

July 10, 2012

Dear SBL and AAR Members:

We write today for three reasons. First, we want to share our excitement at our upcoming meeting in Chicago. This is the second time we are holding Annual Meetings on the concurrent model and we anticipate a terrific gathering, as we had last year in San Francisco. We have vibrant programs planned. We are excited as well about our deepening relationship, which is unique among scholarly organizations and stands as a model of cooperation among learned societies.

Second, we want to share some information about two of the Chicago hotels (the Hyatt Regency McCormick Place and the Hyatt Regency Chicago) at which we have booked space. The labor contract between the hotel workers at the Hyatt has lapsed. While the negotiations continue, the hotels workers' union, UniteHere, has called for a boycott of the Hyatt properties. This is not a strike, and it is our hope that the hotels and the union come to terms soon and ratify a new contract that is fair to all parties.

The AAR Board and the SBL Council, sensitive to our mutual respect for the rights, dignity, and worth of all people, which we understand to include the rights of workers to organize into unions, have met together to decide how to proceed. Canceling our contracts with the Hyatt would be financially prohibitive. Nevertheless, we have worked to ensure that all AAR and SBL members have the right to exercise their conscience in reaction to the boycott. We will alert members of the boycott as a part of the process of making hotel reservations. In addition, if members who have already booked sleeping rooms in one of the Hyatt properties wish to change hotels, we will help accommodate that change. We have provided for alternative arrangements in non-boycotted hotels for disabled members, including a shuttle service, and for Jews who wish to observe the Sabbath and need to stay at and walk from a non-boycotted hotel. The childcare service, the Employment Center registration, and most program sessions will be placed in the McCormick Convention Center. We also recognize that some of our members may wish to stay at the Hyatt, and we have contracted for an adequate number of sleeping rooms at the Hyatts for their use. In addition, the Board and the Council formed a subcommittee to make policy recommendations regarding our relationship with organized labor so that we can make informed judgments about future hotel contracts. Those recommendations are to be in our hands in 2013.

Third, we want you to know that our response to this situation is not limited to contractual and logistical concerns. Indeed, as scholarly societies that foster critical inquiry, we also want to engage important issues like these from intellectual and policy perspectives. With that in mind, we have formed a committee to begin planning a plenary session at the Chicago Annual Meetings that will consider the ways in which academic and religious communities have related to labor movements in North America. Our Annual Meetings offer a unique opportunity for the SBL and AAR to examine questions constructively, and we hope to enable our organization to do what they do best—evaluate, critique, learn, and teach.

Again, our hope is that the union and the hotels are able to ratify a new contract well in advance of our 2012 Annual Meetings. We are closely monitoring this situation and will keep the memberships posted on any new developments.

Sincerely,

The SBL Council and the AAR Board of Directors