

# ON POPE RATZINGER I

By Rev. Dan Hooper ■ April 2005

As a Lutheran pastor, I had been hopeful for years that better ecumenical relations would soften the hard edges of papal absolutism. John Paul II, with admirable personal qualities, seemed to put forward what is best about a fearless spiritual leader, even though I realized Cardinal Ratzinger, behind the throne, was a consistent and intransigent voice of absolute authority, not collegiality.

(The one time the college of cardinals enjoys true collegiality is in these interregnums before a new pope is elected. It might have called, this week, for greater collegiality or even for a new Ecumenical Council, and elected a collegial leader — an opportunity now foreclosed.)

But as an out gay pastor, my heart goes out to those Roman Catholics who remained hopeful and loyal, but who now may suffer greater indignity under Pope Ratzinger I. I am reminded of Martin Luther's prophetic words: "There are some Christians, wicked Christians indeed, who now would gloss things over to make the pope appear again in a good light and who, after he does so and has been dragged out of the mud, would like to reinstate him on the altar. . . . But they are wicked people, whoever they may be, who defend the pope and want me to be quiet about the means whereby he has done harm. Truly, I cannot do this."<sup>1</sup>

Luther once was optimistic that the Church would reform and that the papacy would see the truth. These remarks come from Luther's repeated reflection on the uproar he had launched in trying to press that reform, and which again has been postponed in the Roman Church.

Yesterday I heard Ratzinger described by a former priest who has met him on numerous occasions, as a kind, humble, and holy individual. It might seem comforting that the man has fine personal qualities. But however kind, humble and holy, his totalitarian silencing of dissent in order to preserve "truth" is more than merely unsettling. It appears that Ratzinger shares a pathological personality trait with many deranged people — that he is indifferent to the suffering of other human beings, and especially to his role in causing that suffering.

There is little comfort that Ratzinger isn't my boss. He becomes the most influential spiritual leader in the world. It is not merely that his views and our views (western, LGBT, liberationist) are adversarial in a cultural struggle. Ratzinger is in a position to cause many of us incalculable suffering through his influence over politics, law, culture and faith. I was astonished to see many young admirers in the photos at St. Peter's square. The upcoming generation is more conservative, more gullible for absolutism, than I could have imagined a few years ago.

For example, who is to say that Pope Ratzinger I would not call for the death penalty for LGBT people, and that his admirers would not soon agree?

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<sup>1</sup> Weimar Edition of *Luther's Works*, vol. 47, p. 590; cf. *What Luther Says*, Ewald M. Plass, ed., 1959, p. 1072.