

Dispatches from the Front

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More About Mary

After we reported about prayers to Mary in the March 24th ordination of Keith Homstad in Northfield, MN, we received a letter from the chairman of the Southeast MN Synod candidacy committee, Pastor David W. Rossow. He objected to our article, saying:

[T]he committee does everything it possibly can to make sure those seeking a rostered position in the ELCA are well grounded in Lutheran doctrine and theology. To the satisfaction of the SEMN synod candidacy committee Pr. Homstad met those criteria....

The SEMN candidacy committee is confident that they are doing the right thing for the future. Surely they are trying. At the same time, they, like others, seem confused about what the gospel is and what it is not.

In his own semi-apology Pastor Homstad says: "Our only mediator is the Holy Spirit....God alone is our intercessor...." No. "God" is not our intercessor. We have no direct access to "God" in his hiddenness and majesty. We only have access to God through his Son, Jesus Christ, the one mediator (1 Tim 2:5). And the Holy Spirit's only job is to re-present Jesus Christ. Why is Homstad so vague about these basics of sin and salvation?

Purely. Finally, Pastor Rossow writes, "What is most frightening in what you write has to do with what sounds to me like **purity** of doctrine." (Emphasis added.) Horrors! Pastor Rossow may also be "frightened" by Article 7 of the Augsburg Confession, which states: "[T]he church is the assembly of saints in which the gospel is taught **purely** and the sacraments are administered rightly."

All Lutherans ought to have a concern to certify only candidates who **purely** preach and teach salvation by faith alone in Christ alone through the cross alone. **This** gospel is our only comfort, and it is also judgment on many forms of piety that are accepted under the guise of "this is my heritage" or "my piety must have a place at the table." Many popular devotional exercises and pious practices distort the gospel and must be rejected, not embraced. Even Luther in his early years prayed to Mary, but later in life, in the Smalcald Articles, he rejects praying to the saints, calling such practices a form of "idolatry" (Smalcald II.III:25-29).

PB Hanson Equivocates

Is **ordination** into the Episcopal historic episcopate comparable to **confirmation**? In a letter (6/19/02) to an inquiring Lutheran, PB Hanson says:

Please remember that a pastor prays for the gifts of the Holy Spirit and lays hands on the heads of those affirming their baptism in the rite of Confirmation.

But confirmation is not a required rite that is **never to be repeated** (CCM¶18). Nor is an Episcopal bishop constitutionally required to lay-on-hands in a Lutheran confirmation service, as in ¶19.

Nor is confirmation a deal-breaker. But ordination into the historic episcopate was a deal-breaker because it is sacramental; it "ontologically" changes those who are touched, regardless of their personal beliefs.

Sacramental Status. Under CCM, ELCA bishops are "ordained" (¶18) in a sacramental rite. Both churches must eventually have "**fully interchangeable**" (¶14) episcopates. In spite of all this and more, PB Hanson says that CCM doesn't "imply that this rite has been raised to some kind of sacramental status"! The matter could be easily settled. Let the Lutheran-Episcopal Coordinating Committee put it in writing. They have final authority to interpret the text (¶24).

This solution seems easy. But it will never happen. The Episcopalians on the Committee will never allow a non-sacramental interpretation of the revised Lutheran rite for bishops because they agree with Roman Catholics on the sacramental status of ordination in the "historic catholic episcopate" (¶¶13, 17, 24; see p.7 of this issue of *Lutheran Commentator*).

Hanson concludes his letter with this admonition: "Everyone needs to pay particular attention to what the text of 'Called to Common Mission' actually states." Physician, heal thyself!

What can you do about the equivocating? No one can *make* ELCA leaders speak truthfully about CCM. They can always equivocate.

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