, including the essayist, were deceived by AAL representatives who assured us that the structure of this fraternal life insurance company was going to be changed because of the break-up of the Synodical Conference. The truth of the matter is that the changes in AAL's fraternalism have become more unionistic than ever before. And this should not surprise us since the majority of its Board of Directors are liberal Missouri Synod Lutherans. As Missouri goes, so goes AAL. Its program now is pan-Lutheran. To use their own words: "When a Lutheran buys AAL insurance protection, he also becomes a member of our fraternal family and automatically participates in projects which serve Lutherans and Lutheranism in special ways." (1972 summer edition of "AAL Correspondent," a one-page advertisement.)

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