

## DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS AND THEOLOGICAL OPINIONS (DSTO)

### VOLUME 1

#### A. THESES OF AGREEMENT

## VII: Theses on eschatological matters

*On the basis of theses drawn up by Prof. Blaess after discussions by the Sub-Committees, and of theses submitted by Dr Sasse, Pastor Muetzelfeldt and Pastor J. Riedel, the doctrines on the Last Things were discussed at joint meetings held on March 25, July 6, August 3, November 2 and December 14, 1960, and the theses were adopted in the following form at joint meetings on May 25, August 3 and December 14, 1950. The Preliminary Statements were prepared by Dr Hebart after discussions in the Sub-Committees and adopted at the joint meeting on July 6, 1950.*

*The statement on the Antichrist was adopted by the joint meeting on August 14, 1952. It is No. 7 of these Theses. It was revised to read as it now appears at the joint meetings on May 3, and June 14, 1956.*

*At the same meeting Thesis 5 was adopted unanimously to read as it now appears.*

*Thesis 6 was, at the joint meeting on September 25, 1952, revised to read as it now appears.*

*Reviewed July 2001, unedited.*

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*'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time' (1 Peter 1:3-5).*

### PRELIMINARY STATEMENTS

- a. The Gospel proclaims both present and future salvation and accordingly it kindles not only faith but also a firm and joyous hope in the hearts of those who become one with Christ through the Holy Spirit. The object of this hope is the return of Jesus Christ to judge the quick and the dead, and the glorious visible consummation of all those things which His people even now possess in faith as hidden spiritual realities: victory over sin, death and Satan, the redemption of the body, and the gift of eternal life. The faith of a Christian is therefore essentially eschatological; though he sojourns between the times of Christ's First and Second Advent, he is continually living in the Last Times, as one who possesses even now what shall be his in eternity. Luke 17:21; Matt 12:28;

5:3,10; 21:31; John 3:3; 2 Cor 5:17; Rom 8:1; Gal 2:20; 1 Cor 15:53ff; John 3:18; 2 Cor 5:7; 1 John 3:2; Rom 8:23; 1 Cor 1:7; Phil 3:20; Titus 2:13; 2 Pet 3:12-14; Heb 9:28; 11:10.

On the other hand, all who reject the saving call of the Holy Spirit in the means of grace are not only deprived of the spiritual gifts of eternal life, but are even now under the condemnation of God and therefore without hope. John 3:18; Rom 8:6; Eph 5:6; 2:12; John 3:36.

- b. The basis and centre of all doctrines, also of the doctrine of the Last Things, is the Person and Work of Jesus Christ, His Gospel, His atoning and reconciling death, His resurrection, His ascension, His gift of the Holy Spirit.

The Person and Work and Gospel of Jesus Christ are also the norm and criterion for the interpretation of all eschatological passages and figures in the Old and in the New Testament. When dealing with eschatological matters it is particularly necessary to practise a Christocentric approach; to adhere closely to the words of Scripture; to emphasize the clear doctrinal passages (*sedes doctrinae*); to interpret Scripture with Scripture; to read the Old Testament in the clear light of the New Testament; to maintain carefully the essential distinction between Law and Gospel.

Only by following these hermeneutical principles can we guard against false, enthusiastic interpretations or fantastic exploitations of prophetic passages, as well as against becoming guilty of a legalistic and formalistic abuse of Holy Scripture or a secularization of the Christian hope. Such wrong interpretation or fantastic exploitations would build salvation on an earthly foundation and regard the eschatological passages as a mere catalogue and chronology of the Last Things.

- c. Although the prophetic passages on the Last Things are also profitable for doctrine, nevertheless all interpretation of the eschatological passages of the Old Testament and New Testament must recognize certain inherent limitations. We have our Christian hope in faith and as yet sight is denied to us; we know in part, but not fully; much God keeps hidden from us, as some prophecies on the Last Things are not yet fulfilled and/or the phenomena and events with which they deal are still in process of development; many of these prophetic passages are expressed in figurative language. A theology of the Last Things must therefore avoid a preconceived, unscriptural approach and not endeavour to interfere with the sovereign freedom of God, who Himself will fulfil His prophecies in His own way and time. Therefore, a detailed interpretation and application of prophetic passages on the Last Things is not always possible and no interpretation of all parts of the prophecy of the Last Things can be made binding upon Christians. When interpreting such passages special caution and mutual patience must be practised to preserve the true peace of the Church, always provided that the inviolable authority of the Scriptures and of all doctrines revealed in them in clear words is upheld and the central importance of the doctrine of justification is acknowledged and there is the readiness to fight for these two principles of the Reformation with spiritual weapons against all falsification and weakening.
- d. The correct doctrine of the Last Things is of great importance for the life and work of the Church; it leads to sobermindedness, patience in hope, zealous service, and sound Scriptural practice; it counteracts false aims, enthusiastic expectations, and wrong practice. Those who have the Christian hope expect the battle between the true Church and the godless world to continue to the end of time; they are prepared for the most fearful temptations and tribulations as the end draws nigh, and wait with yearning for the blessed Last Day, the return of the Lord, and the perfect life in eternal communion with God. Meanwhile, they strive to prepare men for the world to come by the preaching of the pure Gospel.

## THESES

1. We believe
  - a. that Christ will at the Last Day return visibly and in glory to judge the quick and the dead in righteousness, Acts 1:11; Acts 10:42; Acts 17:31; John 5:27; 2 Cor 5:10; Jude 14,15; Rev 1:7;
  - b. that He will raise all the dead, John 5:28,29; Acts 24:15; 1 Cor 15:12ff; Luke 20:37,38; 1 Thess 4:14;
  - c. that He will give to the godly and elect eternal life and everlasting joy, John 5:29; 6:40; 10:28; 1 John 2:25; 1 Pet 1:3-5; Psalm 16:11; John 17:24;
  - d. that He will condemn ungodly men and the devils to be in torments without end, Matt 10:28; 25:46; Mark 9:43-48; John 5:29; Jude 6; Rev 20:10; 21:8; Isa 66:24; Matt 8:12;
  - e. and that, at Christ's return to judgment at the Last Day, this present universe will come to an end, Matt 24:3,14; 13:39; 1 Cor 15:24; 2 Pet 3:10; Matt 5:18; Luke 21:33; 2 Pet 3:7-13. cf also Matt 25:31-46; 2 Thess 1:9; 1 Thess 4:13-18. Augsburg Confession Art. XVII; Cat. Minor, Art. II and III.
2. The Scriptures clearly teach and we teach accordingly,
  - a. that the kingdom of Christ on earth will remain under the cross (Apology VII-VIII, 18,19; Cat. Maior, Pars III, 65-67) until the end of the world, that is, the Church on earth will always be the Church Militant and have the form of a servant, Acts 14:22; John 16:33; 18:36; Luke 9:23; 14:27; 17:20-37; 18:8; Matt 10:22; 1 Tim 4:1ff; 2 Tim 3:1ff;
  - b. that the second visible coming of the Lord will be His final advent, His coming to judge the quick and the dead, Matt 24:29,30; 25:31ff; 2 Tim 4:1; 2 Thess 2:8; Heb 9:27,28; Cat. Minor, Art. 11; Cat. Maior, Pars II, 25, 31;
  - c. and that the time of the Last Day is and will remain unknown until the Lord's coming to judgment, Matt 24:42; 25:13; Mark 13:32,37; Acts 1:7.
3. With the Augsburg Confession (Art. XVII, 5), we reject every kind of millennialism or chiliasm, that is, the false teaching that Christ will return visibly to this earth a thousand years before the end of the world and establish a dominion of the Church over the world.
4. Revelation 20, which is the chief passage adduced for chiliastic teaching, dare not be interpreted so as to contradict clear passages dealing with eschatology. The question whether the 'thousand years' of Revelation 20 designate one thousand ordinary years, or whether this term designates a period known to God only and fixed by Him, is not divisive of church fellowship. No interpretation of these 'thousand years' dare be given contrary to the analogy of faith.
5. On the basis of such Scripture passages as John 5:28 and 6:39,40, we teach the resurrection of all the dead, both the godly and the ungodly, on the Last Day. Regarding the resurrection of martyrs prior to Christ's coming to judgment, any interpretation of Revelation 20:4-6 must be in keeping with relevant clear passages of Scripture.
6.
  - a. We believe that, since God wants all men to be saved (1 Tim 2:4 and because of Rom 11:1) God has not cast away 'His people' and desires also all the descendants of Abraham, all Jews, to be saved (Rom 11:15);
  - b. We admit the possibility that a greater number of Jews may be converted in the last times; however, the expectation that a time will come when all descendants of Abraham on earth, all the Jews, will be converted to Christianity and thus be saved has no foundation in Scripture;

- c. We declare it to be the bounden duty of the Church to protest against persecution of the Jews, to proclaim the Gospel also to the Jews and to pray for them with the Church of all ages, 'that God and our Lord may take away the veil from their hearts; that also they may acknowledge Jesus Christ our Lord'.
- 7. a. Among the signs of the latter times (cf Theses on Eschatological Matters, Preliminary Statement a. par. 2), we must also include the appearance of the Antichrist (Dan 11; 2 Thess 2: 1ff; 1 John 2: 18 and 22; 4:3; 2 John 7; etc.) We recognize that in the interpretation of these passages no full agreement has existed or exists. Such differences of exegesis need not be church-divisive, provided the interpretation offered does not contradict any clear word of Scripture, cf Theses on Principles Governing Church Fellowship 4d and 4e.
- b. The Confessions of the Lutheran Church teach that 'the Papacy is a part of the kingdom of Antichrist' (Apol. XV, 18), because 'the marks of the Antichrist plainly agree with the kingdom of the Pope and his adherents' (Tractatus 39), yea, that 'the Pope is the very Antichrist, who has exalted himself above and opposed himself to Christ, because he will not permit Christians to be saved without his power' (Smalcald Articles, II, iv, 10); cf also Apol. VII-VIII, 4; XXIII, 25, German text; Tractatus 31-53, 57-59; Formula of Concord, Sol. Declaratio, X, 19-23. We, too, recognize that the Roman Papacy bears the distinguishing features of the Antichrist in greater number, more distinctly, and with greater soul-destroying force than any other known historical person and phenomenon, because
  - 1. the Pope has anathematized the Gospel of the sinner's justification by faith alone;
  - 2. the Pope has introduced into the Church the cult of human beings;
  - 3. the Pope has made himself the Vicar of Christ, claiming infallibility for his arbitrary definitions in matters of faith and morals, even if they are contrary of Scripture or without any Scriptural basis, claiming also absolute rule over the Church and the obedience of all mankind.
- c. In saying this we do not identify the Papacy with the whole Church in which it has established itself. With Luther and the Lutheran Confessions (Art. Smalc. I), we recognize that even within the Roman Church remnants of the Gospel and of the true Sacraments of Christ have remained and therefore also true believers in the grace of God in Christ are to be found there. Nor do we deny that there have been, are, and may be other persons and phenomena in the world which also bear essential marks of Antichrist (1 John 2:18; 4:1-3; 2 John 7).
- d. The Church cannot definitely state how and in what form the prophecy on Antichrist may still be fulfilled in the future in the Papacy and elsewhere. For the sake of their souls' salvation all Christians should-at all times be on their guard against the Antichrist and the antichrists and their lying and deceit, recognizing them by the marks whereby they may be known according to the Word of God.