

DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS AND THEOLOGICAL OPINIONS (DSTO)

VOLUME 1

A. THESES OF AGREEMENT

I: Principles governing church fellowship

Resulting from the discussions on 'Minimum Requirements for Church Fellowship' submitted by both Committees in 1942 and from the discussions of Dr Hamann's paper, 'Church Fellowship Presupposes the Common Acceptance and Confession of All Doctrines Revealed in Holy Scripture', and of Dr Hebart's paper, 'Principles Governing Church Fellowship', the following theses on the Scriptures were discussed at joint meetings held on December 18, 1947, March 4 1948, April 29 1948, and June 17 1948, and adopted in their present form on August 12, 1948.

Reviewed July 2001, unedited.

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1. We believe that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the infallible Word of God, written by inspiration of God, 2 Tim 3:16, by the holy men of God, 2 Pet 1:21, as the Spirit gave them utterance, Acts 2:4.
 2. We believe that the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments are the infallible and only source and norm of Christian doctrine and the sure and authoritative guide for life and practice. 2 Tim 3:15–17; 1 Cor 14:37; Psalm 119:160, etc.
 3. We agree that for church fellowship the uniting Churches must be one in the acceptance of the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as the inspired Word of God and as the only and true source, norm, rule, and standard of all teaching and practice in the Christian Church.
 4. a. We believe that where differences in teaching and practice exist or arise between Churches uniting, these differences are to be removed by willingly submitting to the authority of the Word of God. Where a difference in teaching or practice is a departure from the doctrine of the Bible, such difference cannot be tolerated, but must be pointed out as an error, on the basis of clear passages of Holy Writ; and if the error is persisted in, in spite of instruction, warning, and earnest witness, it must at last lead to a separation.

- b. We believe that all doctrines of Holy Writ are equally binding; nevertheless not all things in Scripture are of the same importance, when viewed from the centre and core of the Scriptures, Christ and justification by Him through faith.
- c. We admit that there are some things hard to be understood in Holy Writ, 2 Pet 3:16; but no doctrine can be based on Scripture passages that are not clear, especially if no light is thrown upon them by clear passages.
- d. Differences in exegesis that do not affect doctrine are not church divisive.
- e. In case of differences in exegesis that affect doctrine, agreement on the basis of God's Word must be sought by combined, prayerful examination of the passage or passages in question.

If this does not lead to agreement, because no unanimity has been reached on the clarity of the passage or passages in question and hence on the stringency and adequacy of the Scriptural proof, divergent views arising from such differences of interpretation are not divisive of church fellowship, providing that

- i. there be the readiness in principle to submit to the authority of the Word of God;
 - ii. thereby no clear Word of Scripture is denied, contradicted or ignored;
 - iii. such divergent views in no wise impair, infringe upon, or violate the central doctrine of Holy Scripture, justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ;
 - iv. nothing be taught contrary to the *publica doctrina* of the Lutheran Church as laid down in its Confessions;
 - v. such divergent views are not propagated as the *publica doctrina* of the Church and in no wise impair the doctrine of Holy Writ.
- 5. We believe that the formal and the material principles must not be brought into opposition to each other, for the Scriptures are the Word of Christ and they testify of Him. Loyalty to Christ requires loyalty to His Word, and loyalty to the Scriptures requires loyalty to Christ, His person, His work, His means of grace. We dare not stress the material principle at the expense of the formal principle, or vice versa. Churches uniting should make their pledge of loyalty to both Christ and His Word (cf Eph 4:1–16).
 - 6. We believe that it is a solemn obligation of the Church to teach the whole counsel of God, rightly dividing the Word of Truth, feeding milk or meat as the case may demand, but never compromising the truth of Scripture, never permitting reason or feeling to undermine the authority of the Word, or substituting for it any form of subjectivism.
 - 7. In the application of these principles, particularly in the holding of such divergent views as are mentioned in Theses 4 (e), the material principle, agreement in which constitutes the fundamental unity in Christ, is not to be ignored contrary to the law of Christian love, but is to be upheld and applied in full agreement with the formal principle.