

COLUMNISTS

Catholics, Lutherans to bury the ax

On Oct. 31 this year a wonderful event will occur in Augsburg, Germany. On that day the Vatican and the Lutheran World Federation will sign an agreement called the "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification." While much of our own country will be focusing on Halloween and its attendant festivities, I want you to know that I will be spending the day rejoicing because of this joint signing.

I will not be alone, either, since much of the Catholic and Lutheran theological worlds will also be celebrating this event, which has been hailed by various religious publications in terms ordinarily reserved for sports events and business mergers. I've heard it called a "blockbuster agreement" and "a crowning achievement of the ecumenical dialogue spawned by Vatican II."

The dialogue between Lutherans and Roman Catholics that has made the agreement possible has been underway for over 30 years. Because of the call of Vatican II to ecumenical openness and conversation about doctrinal differences and church unity, Catholic and Lutheran theologians began to investigate together the meaning of the doctrine of justification. Ordinarily, it's pretty easy to overlook the significance of theology for church life, or even (this is a horror to me, of course) to wonder why we need to



By PATRICIA SCHOELLES, SSJ

the moral life

do theology at all! But this agreement gives us reason to focus on the usefulness of "thinking about how we understand God." That alone will make my day on the 31st!

The 31st was chosen as the day to formalize the agreement since it is known as Reformation Day in Protestant churches, the anniversary of the day Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of Wittenberg Cathedral. As we might remember from studying world history in high school or elsewhere, at the time of the Reformation, the understanding of the doctrine of justification was a major point of contention. The doctrine of justification is the doctrine that expresses how salvation works, how grace and salvation are made available by God to human persons.

As I remember learning it, Martin Luther was profoundly upset because the church was engaged in practices that dis-

torted a true understanding of grace and salvation. The church actually sold indulgences — which were understood to be channels of grace. The church also overemphasized the way in which "merit," or good works, affected our salvation. Thus, through Luther's attempt to correct this doctrine, Lutherans traditionally came to hold that salvation comes through faith alone. For Catholics, who wanted to preserve the understanding that grace actually changes people and makes them capable of doing good, the emphasis remained on "good works."

At stake in how this doctrine comes to be understood are fundamental beliefs about the goodness of God, who loves and saves us unconditionally, and beliefs about the role of human cooperation with grace in the great cosmic phenomenon of salvation and redemption. The conflict that resulted from the basic differences underlying these issues resulted in opposing understandings of this basic Christian doctrine by Catholics and Lutherans, and led to condemnations by each church of the doctrine of the other. The Vatican condemned the Lutheran teaching on the issue, and Lutheran Confessions condemned Roman Catholic teaching.

But the work of the theological dialogue that resulted in the new agreement began when Pope John XXIII "opened

the windows" of the Catholic Church to ecumenism in the 1960s. Gradually, a consensus was reached on a common understanding of the doctrine of justification. A key sentence from the agreement shows that the consensus that has been worked out combines both churches' ideas on the subject: "By grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping us and calling us to good works."

On the 31st of this month, the mutual condemnations of each other's teachings will be lifted at last. On that day, public declaration of a consensus that has been reached "in basic truths of the doctrine of justification" will be made. On that day, a giant step toward Christian unity will be taken.

There is more work to be done, and part of the declaration spells out some of these steps. But I salute the theologians, pastors and other church officials who have worked so hard not only to clarify a teaching about God, but who have offered us all a chance to move that much closer toward full communion with our Lutheran brothers and sisters.

•••
Sister Schoelles is president of St. Bernard's Institute.

WILHELM MIDDELSCHULTE

Complete Organ Works (Vol. I)
BRINK BUSH Organist

Wilhelm Middelschulte (1863-1943), German American Composer, Organist of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, was considered one of the greatest organists of his time. He was a student of the great Karl August Haupt and graduated from the Royal School of Church Music in Berlin. In 1891 he came to Chicago and became the Organist and Director of Music at Holy Name Cathedral. He performed at the Columbian Exhibition 1893 and the St. Louis Exhibition in 1904. He taught at the American Conservatory of Music, the Milwaukee Conservatory, the Detroit Conservatory and the University of Notre Dame. The famous pianist, Ferruccio Busoni, proclaimed him "Master of Counterpoint" and an equal to Bach, Franck and Reger. His organ compositions include the famous *Perpetuum Mobile*, *Konzert for Organ and Orchestra*, *Passacaglia*, *Chromatische Fantasie* and *Fuge*, *Kanonische Fantasie on BACH* and *Fuge on 4 themes of Bach*, and other large works.

BRINK BUSH

PERFORMS
ORGAN WORKS
OF

VOLUME I
WILHELM
MIDDELSCHULTE

SAINT ANNE CHURCH • ROCHESTER, NEW YORK

Compact disc can be purchased

In Rochester at
Borders Books & Music
Barnes & Nobles
Eastman Book Store

On the Internet at
www.amazon.com
www.ohscatalog.org
www.greatorgancds.com

A Rockin'
Halloween
Charity Bash

For ALL young adults (ages 21+).

Presented by the Catholic Courier and Odyssey,
the diocesan young-adult network.

Friday, October 29

8 p.m. to midnight

Top of the Plaza, 1400 Midtown Tower, Rochester

\$10 tickets include music, finger foods and prizes. Cash bar available.
Costumes optional. Best costume prize to be awarded.

100 percent of proceeds benefit the Catholic Courier/Catholic Charities
Christmas Appeal, a year-round fund for individuals
and families needing emergency assistance.

For tickets call Odyssey at 716-328-3228, ext. 375,
or 1-800-388-7177, ext. 375

or the Catholic Courier at 716-328-4340 or 1-800-600-3628

Thanks to our corporate sponsors:

Kids' Answer from page 12:

Exodus, Psalms, Isaiah, Job, Daniel, Joshua.