

## DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS AND THEOLOGICAL OPINIONS (DSTO)

### VOLUME 1

#### A. THESES OF AGREEMENT

## Appendix: statements on practical matters

*Statements on Lodges and on Marriage and Betrothal were adopted by the Joint Intersynodical Committees on March 5, 1953, the Statement on Marriage with the Deceased Wife's Sister on May 8, 1953. They were first submitted to the pastors and pastors' conference for consideration and discussion and were finally adopted in the present form by the General Pastors Conferences of both Churches and by the Joint Pastors Conference in August 1956.*

*Reviewed July 2001, unedited.*

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### 1. LODGES

We agree that all organizations, whether secret and oath-bound or open, which are either avowedly religious, or practise the forms of religion, without confessing as a matter of principle the Triune God and Jesus Christ as the Son of God come into the flesh and our Saviour from sin (1 John 4:2,3; Matt 10:32ff), and/or teach, instead of the Gospel, salvation by human works or morality, are anti-Christian, and that the Church of Jesus Christ and its congregations can therefore have no fellowship with them (2 Cor 6:14-18). We earnestly warn all members of our Churches to beware of any affiliation with such organizations, as it is inconsistent with Christian faith and church membership, and to testify against the sin of such societies (2 Tim 2:19). In determining whether any organizations are anti-Christian or not, the character and current ritual of the organization concerned must be carefully examined.

When members of anti-Christian organizations seek admission to a congregation, they must be made acquainted with the attitude of the Church and, consequently, of the congregation, towards these organizations. They should not be received into the membership of the Church until they have severed their connection with such anti-Christian organizations.

In dealing with church members who have joined anti-Christian organizations, evangelical discipline must be practised. If members are unwilling to receive instruction and admonition, this must eventually lead to the severance of fraternal relationship; every effort, however, should be made to gain the erring brother (Matt 18:16f).

Merely financial membership in a friendly society need not be a bar to obtaining or retaining church membership, provided the friendly society concerned is free from the anti-Christian features referred to above, or that such financial membership does not involve the person concerned in such anti-Christian or otherwise objectionable features, when such a society becomes a government agency. But we warn our church members against seeking aid through such societies which have objectionable features and we favour the founding of a Lutheran Aid Society.

We recommend to our Churches that a standing committee be appointed to study the literature and rituals of secret organizations and friendly societies, negotiate with them for the removal of objectionable features and assist pastors and congregations with advice.

## 2. MARRIAGE AND BETROTHAL

Holy Scripture clearly teaches that matrimony was instituted by God (Gen 2:18-24; Matt 19:4-6; Eph 5:31; cf Apol. XIV, 14). We agree that marriage comes into being before God by the mutual and unconditional consent of the contracting parties, not by the mere exercise of conjugal rights. The time and the form of such consent is regulated by prevailing custom and law. Among Christians this consent is now normally given publicly and in the presence of witnesses at the marriage ceremony conducted by a pastor of the Church. Marriage is also a civil matter and as such is subject to legitimate laws of the State, cf Luther's Traubiichlein.

Holy Scripture contains no specific doctrine or law for Christians on betrothal or engagement. We agree, therefore, that betrothal or engagement is of human origin, and its meaning and significance is for that reason largely subject to prevailing custom which may vary from age to age and place to place (cf Old Testament times: Gen 29:21; Deut 22:23; Lev 19:20-22; New Testament times: Matt 1:18ff and 24; Luther, W.A. 43, 632 6ff, E.A. op. lat. 7,243, St. Louis II, 493; W.A. 30, III, 224, 32ff, 3.A. 23, 120ff, St. Louis X, 779, 50).

While Holy Scripture teaches with all clarity that matrimony is a divine institution which binds for life (Rom 7:2f), and that divorce is not permissible (Matt 19:61), except on the grounds of adultery and malicious desertion (Matt 19:6-9; cf 1 Cor 7:10-13), it makes no such pronouncement in regard to the dissolution of betrothal or engagement. Nevertheless, we agree that the Christian will always regard betrothal or engagement as a most solemn and sacred promise, not lightly to be broken, and pastors should warn their people against hasty and frivolous engagements and point to the Christian obligation to keep a solemn promise.

When dealing with questions of broken engagements, pastors and congregations should take into consideration prevailing custom, particularly the fact that some element of uncertainty exists in our day concerning the meaning and purpose of betrothal or engagement. Pastors should untiringly instruct the members of our congregations on this matter, admonishing them to hold the engagement promise in high regard, because it leads to the God-ordained estate of matrimony.

## 3. MARRIAGE WITH THE DECEASED WIFE'S SISTER

We believe that the Scripture passages often adduced in support of the opinion that marriage with a deceased wife's sister is absolutely and for all time prohibited by God's Moral Law (Lev 18:6,16,18) are not sufficiently clear, both intrinsically and in their relation to the Moral Law, to compel the formulation of a doctrine reflecting God's revelation and will, so that different views on this matter are not divisive of church fellowship.

Those who contract and those who solemnize such marriages must be fully persuaded in their own conscience that they are not acting contrary to Scripture (Rom 14:23).