

DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS AND THEOLOGICAL OPINIONS (DSTO)

VOLUME 1

G. INTER-DENOMINATIONAL COOPERATION – CHURCH MOVEMENTS

Pastoral attitude and practice where a pastor is attracted to or associated with the charismatic movement

Prepared by the Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations. Adopted by the General Church Council, September 1986.

(Note: This is not a new statement on Charismatic Renewal. Instead, it offers principles which apply generally to all pastors.)

Not edited.

1. The Statement 'The Lutheran Church of Australia and Lutheran Charismatic Renewal' (1977) underscores the place of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church and in the daily renewal of the Christian, and it calls for members of the LCA to pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in their own lives so that the church, empowered by the Spirit, may increasingly reflect the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ and glorify the Father. While pointing out the positive features of Lutheran charismatic renewal, it also notes dangers in the movement that the church must avoid. Its continued study by the pastors and congregations of the church is recommended.
2. When a pastor is attracted to the charismatic movement, either through a personal experience or through the influence of 'charismatics', he should carefully consider his position in the light of the above statement and the confessions of the church.
3. The statement draws clear confessional lines between the Lutheran Church and false teachings promulgated by some charismatics, and points out those teachings and practices that must be avoided and repudiated by pastors and members of the LCA. Persistent adherence to false doctrine by pastors and congregations places them in breach of the constitution and is a ground for discipline and dismissal.
4. The following principles, which apply to pastors generally, need to be borne in mind especially by pastors who are attracted to the charismatic movement:

PASTORAL ATTITUDE AND PRACTICE WHERE A PASTOR IS
ATTRACTED TO OR ASSOCIATED WITH THE CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT

- a. Pastors have responsibility for all the people of God entrusted to their care. They should therefore be careful not to create disunity in their congregation by showing favour or preference to any one person or group.
- b. Pastor and people should do their utmost to respect and preserve their special God-given relationship.
- c. Accepting a label, such as 'charismatic', or giving cause for being so labelled, should be avoided by the pastor and members of his congregation, since such labelling can be divisive in a congregation.
- d. The pastor must be willing to recognise and to use the diversity of gifts God gives in his congregation for the edification of the people of God, and not rank some gifts more highly than they ought to be (1 Cor 12–14).
- e. The pastor should guard against spiritual pride which so easily besets him, and which may be a special temptation where the claim is made to be specially 'gifted' by the Spirit.
- f. The pastor should be open to the advice of fellow-pastors and be ready to seek and heed the counsel of the presidents of the church, who have the responsibility to watch over the doctrine and practice of the church, and to promote its general well-being.
- g. Before evaluating and judging the attitude and work of a pastor, fellow-pastors should look into their own hearts to see whether they are motivated by genuine love.
- h. Where a pastor has erred in teaching or practice, or where there is evidence that he has been misled, fellow-pastors and members, in a loving manner, and with sound evangelical teaching, should endeavour to show the pastor his error and bring him back to Christ's teachings.

APPENDIX

In addition, the following guidelines for pastoral practice in regard to renewal, prepared by Dr C I Koch, and accepted by the Church Council of the South Australia District in July 1982, are appended.

Some guidelines for pastoral practice in regard to renewal

1. **We teach** that the means of grace, that is, the Word of God and the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, are the all-sufficient means through which the Holy Spirit creates and sustains a living faith in Jesus Christ. Justification, becoming a child of God, is always totally a gift, a gracious work of the Spirit through Word and Sacraments.

We reject all teaching and practice which makes man a cooperating partner in becoming God's child, or that the Spirit 'without means, without hearing of God's Word, also without the use of the holy Sacraments, draws men to himself, and enlightens, justifies, and saves them' (FC par 13, Tappert 471; par 22, Tappert 499; and SA par 10, Tappert 313.)

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2. **We teach** that believers are to encourage, exhort, and correct one another according to God's Word with all the energy God inspires in them, so that they enthusiastically lead a life of Christian obedience and service, and in no way quench or oppose the work of the Holy Spirit but 'cooperate with the Holy Spirit in the works that follow' (FC par 18, Tappert 472).

We reject the teaching that it is enough simply to know God's gracious work in Christ, to be satisfied with a dead formalism in living, or that it is unnecessary or even harmful to the doctrine of salvation by grace to urge believers to be active in good works as though saving faith 'could co-exist and co-persist with a wicked intention to sin and to act contrary to one's conscience' (FC par 11, Tappert 474.)

3. **We teach** that God gives believers spiritual gifts and experiences, according to his gracious and sovereign will, so that his church may be edified in and through his Word (Rom 12; 1 Cor 12; Eph 4). All gifts are received by grace; the believer is to appropriate God's gifts for him.

We reject the claim that the believer influences God in granting spiritual gifts by making himself properly disposed or prepared for them, for this detracts from the doctrine of grace and the glory which belongs alone to Christ.

4. **We teach** that the believer in a spirit of humility, submission and obedience to God, should seek and ask for such gifts as will enable him to grow in a knowledge of Christ so that he may grow in maturity of faith and in ability to serve his fellow men.

We reject the teaching that particular gifts or experiences are necessary for the believer to become mature in Christ; or that they signify or assure the believer that he has received the Holy Spirit or possesses salvation (Matt 7:21–23); or that the believer should be preoccupied with the reception of particular gifts or experiences – as happened at Corinth, and resulting in that sadly carnal condition of division, envy, and strife.

5. **We teach** that, where people believe that they possess particular spiritual gifts, the recognition and public use of such gifts is something for the local worshipping congregation to confirm, determine, and to use in such a way that good order and humility in service is maintained. The primary purpose of the gifts of the Spirit is for building up the Body of Christ.

We reject the right of the individual to impose on the congregation or to dictate to the congregation a public recognition, acceptance, or use of gifts which the individual claims to have received. Similarly, we would reject the right of the congregation to prohibit or limit God's activity among his people.

6. **We teach** that, while the gift of saving faith and regeneration always remains a total work and gift of the Spirit of God in which man cannot cooperate, the believer is alive in Christ and is called upon to cooperate in good works through the gifts and experiences which God graciously has given him.

We reject the teaching that believers are without responsibility to God for the way they use the gifts God has graciously given to them for service in his name; that believers acting indifferently and passively in the area of good works are to find comfort in the false promise of a gracious God who is indifferent to man's use of his gifts.

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7. **We teach** that the believer is to discern and test all spiritual gifts and activities of God's people on the basis of the *objective Word of God* as we have it in the Holy Scripture.

We reject any spiritual testing and evaluation of gifts which is based not on the Word, but on man's subjective feelings and emotions.

8. **We teach** that ALL WHO ARE IN Christ have a fellowship centred in him. The way in which this fellowship is given outward expression will be governed by the need to express loyalty to Christ, obedience to his Word, and the circumstances surrounding the particular situation. Joint participation in the Lord's Supper presupposes that those participating are expressing a unity of faith by such action. We further teach that Christians have a responsibility to publicly point out error, also within the bond of Christian fellowship.

We reject participation in outward expressions of fellowship which fail to acknowledge and take seriously differences in doctrinal understandings as though these were of no consequence to the unity of the Spirit. We further reject fellowship which is based simply on common experiences or gifts (e.g., tongues).

9. **We teach** that pastor and people should in all cases respect and do their utmost to preserve the special God-given relationship of pastor and people.

We reject the notion that the priesthood of believers supersedes or invalidates the special God-given office of the ordained pastor together with its attendance responsibilities.

10. **We teach** that central to all Christian growth and maturity is the necessity to grow in the knowledge of God as revealed in Jesus Christ, and recorded for us by the Spirit in Holy Scripture. Only as we understand the call to repentance and faith in Christ more deeply, will we more fully appreciate the cross of Christ, his bitter suffering and death together with his glorious resurrection. The true glory of the Christian's growth and maturity is not centred in himself, his experiences, or gifts, but in Jesus Christ, in whom is hid the glory which finally will be revealed also in the believer. 'It does not yet appear what we shall be!' (1 John 3:2).

We reject all teachings that suggest to the believer that here and now the true glory of the Christian life is to be found or seen in special gifts or spiritual experiences, making it appear that somehow the Christian in this life no longer lives under the cross with the constant need of being washed in the blood of the Lamb of God who alone takes away the sins of the world.