

REVISED PLESHEY DRAFTIntroduction

1. At their meeting in Canterbury at Pentecost 1982, Pope John Paul II and Archbishop Robert Runcie charged the second Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission "to examine, especially in the light of our respective judgements on the Final Report, the outstanding doctrinal differences which still separate us, with a view to their eventual resolution".
  
2. One topic believed to be such is the doctrine of justification by faith in the total process of salvation. Disagreement on this had already surfaced in the Church in the later Middle Ages and it became in the sixteenth century a central matter of dispute between Roman Catholics and the continental Reformers. It also played a significant though less prominent role in the division between Roman Catholics and Anglicans. Since then various debates on justification have been vigorously pursued within each of the divided communions. It is a question which still raises substantial issues which cannot be ignored if full reconciliation between our two Churches is to be achieved.
  
3. In the sixteenth century there was much more that was a matter of agreement on this subject than of disagreement. Above all it was universally agreed that the act of God in bringing salvation to the human race and summoning individuals

into a community to serve him has no other cause than the mercy and grace of God himself, mediated and manifested through Jesus Christ in his ministry, atoning death and rising again. It was also no matter of dispute that human beings played some part in this process, both in the mediatorial role of the church and the response to God's gracious gift that is required of them. Many of the difficulties lay in explaining in what this mediatorial role and this response consist.

4. One difficulty concerned the bearing of good works on justification. Reformation theologians thought that the Catholic emphasis on the value of good works and religious practices and ceremonies implied a belief that justification in some degree depended upon them. Catholics were afraid that the Reformation understanding of justification implied a view of God's judgement as arbitrary and a view of human actions as totally worthless. This, in their judgement, led to the negation of human freedom and responsibility, and to the denial that works, though supernaturally inspired, deserved any reward.

5. A consequent difficulty concerned the strict use of the term 'justification' itself.<sup>1</sup> In their fear that

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<sup>1</sup> In Scriptural usage the predominant meaning of 'to justify' (dikaioo) is 'to pronounce righteous'. In some Scriptural passages and in patristic and subsequent usage iustificare had the wider meaning 'to make righteous'. Reformation theologians returned to the Scriptural usage; Catholic theologians, and notably the Council of Trent, retained the later, broader usage.

justification might seem to depend upon entitlement arising from good works, Reformation theologians laid great emphasis on the imputation to humanity of the righteousness of Christ. By this they meant that, on account of the obedience of Christ and the merits of his passion, sinners were declared to be in the right before God. Catholics on the other hand took them to be saying that imputed righteousness was a legal fiction, which remained only external in the believer leaving his essential sinfulness unchanged, which is the habitual and actual righteousness forged in the inner being of the regenerate person by the indwelling Spirit.

6. While the break in communion encouraged both sides to produce the caricatures of the other's beliefs, there were extremists in both the Catholic and Reformation camps whose words and actions seemed to confirm the anxieties of their opponents.

7. A <sup>difficulty</sup> third/concerns the understanding of the faith through which we are justified. Reformation theologians took this faith in Christ with his merits to include the individual's assurance of his own salvation. Catholics suspected that this Protestant emphasis on assurance encouraged an antinomian neglect of the need for justification to issue in holiness. They also thought that this involved a confusion between the absolute certitude that God gives to the believer unconditonally everything which is necessary for salvation, and the relative certitude that the believer will respond to

this gift in such a way that in the last day he will be counted amongst the elected. Moreover they thought that if faith were identified with psychological certitude then that would have the effect of undermining sure hope in God rather than supporting it. Protestants for their part suspected that Catholics placed their assurance on good works, even in some cases to the denial of assurance altogether.

8. Although the sixteenth century discussion centred largely on the justification and salvation of the individual, in fact it presupposed differences in the understanding of the nature of the Church. The doctrine of the Church is connected with the doctrine of justification in three ways all of which are concerned with the nature and manner of our salvation. First the good news of God's justification in Christ Jesus is proclaimed by the Church. Secondly the individual in response comes to the way of salvation through incorporation by baptism into the koinonia of the believing community, the communion of individuals with each other and with God. In turn the individual receives the call to witness to the Gospel as a member of that community. Thirdly reflexion on the history of the Reformation shows that fundamental issues about the role of the Church in Salvation pervaded the whole dispute.

9. Thus, although our churches have always confessed that salvation is from beginning to end the free gift of God, history shows the need for a clearer common understandi-

of the role of the Church in this salvation. The Commission does not, however, think it necessary to set out at this time a complete statement of agreement on the nature of the Church .

#### The Church and Salvation

10. God's purpose is to draw humanity into communion with himself and with one another so as to share his life.

There is therefore a profound link between God and his Church, which "is the community of those reconciled with God and with each other because it is the community of those who believe in Jesus Christ and are justified through God's grace". (Final Report Introduction para. 8.)

11. In this koinonia the Church is God's instrument for the realization of his eternal design, the salvation of humankind, for it is within the Church that the Holy Spirit gives and nurtures the new life so that the Gospel becomes a manifest reality. As this instrument, the Church is called to be a living expression of the Gospel, evangelized and evangelizing, reconciled and reconciling, gathered together and gathering others. In its ministry to the world the Church seeks to share with all people the grace by which its own life is created and sustained. Thus the Church understood as a living expression of the Gospel necessarily involves an understanding of the Church as sign and steward of the Gospel.

#### The Church as Sign

12. Since God's purpose is that we should all be conformed

to the image of his Son (Rom. 8:29), the Church's vocation is to devote itself to the achievement of that goal, thus revealing and embodying the redemptive power contained within the Gospel. What Christ achieved through his cross and resurrection is communicated by the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church (Rom. 8:1-4). In this way the Church becomes a sign to the world both of God's gracious purpose for his creation and of the possibility of this being realized for sinful humanity. The Church is a sign and foretaste of God's Kingdom. Yet it has to follow the way of Jesus, at the same time the divine image and the suffering servant, who had to be made perfect by suffering and so become the Lord of all creation (Heb. 1:3; 2:10; Phil. 2:8-11). In the opposition and persecution it experiences, the Church is a living reminder and witness that in his compassion God chose the way of the Cross to save the world.

#### The Church as Steward

13. The once-for-all atoning work of Christ and its continuing actualization in the life of the Church together constitute the free gift of God which is proclaimed in the Gospel. This continuing actualization includes the Church's ability to foster the new life given by the Spirit. The Church as a whole is thus called to serve God's purpose of drawing the human race into reconciliation and fellowship with himself.

14. For the fulfilment of this service the Church is entrusted with a responsibility of stewardship. This includes the Church's faithful proclamation of the Gospel, as well as its sacramental, pastoral and missionary activities. In exercising this stewardship the Church has no authority to change the essential content of the Gospel, nor has it any power of itself over the effect in the hearer. However, the manner in which the word is preached, taught and demonstrated in the Church's life is crucial. The presentation by the Church must vary from age to age in different cultures. In this way, while the source of the Church's effectiveness is always the Holy Spirit, the Church is truly the servant and steward of God's design.

15. What we have said about the Church as instrument, sign and steward does not presuppose that the Church is perfect. In its constant struggles with sin and its own weakness the Church is reminded of the need for repentance in its failure to realize the Gospel more fully. Lack of authenticity in the Church's life undermines the credibility of what it proclaims.

Justification and Salvation

16. The heart of the Gospel is the good news of our salvation. In speaking of this salvation the New Testament uses a wide variety of language. Though some of the terms employed are of more fundamental importance than others, there is no single all-embracing term or concept; rather, they complement one another. Thus the language of reconciliation and forgiveness stresses the restoration of broken relationships (e.g. 2 Cor. 5:18; Eph. 2: 13-18; 4: 32). To speak of justification is to speak of removal of condemnation and of a new standing in the eyes of God (e.g. Rom. 3:24; 4:5; 5:1). The language of expiation or atonement (hilasmos) is drawn from the context of sacrifice and denotes the putting away of sin (e.g. Rom. 3:25; Heb. 2:17; 1 John 2:2; 4:10). To speak of redemption or liberation is to speak of rescue from bondage so as to become God's own possession, and of freedom bought for a price (e.g. Eph. 1:17; 1 Pet. 1 18f; 2:9). The language of adoption speaks of our restoration as children of God, made and remade in his image, which is the image of his Son, in whom we are incorporated by his Holy Spirit (e.g. Rom.8:15-17, 23,29). Terms like regeneration and rebirth speak of a work of recreation and the beginning of new life (e.g. 1 Pet.1:23). New life is given to those who were dead in their sins (e.g. Eph. 2:5) and those who are "in Christ" are a new creation (e.g. 2 Cor. 5:17). The theme of sanctification underlines the fact that God has made us his own and calls us to holiness of life (e.g. John 17:17; 1 Cor. 3:17; 6:11). Finally the key concept of salvation (soteria) has the wide



connotation of the deliverance of human beings from evil and their restoration to what God wants them to be (e.g. Luke 1:77; John 3:17). These and other terms which are employed in scripture, both of the people of God and of the individual, complement one another in expressing various aspects of God's work of salvation which is one and indivisible.

17. These scriptural terms combine two contrasting but complementary aspects of God's saving love: that which is once for all and the continuing process. Thus Scripture speaks both of God's eternal will, realised in the once-for-all paschal event, and of his abiding presence and action through the Holy Spirit in the Church; both of God's decisive act of reconciling each sinner and of his continuing gifts of grace; both of our initial response to the Gospel and of our continuing life and growth in grace.

18. Many examples can be given of the polarity of the biblical language of salvation. Thus Paul, using the metaphor of putting on clothing, speaks of his hearers as men and women who have put off the old nature and put on the new humanity, and at the same time speaks of a nature which is being renewed, telling them to put on the qualities which belong to this new humanity, such as compassion and the peace of Christ (Col. 3:10-13).

Likewise, though justification is usually spoken of as a past event in the New Testament, yet it is also presented as a future reality (Rom. 5:19 "will be made righteous"). Again, sanctification on the one hand denotes consecration to God and is associated

with the moment of baptism (1 Cor. 6:11); on the other hand it denotes constant re-appropriation of this consecration by holiness of life (1 Pet. 1:15-16). Yet again, while we are said to be already saved (Eph. 2:8), we are also told to work out our salvation (Phil. 2:12).

19. In the life of the Church, this polarity is reflected in the relation between baptism, which is the unrepeatable 'sacrament of justification' (Augustine, sermon 152.3; see 1 Cor. 6:11) and of incorporation into the body of Christ, and the eucharist, which is the repeated sacrament by which the life of Christ's body is nourished.

20. The term Justification has in the New Testament both a past and a present reference. On the one hand, the term 'justification' speaks of a divine declaration of acquittal, of the love of God manifested to an alienated and lost humanity prior to any movement on the part of the human soul (Romans 5:8). God declares we are forgiven and accepted and that we are reconciled to God through the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross, the supreme sign of divine love and mercy. This declaration is expressed in the language of law, as a verdict of acquittal of the sinner. On the other hand an acquittal in a human law court is an external, even impersonal act. The declaration of divine forgiveness and reconciliation does not leave the soul as it was if there is a human response of repentance and faith. And therefore the remission of sins also brings a present renewal, a rebirth to newness of life. Accordingly the juridical category

of 'justification', which expresses an important facet of the truth, is not the exclusive notion within which all other biblical ideas and images must be forced. The gift of forgiveness and the gift of new life are distinct in the understanding, but not to be separated in the deeper experience of the person, and are simultaneously received, not successive in time.

Sanctification is the making in the believer of that righteousness and salvation without which no one may see the Lord. Faith is the beginning of human salvation, the foundation and root of all that follows. This repentance and faith, which lie at the foundation (Heb. 6:1), are the gift of God. Therefore 'we are justified freely, gratis, by God's grace' (Rom.3:24). No human act prior to justification, whether of inward belief or of outward action, is the ground or reason for the gift of grace. Our entire hope of justification and salvation rests on Christ Jesus and on the gospel of God's gratuitous and merciful action in him. At the same time the gift of new life means the restoration of the possibility of human freedom as man is recreated to correspond to the Creator's purpose. The prerequisite of final salvation is 'righteousness', and God's last judgement is presented to us in Scripture as resting on our works, done on the foundation of faith and love. So the righteousness of God is not only a judgment made by God in favour of the sinner declaring him righteous but also a gift which God bestows on him making him righteous.

2). Justification and sanctification are therefore not

distinct and unrelated acts of God. The initiative of God in the declaration of forgiving love is independent of and uncaused by human acts of faith or works, but is not external to the human person and is indissolubly linked to the transforming recreation in grace as 'the love of God is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given to us'(Rom. 5:5). That is why God's judgment is not a legal fiction: God's grace effects what he declares. In the act of justifying God infuses or imparts a righteousness which is both his and ours; and since God is not unrighteous to forget the labours of love in his service (Heb. 6:10) there is propriety in speaking of 'reward' for good works done in God, from love for him.

22. The language of grace is used in describing the merciful and saving action of God in its entirety. Grace is the totally undeserved love of God for his creatures, a love which issued in the saving work of Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us and makes us God's children. Grace also speaks of God's continuing work on our behalf, calling us to respond to his love, forgiving our sins and conforming us to the image of his Son. Even the power to respond to God's saving action is itself a gift of grace, though this is still a truly human and free response. Growth in grace is a deepening in our relationship with our loving God: grace is not to be conceived as a thing or substance.

Faith

23. This gracious action of God in Christ is proclaimed to us through the Gospel. Our God-given response to the Gospel is faith, by which we accept the effects of this saving action on our behalf. Faith receives what grace bestows. While faith includes an intellectual assent to the truths of the Gospel, it must also involve commitment of one's whole being to God in repentance and obedience to his call, otherwise it remains a dead faith. Living faith is inseparable from love and issues in good works. This faith, of which baptism is the sacramental sign, unites believers with Christ, and makes them members of his body, the Church. Faith is sustained and deepened by the life of the eucharistic community.

Freedom

24. This response of faith to the Gospel must be free, since it involves a relationship of communion with God and a share in his life. This is the freedom God has given us in his Son, for 'in Christ Jesus the law of life has set you free from sin and death' (Rom. 8:2).

Assurance

25. The certainty of God's promise of eternal life, the finality of Christ's atoning work, and the gift and pledge of the Holy Spirit to every believer, constitute the Christian's grounds for assurance of salvation. God's gracious will for us includes the assurance that we have the gift of eternal life and that we are children of God (1 Jn. 5; Rom. 8). Such confidence does not in any way remove the Christian's responsibility to work out his salvation in fear and trembling. This is not a presumptuous confidence, because it is founded upon God's unfailing faithfulness and not upon the measure of our response.

Merit

26. The question of merit has caused difficulty and misunderstanding in the past (cf. Art.XI11). The use of this term was thought to imply that human beings contributed to their own salvation in such a way as to suggest an incompleteness in the work of Christ. Certain beliefs and practices in the Church, such as purgatory and pardons (cf. Art. XX11), appeared to lend credence to this view.<sup>1</sup>

27. Although some late medieval theologians taught otherwise neither of our churches has ever officially taught that justification is anything other than a gift. Even the very first movements which lead to justification, such as repentance, the desire for forgiveness and even faith itself, are God's work in us touching our heart by the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

28. With regard to the justified, Scripture speaks of their good works performed in grace as recompensed by God, the righteous judge (e.g. Mt. 25:14-30). The eternal reward promised to all the righteous is itself a gift, depending wholly on God's grace. It is only with this understanding that following St. Augustine we can say of the merits of the righteous: 'When God crowns our merits it is his own gifts that he crowns' (Ep. 194.5). He is true to his promise to 'render to everyone according to his works' (Rom.2:6), yet when we have done all that is commanded we must still say, 'We are unprofitable servants, we have only done out duty' (Lk. 17:10).

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<sup>1</sup> The difficulty was compounded by the use of the Latin 'mereor' which can/translated either 'deserve' or 'obtain'.  
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Perseverance

29. The Christian believer derives assurance not from his own feelings, or his moral achievements, or even the correctness of his orthodox professions. His confidence is based on God's declared will to save all mankind. The christian is called to live his life with sure trust in God's promises, 'in full assurance of faith', knowing that in the community of the faithful he has 'passed from death to life.' God gives the faithful all that is needed for their Salvation, and the word of Christ and his Sacraments assure us of this. This is to believers a matter of absolute certitude. Even if one's sins are great, one always has the possibility of receiving the forgiveness of God. But there is a less than absolute certitude, namely a moral certitude that by the grace of God the believer may remain faithful and will always have the desire to use what God has given for the restoration of those who stumble. The Christian, even though he actively participates in the life and worship of the Church, may never presume on the gift of final perseverance, yet he should live his life with a sure confidence in God with the firm hope that God will bring him to final salvation.



Conclusion

30. Comments need to be made on certain aspects of the theology of Church and Salvation, which have been emphasized in this statement; namely, the affirmations of God's righteousness and the effects of his grace. It remains also to stress the contemporary relevance of these affirmations and to note their abiding social and ethical consequences.

31. In considering the question of relevance, if it is submitted that the concepts of justification and grace are of little concern today, we would reply that when these concepts are studied seriously, they deal with issues which are of permanent concern. Humankind in every generation is preoccupied with both the meaning of life and the search for happiness. The English phrase, "justifying one's existence" is itself noteworthy. Humankind searches for validation of both existence and purpose. Apart from God, this search leads only to captivity to one's own efforts and slavery to lesser goals and values. Belief in God, who has created and who freely accepts human beings in Christ Jesus, provides a foundation for the sense of self-worth which we seek. The recognition that each individual and the whole of humanity is the object of God's love, provides the foundation on which all authentic self-worth is to be found, and gives enduring value to all that we do and achieve in obedience to God.

32. Turning now to the social and ethical consequences of God's declaration of righteousness and the effects of his grace, we note first, that immediately after referring to God's act of justification in the Galatian letter, Paul goes on to speak of a new community where the greatest divisions of his world had been transcended. There had been a "putting-on of Christ", an incorporation into a new community where seemingly insuperable distinctions had been overcome, and where all stood equal in the sight of God. The presence of such a community where irreparable divisions had been healed, speaks with immediacy to our own world. Such a definition of the Church imposes the obligation on the Church so to live, and offers the world hope in the midst of its divisions.

33. Second, the effects of his grace opened up the potential, not only for individual righteousness, but also corporate righteousness - a newness of corporate life whereby the Church may truly be a sign both of God's grace and also his righteousness.

34. The affirmations of God's declaration of righteousness and the effects of his grace in human lives have often in the past been understood to represent contradictory positions. We have tried to show that these affirmations are not only compatible but are indispensable for the fullness of Christian faith. The first statement places the believer in reverence before the mystery of God's eternal and free decision on our behalf. The second reminds us that God's intention, achieved through the incarnation of the Eternal Son, restores and makes God's own all that is of value in human existence. The very fact that these positions, understood to be in opposition, were held with such conviction, indicates their lasting importance for the understanding of the Christian faith and the living of the Christian life.

35. The Christian faith cannot be held with consistency, the Christian life cannot be lived with authenticity, without conviction both of God's forgiveness and human need of that forgiveness, a sense of acceptance by God, incorporation into a divinely-ordained community and an awareness of God's love freely given and joyfully received. If the issues considered by us in this statement were the cause of division in the past, our reflection on them has enabled us to become more deeply aware of their eternal significance. Such reflection applies also to our mutual understanding of the role of the Church.

36. To see the Church of Jesus Christ as a sign or instrument of God's saving action in the world helps us to understand what we mean when we say, "I believe in the Holy Catholic Church". To see the Church as not only the sign but also the steward of God's gifts, helps us to appreciate the responsibility of all Christians to spread the word of God and to give witness to Christ in the world of today. For if the sign is to be truly effective, if the stewardship is to be truly faithful, then Christ's will that the Church should be united is crucial. For our two Churches, growth towards unity is not for our own sakes, but "so that the world may believe that it was God who sent me".