

DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS AND THEOLOGICAL OPINIONS (DSTO)

VOLUME 2

A. THESES OF AGREEMENT

Theses of Agreement II: joint prayer and worship

Adopted by the Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations, 1993.

Edited August 2001.

1. The statement in the *Theses of Agreement* [TA] on joint prayer and worship was adopted in its present form in 1949. Three things need to be noted about the character of this statement:
 - The content of the statement grew out of the areas of dispute which had been identified during many years of theological debate between the Lutheran churches in Australia.
 - The wording is conditioned not only by the language and style of the 1940s, but also by the particular kind of language which had been generated in the disputed areas in prior decades.
 - Various texts of Scripture are cited to support particular emphases in the statement. These texts were judged to be significant on the basis of the knowledge and interpretative tools available to the compilers at the time.
2. The Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations [CTICR] appreciates the difficulty a number of pastors and laity in the Lutheran Church of Australia [LCA] have with aspects of the content, wording, and scriptural references in TA II, especially since half a century separates us from the time and circumstances of the original drafting. The CTICR is mindful also of the fact that some pastors in the LCA strongly approve the emphases in TA II which provide safe channels for navigating through the swirling currents of the ecumenical movement.
3. It is the considered opinion of the CTICR that the 1949 statement should not be revised or reformulated. The reasons for this are:

- 3.1 The *Theses of Agreement* is an important historical document, having been adopted by the uniting churches 'in all seriousness and in good faith... as a unifying document prior to the formation of the Lutheran Church of Australia' (see DSTO I, A30).
- 3.2 Since TA II is part of so important an historical document, it is not appropriate to alter or rewrite this set of theses in our time.
- 3.3 The reactions by pastors in the LCA to the content and wording of TA II have been somewhat ambiguous.
- 3.4 The statements of TA II are doctrinally correct in their main emphases, despite the doubts that exist here and there about the interpretation and suitability of one or two of the Bible passages that are referred to in TA II.
- 3.5 Despite their dated terminology, the statements of TA II, when properly interpreted in today's context, provide timely guidance for members of the LCA
- 3.6 If new issues need to be addressed in the area of joint prayer and worship, the LCA will be better served by adopting a new statement which addresses the new issues.
4. The following emphases in the original theses can serve us Lutherans well as we relate to others in the Christian church:
 - 4.1 There are times when joint prayer/ joint worship is appropriate, and there are times when it is not.
 - 4.2 As we determine and practise relations with fellow Christians, we should remember that we are confessing Lutherans, that is, we have a doctrinal position which is precious to us and which we do not want to deny or give up.
 - 4.3 In determining our worship relationship (and all other church fellowship relationships) with other Christians, we will act in keeping with the word of God and the Confessions of the Lutheran church [see TA A31 and the 'Document of Union', DSTO I, A32 – A35].
 - 4.4 While normally we will attend our own Lutheran worship services, there may be valid reasons for us to attend, on special occasions, services of other denominations or services of an ecumenical nature.
 - 4.5 Joint prayer and worship often present us with difficult decisions involving loyalty to our own church's teaching and our relationship with other Christians. The situation can be quite complex. On the one hand, this complexity should challenge us to work through the issues in the light of the principle given in 4.3 above, so that we act responsibly. On the other hand, this complexity should not become an excuse for acting in a way which suggests that the issues have not been carefully worked through on the basis of this same principle.
 - 4.6 When situations are complex, participation in joint prayer and worship comes down to individual judgment and conscience. A decision has to be made on the basis of the theological principle stated in 4.3 above. So it may happen that two individual Lutherans decide on two very different courses of action in similar contexts. In such instances the issue is not the different actions, but the grounds on which the individuals base their actions (see TA II, 10).
5. It is worth noting that, while the text of TA II often speaks only of joint prayer, the title of TA II includes the words 'and worship'. Therefore the contents of TA II speak also to worship situations in the broader sense, even though specific reference may sometimes be made only to prayer.