

Dispatches



From the Front

Indulgences and the New Pope

The new Pope, Benedict XVI, stuck his thumb in eye of Lutherans everywhere by issuing new indulgences in August 2005 on his first trip to Germany as Pope.

Lutheran Jean-Arnold de Clermont, President of the Conference of European Churches, wondered if the Pope's "granting of indulgences is compatible with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, signed by the Lutheran World Federation [and the Roman Catholic Church]" (ENI Daily News, 8/18/05).

Aren't indulgences a thing of the past? Long gone with Tetzel and the Counter-Reformation? No so. They were formally defined at Trent and are issued even today. To be sure, they are no longer sold, but they are still quantitative. A plenary indulgence, unlike a partial indulgence, grants full remission of sin up to that point in one's life. Only the Pope can grant a plenary indulgence.

Good Works are Necessary. The old scheme of salvation remains. The Pope controls the Treasury of Merit. As the Vicar of Christ on earth he regulates the dispensing of merits, i.e., indulgences. Believers can and must do good works to cooperate in their salvation.

In November 2005 Pope Benedict XVI received a LWF delegation led by ELCA PBp Hanson and said:

"We must accept that differences remain regarding the central question of justification; these need to be addressed, together with the ways in which God's grace is communicated **in and through the Church**" (11/7/05, emphasis added.)

In other words, there is no consensus on justification between Catholics and Lutherans. For Roman Catholics salvation happens through the church, that is, through the instrumentality of the bishops acting together with the Pope. For Lutherans salvation happens in the church through the Word, but not through the church as an instrument.

Of course, because the ELCA Constitution now requires the Episcopal sacramental hierarchy, the ELCA has moved away from the Reformation and is becoming more like the Roman Catholic Church.

Cooing at the Pope

The LWF leaders, for their part, cooed at the Pope. They did not mention indulgences. They glossed over differences. From Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson's remarks:

"A significant milestone ... was the signing by the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* ... The *Joint Declaration* is a living letter, documenting a unity in shared faith."

Not true. But LWF elites had a nice junket to Rome and a photo opportunity with the new pope.

Bishop Urges Kids to Come-Out Gay

At California Lutheran University former ELCA Bishop Paul Egertson is teaching a workshop for congregations to encourage youth who have same-sex attractions to be "empowered to 'come out' during their high school years."

LSTC Hosts Extremist Palestinian Group

In October 2005 the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago hosted a Palestinian nationalist group whose leader denies Israel's right to exist in the Holy Land. The group, Sabeel, masquerades as a peace group, but it's virulently anti-Semitic. Naim Ateek, the leader of Sabeel, is an Episcopalian who during the Second Intifada urged his Muslim countrymen to kill Israelis. He has portrayed Israel as a baby-and-Christ-killing nation which blocks the political salvation of the Middle East..

Is the ELCA anti-Semitic? Not openly. But practically, yes. The Sabeel Conference at LSTC is one of many anti-Semitic ELCA events and programs held under the guise of "peace and justice." (See *Lutheran Commentator* March/April and May/June 2005.)

The ELCA's new RED hymnal

It may be sheer coincidence, but the Episcopal *Book of Common Prayer* and the Episcopal hymnal are both **red** – the color chosen for the new ELCA hymnal.