

SALVATION AND THE CHURCH

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INTRODUCTION

1. The will of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is to reconcile to himself all things on earth and in heaven which he has created and sustains, to set free the creation from its bondage to decay, and to draw all humanity into union with himself. Though we, his creatures, turn away from him through sin, God continues to call and empower us to find him anew. To restore us to union with himself, the Father sent into the world Jesus Christ, his only Son, in whom all things were created. He is the image of the invisible God; he took flesh so that we in turn might share the divine nature and so reflect the glory of God. Through Christ's life, death and resurrection, the mystery of God's love is revealed; as an act of pure unmerited gift we are saved from sin and death; and we receive a share in the life of God. God pours his Holy Spirit into the hearts of believers - the Spirit of adoption, who makes us sons and daughters of God. The Spirit unites us with Christ and, in Christ, with all those who by faith are one with Christ. Through baptism we are united with Christ in his death and in the hope of resurrection, we are by the power of the Spirit made members of one body, and together participate in the life of God. This fellowship in one body is called in the New Testament koinonia. "Koinonia with one another is entailed by our koinonia with God in Christ. This is the mystery of the Church". (F.R. Introduction 15). The community of believers, united with Christ, give praise and thanksgiving to God celebrating the grace of Christ as they await his return in glory when he will

be all in all, and will deliver to the Father a holy people. In the present time, the Church is called to be a sign to the world of God's will for the healing and re-creation of the whole human race in Jesus Christ. And as the Church preaches the good news of Christ, the heart of its message must be salvation through the grace of God.

2. But the doctrine of salvation has in the past been a cause of contention between Anglicans and Roman Catholics. Disagreements, focussing on justification, had already surfaced in the Church of the later Middle Ages, and in the sixteenth century became a central matter of dispute between Roman Catholics and continental reformers. Though the matter played a less crucial role in the English Reformation, the Church of England substantially adopted the principles expressed in the moderate Lutheran formulations of the Augsburg and Wurtemberg Confessions. The Decree on Justification of the Council of Trent was not directed against the Anglican formularies, which had not yet been compiled, but Anglicans widely came to understand that Decree as a repudiation of their position. Since then various debates on the doctrine of justification and on related issues (such as predestination, original sin, good works, sanctification) have been pursued within each of the divided Communions.

3. In the area of the doctrine of salvation including justification there was much agreement. Above all it was agreed that the act of God in bringing salvation to the human race and summoning individuals into a community to serve him is due solely to the

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19. Mutual misunderstandings about the bearing of good works on salvation are properly resolved when the Christological centre of the doctrine of justification is brought into clear focus. God has brought a new humanity into being in the person of Jesus, the "last Adam" or "second man" as St. Paul describes him (1 Cor. 15:45,47). Salvation means participating in that humanity, living the human life as God has refashioned it. In speaking of this humanity as new, we show the proper basis for the denial "not because of works" (Eph. 2:9). Nothing that our old humanity can do, nothing of our achievement, good will or seriousness about ourselves, can make it ^{any} more or less possible for God to offer us our humanity made new in Christ. His deed originates in himself, and nowhere else. At the same time, in speaking of God's new deed as the gift of humanity, we show the proper basis for the affirmation "for good works" (Eph. 2:10). For humanity is created to live in activity and freedom; and it is not possible to conceive of a renewed human existence which proceeds entirely in an interior realm and does not manifest itself by displaying these objective hallmarks of human existence. We may, then, follow an earlier idiom in saying that good works are the "form" of justification, meaning that the decisive verdict of God in our favour finds its correspondence in human lives to which the true shape of human freedom is restored. From the divine work follows the human work: it is we who live and act in a fully human way, yet never on our own or in self-sufficient independence, for it is only possible so to live in the freedom and activity of Christ, who "lives in me" (Gal. 2:20).

20. To speak thus of "freedom in Christ" is not to suggest that there is no sense in which freedom of choice can be spoken of simply as a datum of human existence, but to stress, as the apostolic tradition has always done, that it is Jesus who decisively discloses the shape of human life lived in total freedom before God. Life in Christ is liberated from the demonic forces and group egotisms which control and inhibit all of human society, especially from the restless urge for power, honour, wealth and sex. But neither is it to suggest that Christian existence takes an easy and unproblematic form. The believer's growth to maturity, and

indeed the common life of the church, is in practice often checked by continual lapses into sin, whether by habit, ignorance, neglect or even wilful resistance to the known will of God. "In this life our righteousness consists more in the forgiveness of sins than in the achievement of virtues" (Augustine, City of God XIX.27). Even good works, done in God and under the grace of the Spirit, can be flawed by pride or some egotistical element, and therefore it is by repeated repentance and faith that we must lay claim on our freedom from sin. Again, freedom in Christ does not imply a life lived in isolation or without determinate structure. Our liberation admits us to an order of social existence in which the individual finds fulfilment in community. We are free to keep the commandments of God, to exist authentically as his people, to be shaped by that pattern of true fellow-humanity which Jesus discloses, and to grow in love within the discipline of his community.

21. Certain kinds of religious good works, especially those associated with penitence, have been areas of controversy. The individual believer's pilgrimage, which can never be a flight of the alone to the Alone, is lived out with the mutual support of all the people of God; for in Christ all the faithful, both living and departed, are bound together in prayer. To one who has fallen into sin and seeks repentance the church is entrusted by the Lord with authority to pronounce forgiveness in his name. The church may also help the individual to a deeper realisation of the mercy of God by asking for practical amends for what has been done amiss. Such penitential practices, and other devotional acts, are not in any way intended to earn divine favour; rather, they provide a form in which one may embrace the free mercy of God.

21a. God's acceptance of our good works done in Christ is the ground of what is called, in the Roman Catholic tradition, Christian "merit".¹ The works of the righteous performed in Christian freedom are the object of God's commendation and receive his reward. Yet in speaking of reward we do not point to anything other than the delight which he enables us to take in the completion of his redemptive purposes and his immediate fellowship with his people. And the

reward itself is wholly a matter of divine grace. In contemplating ultimate destiny no Christian trusts in his or her merits, but rests confidence wholly on the mercy and loving kindness of God, and prays that the good work which God has here begun he will in grace complete. It is in this perspective that the language of "merit" must be understood, so that we can say with St. Augustine: "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 our duty" (Lk. 17:10).

¹ Misunderstanding has been caused by the fact that the Latin mereor has a range of meanings, from "deserve" to "obtain".

28th August, 1986 9.20 p.m.

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27. The Church, as koinonia, always in need of renewal and purification, is already here and now a foretaste of God's kingdom. It is this foretaste, within a world which is still awaiting its consummation - a world therefore full of suffering, injustice, division and strife (Rom. 8:18-20). Thus Paul speaks of a fellowship which is called to transcend the seemingly insuperable divisions of the world; where all, because of their equal standing before the Lord, must be equally accepted by one another; where, since all are justified by the grace of God, all may learn to do justice to one another; where ethnic, social, sexual and other distinctions no longer create forms of discrimination and alienation (Gal. 3:28). Those who are justified by grace, and who are sustained in the life of Christ through Word and Sacrament, are liberated from their self-centred concern and are thus enabled to act freely and to live at peace with God and with one another. The Church, as the Community of the justified, is called to embody the good news that forgiveness is a gift to be received from God and shared with others (Mt. 6:14f.). Thus the message of the Church is neither a private pietism irrelevant to contemporary society, nor a political programme not subject to critical judgement in the light of the Gospel. Only a reconciled and reconciling community, faithful to its Lord, in which human divisions are being overcome, will speak with integrity to an alienated, divided world, and so be both a credible witness to God's saving action in Christ and a foretaste of God's Kingdom. Until the Kingdom is realized in its fulness, the Church as koinonia and its service to the world are subject to imperfection and human limitation. It is the beginning and not yet the end, the seed and not yet the harvest.

28. The source of the Church's hope for the world lies in the fact that God has never abandoned the world, has never ceased to work within it, and has never given up his saving purpose for the whole created order. The Gospel affirms the sacredness and dignity of the person, of communities and of the human race as a whole. The Church is called, empowered, and sent to proclaim this hope by word and deed, and to communicate this conviction to the world until the end of history. This is the participation of the Church in Christ's mission: witnessing against the structures of sin in society, addressing individuals with the Gospel of repentance and forgiveness, and making intercession for the world. In being an agency of justice and compassion it will challenge and assist society's attempts to achieve just settlements of its conflicts, even though these settlements remain provisional. As the Church pursues its mission and pilgrimage in the world, it looks forward to "the end, when having destroyed every sovereignty, authority and power, ...(Christ) will hand over the kingdom to God the Father" (1 Cor. 15:24).

CONCLUSION

29. In our work we have rediscovered and expressed together the balance and coherence of the constitutive elements in the Christian doctrine of salvation which in the course of history and controversy became partially obscured. We are agreed that this is not an area where any remaining differences of theological interpretation, ecclesiological

emphasis or devotional practice, either within or between our Churches can justify our continuing separation. We believe that our two Communion's are agreed on the essential aspects of the doctrine of salvation and on the Church's role within it. We have also realized the central meaning and the profound significance which the message of justification and sanctification within the comprehensive doctrine of salvation continues to have for us today. This agreement also enables our two Communion's to witness together to God's salvation in the midst of the anxieties, struggles and hopes of our world.