

K. Lutheran-Non-Lutheran Marriage Ceremonies

At the request of the Board of Theology of the Kansas District, the commission has studied the meaning of the term "heterodox" in Article VI of the synodical Constitution and its application to the question of marriage ceremonies in which clergymen of different denominations are asked to participate jointly. The commission's response is included with this report as Appendix H.

APPENDIX H

Statement on Lutheran/Non-Lutheran Marriage Ceremonies Statement of the Problem

1. Increasingly in mixed marriages, the pastors of both parties to the marriage are being invited to participate in the wedding service.
2. The inquiry of the Board of Theology of the Kansas District is directed to the pertinence to this practice of Article VI of the Constitution of The Lutheran Church -Missouri Synod which includes among the "conditions for acquiring and holding membership in the Synod" the "renunciation of unionism and syncretism of every description," such as "taking part in services and sacramental rites of heterodox congregations or of congregations of mixed confession."

Clarification of the Term "Heterodox"

Definitions

The following are some dictionary definitions of the term "heterodox":

1. Webster's *Unabridged Dictionary*: "not in accordance with established or accepted doctrines or opinions, especially theology."
2. *Oxford English Dictionary*: "Of doctrines, opinions, etc.: not in accord with established doctrine or opinion, or those generally recognized as right or 'orthodox'; of persons: holding opinion not in accord with some acknowledged standard."
3. Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, edited by James Hastings, 9:570 f.: "To be 'orthodox' is to hold and profess opinions which are regarded as in some sense 'right' ... Heterodoxia, an awkwardly formed yet useful derivative, is the character of thinking which is 'other' than right Strictly speaking, orthodoxy in religion is concerned only with doctrine or belief, with the intellectual element in spiritual life. It ought to have for its correlatives such words as 'orthopathy' and 'orthopraxy', the inward experience and the outward exercise of piety."

Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953, III, 422), says:
A congregation or church body which abides by God's order, in which therefore God's Word is taught in its purity and the Sacraments administered according to the divine institution, is properly called an orthodox church (*ecclesia orthodoxa, pura*). But a congregation or church body which, in spite of the divine order, tolerates false doctrine in its midst is properly called a heterodox church (*ecclesia heterodoxa, impura*).

The thought which all of these definitions, secular and ecclesiastical, have in common is that the heterodox are those who believe and teach contrary to an acknowledged standard.

Article VI

The standard or orthodoxy to which the members of The Lutheran Church -Missouri Synod subscribe is stated in its Constitution, Article II, to wit:

The Synod, and every member of the Synod, accepts without reservation:

1. The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and of practice;
2. All the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God.

The heterodox, therefore, are those who hold theological opinions not in accord with our acknowledged standard. Although we do not judge that they are outside of the pale of the Christian church if they cling in faith to Jesus Christ as the Son of God and their Savior from sin and death, we nevertheless acknowledge that they differ from us in one or more articles of faith.

Application to Lutheran/Non-Lutheran Marriage Ceremonies

The following points deserve serious consideration:

1. A marriage ceremony conducted under the auspices of a congregation is not only a civil ceremony but also a minor service of worship.
2. A marriage ceremony conducted under the auspices of a congregation should be governed by the same principles and rules which govern its regular worship services.
3. The same principles which govern the pastor's participation in inter-denominational worship services should govern his practice with respect to marriage worship services.
4. Pastors, by virtue of their position as overseers of the flock, (Acts 20:28) have the responsibility not only to equip the saints for their service (Eph. 4: 11-12), but also to avoid giving offense by their conduct (Matt. 18:6). In addition, they function as representatives of their congregations.

Recommendations of the CTCR

1. That we reaffirm the validity of Article VI of the Constitution of The Lutheran Church -Missouri Synod; and
2. That we encourage our pastors and congregations to follow this article in their practice, with particular reference to Article VI 2 b; and
3. That we concur with point five of the guidelines for Ecumenical Marriage Ceremonies of the Council of Presidents of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, dated Feb. 18,1971, which states that " participation should not be as co-officiant, worship leader, or celebrant, but should be arranged in such a way that it is not an official part of the worship service, nor a sharing of the solemnizing or celebrating of the marriage." It is self-evident that pastors ought to avoid participating or functioning in any manner in which the integrity and authority of the office of the holy ministry is questioned or denigrated, or that casts doubt on the validity of Lutheran orders.

Adopted by the CTCR on March 27, 1973