

DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS AND THEOLOGICAL OPINIONS (DSTO)

VOLUME 1

A. THESES OF AGREEMENT

Document of Union

The Constituting Convention 1966 took the following action:

'RESOLUTION No.176: RESOLVED That paragraphs 9, 10, and 11 of the Document of Union form the basis with other Churches regarding the establishment of altar and pulpit fellowship.

'RESOLUTION No.177: RESOLVED That the Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations investigate with urgency the fellowships and affiliate connections of both amalgamating Churches with Lutheran Churches and organizations, in keeping with paragraphs 12, 13, 14, and 15(c) [numbered 16(c) below] of the Document of Union. ...'

The Document of Union was therefore appended to the Report of the Constituting Convention as information, particularly in reference to fellowships and affiliate connections.

The Preamble and Section 3 formed portion of the basis for the Preamble to the Constitution of the Lutheran Church of Australia.

Sections 1 and 2 formed the basis for Article II, Confession of the Constitution of the Lutheran Church of Australia.

Sections 4 to 8 are printed here in the recast form which was adopted by the two amalgamating Churches in their Closing Conventions at Tanunda, 1966, and which has been incorporated into the Theses of Agreement as Clauses 25 to 29 of Section V, Theses on the Church.

In keeping with the recommendation of the Joint Intersynodical Committee, the second portion of Section 15 is numbered Section 16.

Reviewed July 2001, unedited.

PREAMBLE

By the grace of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit we, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia, and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Australia, have been led together in the confession and unity of the one faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and of the one doctrine of His holy Gospel. We accept this unity as an unmerited gift of our God, in sincere repentance for what lies behind us since our fathers went their divided ways, and in humble gratitude for all that God in His mercy has worked through each of us in the years since 1846. He has kept us and blessed us and for this we magnify His holy Name.

We believe that the union between our Churches is His holy Will for us at this time. Therefore, we, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Australia, give each other the solemn pledge to unite together for the joint proclamation of the Gospel and the common administration of the Sacraments, in token of which we declare severally and jointly our acceptance of the following Document of Union.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

DOCTRINAL BASIS

1. We, the uniting Churches, accept without reservation the Holy Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament, as a whole and in all their parts, as the divinely inspired, written, and inerrant Word of God, and as the only infallible source and norm for all matters of faith, doctrine, and life.
2. We recognize and accept as a true exposition of the Word of God and as our own confession
 - a. the three Ecumenical Creeds: the Apostles' Creed, The Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed;
 - b. the Lutheran Symbols of the Book of Concord of 1580: the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles, the Small Catechism of Luther, the Large Catechism of Luther, and the Formula of Concord.
3. We accept the Theses of Agreement as the expression of the common consent of our two Churches on matters which were in dispute between us, and these Theses are hereby made part of this Document of Union.

CHURCH FELLOWSHIP AND COOPERATION

We adopt the following statements as an expression of the agreement that has been reached between us on matters of church fellowship and cooperation:

4. We uphold the distinction between the one, holy, Christian Church and the visible, organized Churches. We believe that the one, holy, Christian Church is present in those visible Churches where the marks of the Church are to be found, that is, where the Gospel of Christ is purely taught and the Sacraments are administered according to Christ's institution (Theses of Agreement, VI).
5. We believe that true Christians are found in every denomination in which to a greater or lesser degree the marks of the one, holy, Christian Church are present, in spite of existing errors, and we rejoice in the unity of the Spirit that binds all true believers to their one Lord. Nevertheless, according to the Word of God and our Lutheran Confessions, church fellowship, that is, mutual recognition as brethren, altar and pulpit fellowship and resultant cooperation in the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments, pre-supposes unanimity in the pure doctrine of the Gospel and in the right administration of the Sacraments.
6. We reject all religious syncretism or unionism (see Theses of Agreement II, 2, and V. 14,15). Accordingly, we cannot acknowledge ourselves to be in fellowship with Churches with which we are not one in doctrine and practice.
7. We declare that wherever continued cooperation in the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments and worship exists, there we have a witness to the world of unity in the faith and a profession of church fellowship.

8. There are, however, forms of cooperation between Churches not in church fellowship that are not necessarily a witness to unity in faith. God's Word does not explicitly or categorically justify or condemn such cooperation in special circumstances. Therefore all such extraordinary cooperation must be determined from case to case. Differences in judgment can be expected here and should be tolerated according to the law of love.

RELATIONSHIPS TO OTHER CHURCHES AND ORGANIZATIONS

In keeping with the above principles:

9. We acknowledge ourselves to be in church fellowship with all Lutheran Churches which subscribe to the Lutheran Confessions in their constitutions and adhere to them in their public teaching and practice. We are ready to enter into full cooperation with them or associations of them.
10. We cannot acknowledge ourselves to be in church fellowship with Lutheran Churches which do not give expression in their public teaching and practice to their adherence to the Lutheran Confessions as expressed in their constitutions. Accordingly we will define and decide the extent of our cooperation with these Lutheran Churches or associations of them from case to case.
11. We declare that the possibility or the extent of cooperation with other Churches or associations of them must be determined according to the circumstances, without condoning any syncretism or unionism or ceasing our witness against it. (cf Theses of Agreement II, 9)

DECLARATIONS REGARDING EXISTING FELLOWSHIPS AND AFFILIATIONS

12. We, the uniting Churches, have had church fellowship and affiliate connections with different Lutheran Churches and organizations. We realize that by our union the external, organizational, and legal aspects of such relations cease. We know, however, that unity in faith and confession is a gift of God which we may not repudiate. We therefore face the immediate obligation of having to determine our future common relationships to the Churches with which we severally have been in fellowship.
13. We declare that we take our stand on the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions and are ready on this basis to enter into discussions with Lutheran Churches at home and abroad to determine with which of these fellowship in Word and Sacrament exists or can be reached.
14. We pledge our common support to the native Lutheran Churches in New Guinea for the following reasons:
 - a. Both of the uniting Churches have accepted as the ultimate goal of all Lutheran mission work in New Guinea the establishment of one indigenous Lutheran Church in New Guinea;
 - b. Both of the uniting Churches are actively engaged in mission work in New Guinea. the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Australia from the beginning of Lutheran Mission in New Guinea, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia in its own mission on Rooke-Siassi since 1936 and on the mainland since 1951;
 - c. The three Lutheran Missions (Lutheran Mission New Guinea, New Guinea Lutheran Mission-Missouri Synod, and Australian Lutheran Mission) and the three native Lutheran Churches or groups of congregations (The Evangelical Lutheran Church

of New Guinea, the Wabag Lutheran Church, and the congregations of Siassi and Menyamya) have in 1963 appointed a Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations, which has been at work preparing a statement of faith and confession 'that can serve as a basis for fellowship and/or union between the several Lutheran Churches in New Guinea' which is to be 'in full accord with the Word of God', 'fully biblical and Gospel-centred and ... is one with the historic Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Churches' (Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations documents);

- d. Both of the uniting Churches as well as the native Churches in New Guinea and their representatives are earnestly concerned about the scriptural and confessional character of such a native Lutheran Church;
- e. The time for the continued presence of white missionaries in New Guinea may be limited and therefore the need to establish the native Lutheran Christians and congregations on a soundly scriptural and confessional basis in one Lutheran Church is urgent.

We, the uniting Churches, therefore pledge our common support to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of New Guinea, the Wabag Lutheran Church, and the Rooke-Siassi-Menyamya congregations of the Australian Lutheran Mission, because we recognize these three native Lutheran bodies to be confessionally Lutheran in their constitutions, doctrine, and practice. We promise to do all in our power to maintain the confessional Lutheran character of these native Churches and to assist them in their endeavours to establish one indigenous Lutheran Church in New Guinea. We are ready to discuss with other supporting Churches and Mission Societies our support of the native Lutheran Churches in New Guinea and our common responsibility to continue safeguarding the confessional Lutheran character of the native Churches.

We declare that we do not hereby enter into any direct church fellowship with the other supporting bodies, but that we are ready at any time to discuss this with them.

- 15. We hold that membership in an association or federation of Churches is in itself neither bidden nor forbidden in the Holy Scriptures, so that it is an adiaphoron and therefore a matter of free choice for a Church in keeping with its confessional character and such principles as it may hold to be necessary for its well-being.
- 16. We accept the following declaration concerning our attitude to the Lutheran World Federation:
 - a. The Lutheran World Federation has clearly indicated its intention to be a federation of Churches and not a Church. There is no reason to doubt the genuineness of this intention. However, the ecclesiological problem still remains: Can a federation with a specific doctrinal basis act in essential church work (*in sacris*) on behalf of its member-Churches without itself assuming the character of Church in the New Testament sense? This problem is unresolved within the Federation itself, for member-Churches not in church fellowship with other member-Churches have been asked to give their reasons for not entering into church fellowship with them.
 - b. In the uniting Churches there are some who hold that membership in the Lutheran World Federation is not contrary to the Word of God, while others hold that it is.
 - c. In view of these facts and because Lutheran union is for scriptural and practical reasons the paramount duty of the Lutheran Churches in Australia, we are agreed not to seek affiliation with the Lutheran World Federation until the implications of such affiliation are resolved to the satisfaction of the united Church.