

Concordia Theological Monthly



N O V E M B E R • 1 9 5 6

THESES ON PRINCIPLES GOVERNING CO-OPERATION BETWEEN CHURCHES NOT IN CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

[EDITORIAL NOTE: These theses appeared in the *Australian Lutheran*, June 27, 1956. Since the question of membership in the Lutheran World Federation plays a large part in the final negotiations for unity between the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia, in communion with the American Lutheran Church, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia, in communion with The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, our readers will be interested in the principles set forth in these theses.]

In February, 1953, Dr. Hebart submitted a draft of "Preliminary Considerations on Principles Governing Co-operation with Other Churches, with Whom There Is No Church Fellowship," to the Intersynodical Committees. These were considered at the Joint Meeting on March 8, 1953. Dr. Hoopmann and Pastor J. Riedel presented other drafts on theses in June, 1953. Consideration of these various drafts at other Joint Meetings and at Sub-Committee meetings in 1953 and 1954 resulted in the adoption of theses on Principles Governing Co-operation Between Churches Not in Church Fellowship, on January 28, 1954, and on April 29, 1954. These theses were duplicated and circulated amongst the ministry. The theses were again taken up for consideration in May and June, 1956, and were adopted on June 14, 1956, in the following form.

By resolution of the Joint Intersynodical Committees they are being published in the church papers.

S. HEBART
F. J. H. BLAESS

1. When co-operating with Churches with which we are not in pulpit and altar fellowship we dare not violate either the Word of God as the *norma normans* or the Lutheran Confessions as the *norma normata*.

2. There can be no co-operation of any kind by us with any Church, if such co-operation would have the characteristic of "unionism," if such co-operation on our part is or implies:

- (a) failure to confess the whole truth of the divine Word;
- (b) failure to reject or denounce opposing error;
- (c) assigning to error equal right with truth;
- (d) creating the impression of unity in the faith or of church fellowship where it does not exist.

3. (a) Where there is no violation of the Biblical principles of truth and love, we can confer or co-operate with Churches,

with which we are not in church fellowship, for the purpose of establishing unity on the basis of the Word of God.

- (b) We may further co-operate with any Christian Church in matters of common interest, such as: legal status of the clergy, questions concerning marriage laws, religious instruction in schools, translation of the Bible, protection of Church property, caring for the physical welfare of the poor and the needy, etc., provided always that the objects of such co-operation do not require a common doctrinal basis or presuppose a basis which does not exist (cf. Theses of Agreement II, 2).

4. Lutheran Churches not in church fellowship with one another may join together in a federation provided that

- (a) the purpose of the federation is not contrary to the Scriptures and clearly defined;
- (b) a constitution in keeping with the purpose is drawn up;
- (c) the constitution is adhered to.

5. A Lutheran Church can under no circumstances join a federation or council of Churches, composed of Churches with which it is not in fellowship, if this federation or council as such pursues aims that presuppose a common faith and confession in harmony with the Holy Scriptures and the Confessions of the Lutheran Church.

6. If the federation or council has an unscriptural or unionistic basis and aim, affiliation with such a federation or council of Churches can never be justified on the plea that the federation is a federation or council, and that all constituent bodies remain autonomous.

7. If membership in a federation is impossible for reasons stated above, a consultative relationship may be possible for Churches which for conscience' sake cannot be members. They may become members, when the position is satisfactorily rectified.

Responsibility and Co-Responsibility

8. Lutheran Churches in full church fellowship with each other, which are bound by the common bond of the Lutheran Confessions, have co-responsibility for all public teaching and practice in each of them.

9. Lutheran Churches not in church fellowship with one another, which nevertheless in common acknowledge the Lutheran Confessions as their Confessions, have a moral responsibility towards one another, for all public teaching and practice in each of them, within the limits of their knowledge and the opportunity and power to bear witness.

10. A member-church of a federation of Lutheran Churches has responsibility for the actions and omissions of the federation in all those

matters in which by accepting the constitution it has delegated its power of decision to the federation; thus it has responsibility for the decisions made by the executive in conformity with the constitution of the federation, or, where majority decisions are regarded by the federation as binding upon all member-churches, as at an assembly of the federation.

11. Responsibility in a federation of Lutheran Churches thus extends to all member-churches, and so becomes co-responsibility for all decisions and activities which arise out of a commonly accepted constitution. This implies responsibility of the member-churches for the decisions and actions of the federation which are made for the purpose of achieving the common ends for which the federation was founded.

12. There is no co-responsibility, beyond the moral responsibility (see Thesis 9 (2)), for decisions and actions which are made by member-churches of a federation of Lutheran Churches and which are beyond and outside of the scope of the commonly accepted basis and constitution which federated the member-churches. But all decisions and actions of the federation as such, or of any of its member-churches, which arise out of the commonly accepted constitution and are compatible or incompatible with it, imply co-responsibility, unless a protest is lodged by any member-church not prepared to accept such co-responsibility.

13. Thus co-responsibility is full and complete unless there has been such a public protest. If such a protest goes unheeded, responsibility cannot be accepted by the member-church which lodged the protest and separation from the federation may become imperative and finally must take place as a public witness against the violation of the commonly accepted basis and aim of the federation.

14. A federation of Lutheran Churches, its executive, and all its organs, are in duty bound and have responsibility to all member-churches to make decisions and undertake actions which are compatible with the constitution of the federation. Similarly, a federation of Lutheran Churches has the responsibility of seeing to it that the basis of membership is upheld by the member-churches and that its own declarations and practices are and remain compatible with the constitution of the federation. Should they continue to be incompatible, exhortation, warning and finally exclusion must follow. A federation cannot, however, be held responsible for the teaching and practice of a member-church where these are beyond and outside the scope of the commonly accepted basis and aim of the federation.