

Malone Theses
Agreed to:
06 June A. D. 2006

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Building upon the Niles Theses of A.D. 2005, we, the undersigned, wish to further clarify our common beliefs concerning controverted issues facing the Evangelical Lutheran Church in our day. We all agree that these stated positions are our firmly held convictions, and in conformity with Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, and we wish to have fellowship with all others who teach and confess the same.

Liturgy

It is our desire to see Lutherans adopt a more fully liturgical, sacramental, and historic divine service. We wish to promote a more truly catholic practice among the saints entrusted to our care, and clearly distinguish ourselves from the 'Protestantizing' practices which dominate so much of the American Lutheran church. Therefore, we all agree that:

- 1) We seek to achieve a high degree of uniformity in the liturgical expression of our theological agreement among the parishes of our signators. Significant deviation in liturgical practice between parishes is confusing to the members of the Church. Therefore, we commit ourselves to endeavor over time, by common consensus, to minimize local deviations from common practice.
- 2) We recognize that Lutherans in other countries observe different elements in the rite of the divine service. Lutherans in traditionally Eastern Orthodox lands may have different liturgical traditions from Lutherans in the West. However, we reject any effort to institute Eastern elements which would violate Formula of Concord article 10, that is, which give the appearance of doctrinal unity where no such unity exists.

Office of the Ministry

It is our desire to fully re-establish the confessional understanding of the office of the ministry within the Lutheran Church. Therefore, we reject all 'functionalist' misconceptions of the office of the ministry. Therefore, we all agree that:

- 3) Laymen ought not preach or read sermons at the divine service. Laymen are not to administer the sacraments of the Church. Emergency baptism is the only exception to this rule. (AC 14)
- 4) The Church, corporately, possesses the office of the ministry. Our Lord Jesus Christ gave the office of the keys to the whole Church. That office is conferred upon men by the Church through call and ordination.

Episcopacy

It is our desire to conform ourselves to the dominant practice of the Church throughout all time on the issue of polity. We wish to distinguish ourselves from the democratic mind-set that is dominant in the Lutheran churches in America. It is the overwhelming witness of the church catholic that Episcopacy has been the accepted polity in the Church. Therefore, we all agree that:

5) We recognized that a truly Evangelical Episcopacy is set forth as the preferred polity of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as taught in the Augsburg Confession (XXVIII), the Apology (XXVIII), and the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope.

6) We seek the restoration of the historic, preferred polity—that is, the offices of Bishop, Presbyter, and Deacon—within the one divinely-established office of the ministry as local circumstances warrant.

Nomenclature

The variations in terminology used to refer to occupants of the ministry and various lay officers in congregations has led to increasing confusion on the Church. While there is no law to be made regarding the terminology by which we reference offices and officeholders not established by God's Word, uniformity of usage would contribute to the teaching and preservation of correct doctrine throughout the Church. Therefore, we agree that:

7) We will endeavor to use terminology/nomenclature in the same way both in our teaching and in our parish structure.

Infant Communion

As pastors, we take seriously our responsibility to serve as “stewards of the mysteries of God.” No matter how ‘interesting’ and ‘clever’ new theories may be, we reject and avoid practices that are completely unknown to the history and practice of the Church of the Augsburg Confession. Therefore, we all agree that:

8) We reject the practice of infant communion. We reject the practice of the Eastern churches which commune infants at the time of baptism. We also reject the practice of communing small children who have not been examined and absolved. We hold to article 25 of the Augsburg Confession, which says, “The custom has been retained among us of not administering the sacrament to those who have not previously been examined and absolved.”

9) We reject infant communion because it undermines the pastoral responsibility to examine those who present themselves for communion. It also does not help the communicant learn the practice of self-examination. We further reject it because it has no Lutheran precedent. And finally, the erosion of pastoral examination of communicants involved in infant communion is the same as that erosion caused by the practice of open communion.

10) We also encourage the maintenance of, or restoration into our parishes of, private confession and absolution (AC XI) as a helpful practice in preparation for reception of the sacrament.

Images

It has become sadly evident that there is a need to make a clear distinction between the doctrine and practices of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the churches of Eastern Orthodoxy . Our fellowship eschews any appearance of “Easternizing.” Therefore, we all agree that:

- 11) We reject the teaching that icons or statues or any sort of image are means of grace.
- 12) We, as Lutherans, embrace images as tools for piety and aids in the honoring and worship of our Lord Jesus Christ. They are also valuable tools in honoring of the saints. Images—especially the crucifix—have always been an important part of the life of the Church.
- 13) We recognize that in the Western Church, statuary and paintings have been an important part of the life of the Church. We encourage the use of statuary and paintings in the Church in order that they may help draw the Christian’s mind to our Lord and His grace.
- 14) We recognize the recent use of Eastern style icons in the worship life of the Lutheran Church as an alien element in Western Lutheran churches. We reject the veneration of icons or images in the Lutheran Church.
- 15) We agree with the conclusions of the Blessed Martin Chemnitz regarding the Seventh Ecumenical Council and its advocacy of adoring images. He condemned this council’s decree on adoration of images, whether icons or other types of images: “The chief point is that at this synod it was decreed, contrary to the clear statement of Scripture, and contrary to the unanimous testimony of all antiquity, that sacred images are to be honored, venerated, saluted, embraced, kissed, worshiped, and adored.” (Ex. pp. 115-116.)

These theses, and those agreed to in Niles, Michigan are not seen by us as additions to our vows to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, which vows are unconditional. These theses may change as the issues are further clarified. However, we do see them as defining the limits of our fellowship with regard to these issues until such time as we are convinced otherwise from the Scriptures and Lutheran Confessions, or until further clarification is needed. We are keenly aware of the fluid nature of such statements. We are also keenly aware of the clear lines of distinction they draw among those who call themselves Lutherans, and we intend to draw such lines.

Many of the matters addressed by these theses are not matters that are divisive of fellowship (episcopacy, liturgy, etc.). We, in our fellowship, voluntarily agree to abide by these theses for the well being of our parishes. These theses are not a declaration of fellowship. Those inside our fellowship voluntarily agree with these theses and support them. But we also wish to have these theses function as a marker of agreement between Christians who are not yet necessarily in fellowship. Therefore, we invite all who agree with these theses to express their agreement without necessarily committing themselves to fellowship.

We hope and pray that these theses will be yet another building block in establishing a more healthy and orthodox Lutheran Church in our time, and in this country. With this hope, we with joy and profound thanks to our triune God, accept and confess these theses.