

JDDJ: Too Important to Rush

"If you vote 'No' on the *Concordat*, you must vote 'Yes' on JDDJ (the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification)," a delegate was told by a bishop. Or as Ed Trexler says, "We can't say no" (*The Lutheran*, 8/97, p.58).

An Artificial Deadline. Despite what ELCA leaders say, "Yes" and "No" are not the only options. The LWF has set an artificial deadline (June 1, 1998) for member churches to respond to JDDJ. After hurriedly drafting JDDJ in the fall of 1994, circulating it on a restricted, confidential basis in 1995, making extensive revisions in 1996 and early 1997, and not releasing a final draft until late February 1997, the LWF is in no position to demand compliance with its artificial deadline in 1998.

Insiders say that the Vatican is not going to be pressured to comply with the LWF deadline. In other dialogues, the Vatican has acted according to its own schedule, and not to meet deadlines imposed by others.

The ELCA Churchwide Assembly could inform the LWF that the shortness of the timeline and the seriousness of the issue preclude action by the 1997 Assembly.

Another Stacked Podium. Delaying action on JDDJ at the Assembly will be difficult. ELCA leaders are pushing its adoption and have asked only supporters of JDDJ to serve as resource people. One person on the official list, Michael Root, a lay theologian on the staff of the Strasbourg Institute, is doing double duty, speaking for both the *Concordat* and JDDJ.

Both Luther Seminary and Philadelphia Seminary have urged that action on JDDJ be deferred (*The Lutheran*, 8/97, p.39). German Lutherans are in an uproar over JDDJ. They have been very critical of the text and will not agree to JDDJ's claim that "there are no more church dividing differences on justification." However, the resource persons chosen by ELCA leaders for discussion of JDDJ do not include any persons who represent these views.

JDDJ — Another Ambiguous Text. What are the consequences of adopting JDDJ? ELCA materials say that adopting JDDJ would mean that "the mutual ... condemnations drawn up in the sixteenth century on the teaching of justification no longer apply." Many Lutheran leaders, including Ed Trexler (*The Lutheran*, 8/97, p.58), refer to this as the "mutual lifting of condemnations." But this description is seriously misleading:

1. There are no "mutual" condemnations about justification. JDDJ never identifies what condemnations or

assertions in the Lutheran Confessions are at stake. In fact, the Augsburg Confession and the Small Catechism contain no condemnations about justification in relation to the Roman Catholic Church. Lutherans have never excluded Catholics from fellowship or communion. On the other hand, the Catholic condemnations, which are dogmatic decisions having the force of binding church law, excommunicate Lutherans from church fellowship with Catholics. To speak of "mutual" condemnations is erroneous and misleading.

2. JDDJ does not call for any condemnations to be lifted. JDDJ only says that the condemnations of the 16th century do not apply (a big difference!) to Lutherans (or Catholics) so long as Lutherans (or Catholics) do not teach the doctrines that are condemned by the condemnations.

The Big Question: How will JDDJ affect Lutheran teaching? Some Luther Seminary faculty, in their March appeal to bishops to delay action on JDDJ, say:

The document presents an understanding of justification in terms of the soul's progressive internal transformation by infused grace, and never refers in a vital or critical way to the Lutheran insistence on justification by faith alone (sola fide) in God's Word of promise, no doubt because such insistence would undermine the entire structure of the doctrine of justification proposed by JDDJ.

What would adoption of JDDJ mean for the ELCA? Would Lutheran seminaries teach "renewal by grace" as another, equally valid understanding of justification? Would pastors be allowed, even encouraged, to adopt whatever understanding of justification they liked best?

JDDJ presents a serious challenge to the identity of the ELCA as a confessional church. This challenge will not be openly acknowledged by ELCA leaders at the Assembly. It will be up to the voting members to say, "Wait. We need more time for churchwide discussion about JDDJ and its claims, and its effect on Lutheran teachings."

Redemption Through Mary?

"A recent anthology from a small Roman Catholic publisher in Santa Barbara, Calif., predicts that as early as next year, [Pope] John Paul II will exercise his power of infallibility to declare Mary the Co-Redemptrix of humanity and 'Mediatrice' of all graces. That would make her a participant in salvation — along with her son Jesus Christ" (*Time*, June 16, 1997, p.16).