

# JDDJ Adopted Without Debate

It is said that "It's far better to debate an issue without settling it than to settle it without debate." But the 1997 ELCA Churchwide Assembly adopted the controversial *JDDJ* without debate. What happened?

**A Churchwide Assembly Can Only Handle One Issue.** In 1997 the issue was the *Concordat*. In 1995 it was the Sex Report. In 1993 the Ministry Study. In 1991 the ELCA statement on ecumenism.

Of course assemblies act on many items. But delegates only have energy for debating one big issue.

**A Greased Skid.** At the 1997 Assembly, after several days of wrenching debate on the *Concordat*, the delegates were simply worn out. By the time the *JDDJ* was presented for action, people were exhausted. They just wanted to vote and be done with it. The first delegate to speak praised Catholic schools. The second delegate called the question. Without debate, the *JDDJ* was adopted by a vote of 958 to 25.

**Top-Down Control.** This steamroller had been set in motion months before. The ELCA review team (H. George Anderson, Sherman Hicks, Joan Mau, David Lotz, John Reumann) merely applauded the *JDDJ*. They did not deal with theological doublespeak of the text, as do the German professors.

(John Reumann was both a member of the review team and an author of the biblical section of the *JDDJ*.)

These Lutherans worked jointly with Catholic representatives. The eminent Roman Catholic theologian Avery Dulles strongly criticized the *JDDJ*, saying that Catholic theology has not been and "will not be

predicated on the doctrine of salvation by faith alone" (*First Things*, 3/96, p.28). But ELCA leaders ignored Catholic voices urging caution, just as they ignored Lutheran ones.

**ELCA Seminary Responses.** The 8 ELCA seminaries made the following responses to the *JDDJ*:

DELAY: Luther, Philadelphia

YES: Trinity, Southern, Gettysburg

NO RESPONSE: Chicago, Wartburg, Berkeley

Do these mixed responses mean the seminaries simply cancel each other out? Some said "Yes," others said "No." Should delegates just follow their feelings?

**Truth is Weighed, Not Counted.** No. Matters of ultimate salvation are not settled by vote. Rather, truth claims are to be weighed. Is the cross enough or does something more need to be added to it? Are we in bondage to sin, or is sin a weakness we can overcome with the proper churchly grace? The *JDDJ* is equivocal on key questions. The truth of the Gospel is at stake.

**Truth at Stake in Every Generation.** The battle for the truth began in the Garden of Eden and it will go on until Christ returns. This is not a battle distracting the church from its real ministry. *The battle for the truth of the Gospel is the real ministry of the church.* Everywhere Christians go, whether to a remote village or to a church assembly, the challenge is to let God be God, that is, to proclaim salvation by faith alone in Christ alone.

**The Problem of "Niceness".** We are continually

(continued on page 8)

LUTHERAN  
COMMENTATOR

March/April 1998  
Volume 11, Number 5

*Lutheran Commentator* (ISSN: 0894-0304), is published six times a year by Lutheran Commentator, a Minnesota nonprofit corporation, and is supported solely through subscriptions and contributions of our readers.

Address all editorial correspondence to James D. Torgerson, Editor, and all subscriptions, changes of address, etc. to Lyle M. Bohlig, Subscription Office. *Lutheran Commentator*, P.O. Box 103, Maple Plain, MN 55359-0103; Phone 612/442-4134; FAX 602/767-7661.

Unsolicited essays, letters, news and book reviews are welcomed, but cannot be returned unless they are accompanied by a self-addressed envelope, required postage attached. Opinions expressed in articles published do not necessarily represent the views of the officers or directors of Lutheran Commentator.

**Chairman of the Board:** Grant Barry Anderson  
**Executive Director, Editor:** James D. Torgerson  
**Subscription Office:** Lyle M. Bohlig

**Subscription rates:**  
\$12 one year; \$22 two years; \$30 three years;  
\$10 students and seniors

**Board of Directors, Lutheran Commentator:**  
Carl K. Albing Jane Hussey Larson  
Grant Barry Anderson (*Chairman*) Robert E. Meyer II  
Lyle M. Bohlig (*Treasurer*) Paul P. Omelianchuk  
Elmer A. Hansen Richard L. Peterson  
Pastor Mark G. Jamison

**E-mail address:**  
james.torgerson@mcione.com

## **JDDJ Adopted Without Debate**

*(continued from page 2)*

bombarded by the idea that the church is the one place where there is supposed to be peace, niceness, and unity. But as C.S. Lewis said the Evil One works harder in the church because he already has the rest.

The danger we face is that the desire for visible unity with other Christians, especially Catholics and Episcopalians, is getting in the way of the truth of the Gospel. We are being pressured to endorse ecumenical agreements that ask us to concede that good works are necessary for salvation and specially consecrated priests are required for unity. Some Lutherans earnestly believe that these agreements should be endorsed because unity is the supreme good.

But peace and unity in the church are acceptable only when the truth of the Gospel is not distorted or lost. Ecumenism is important but not supreme; when something other than the truth of the Gospel is required for unity, the Gospel itself is at stake.

Take heart. Spiritual battles are part of Christian life. For use in these battles, Luther honed for us the two-edged sword of law and gospel. This sword is not to be mounted on a wall and admired. It is to be taken down and used.

### ¶ 1471: INDULGENCES

The doctrine and practice of indulgences in the Church are closely linked to the effects of the sacrament of penance.

#### **What is an indulgence?**

An indulgence is a remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven, which the faithful Christian who is duly disposed gains under certain prescribed conditions through the action of the Church which, as the minister of redemption, dispenses and applies with authority the treasury of the satisfactions of Christ and the saints.

An indulgence is partial or plenary, according as it removes either part or all of the temporal punishment due to sin. Indulgences may be applied to the living or the dead.

*(Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1994)*