

St. Albans Sub-CommissionCHURCH AND SALVATION: GENERAL FRAMEWORK

1. The conclusion of the Final Report of ARCIC-I made it clear that our ultimate quest was the restoration of a true koinonia between our two communions. In seeking this we are not concerned primarily with the security and prosperity of our Churches but rather with our desire to be conformed to Christ's will that all his followers may be one so that the world may believe that it is the father who sent him (Jn.17:22-23). For God chose to save the world through the revelation of his purpose in Christ Jesus. It is the Church's vocation to proclaim the good news of this revelation. Faithful transmission of this gospel does not only involve fidelity to the Apostolic word: the manner in which the community lives its faith gives credibility to what it proclaims. The first Commission (ARCIC-I) studied the ministerial structures necessary for maintaining the Apostolic faith: the present Commission has to consider more fully the content of that faith and the interaction between divine grace and human response in the salvation of mankind.
2. With the power of the promised Holy Spirit the Church since the beginning has proclaimed that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. This is the heart of the gospel. Because it is God's good news and the initiative comes wholly from him, salvation is a gift and not a reward. By the sending of His Son to heal a relationship broken by sin God has given us free access to redemption, whereby we become members of his family and participate in the life of his Son.
3. As God's chosen people the Church is called to be continually

transformed into the likeness of Christ and thus enabled to become in reality what it already is in name. ^{transformation} Since this/ is the work of the Holy Spirit everything in the Church that springs from its new life in Christ redounds to God's glory and not man's.

4. Salvation bestows upon the Christian community God's gracious acceptance and the constant renewing power of the cross.

'Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand.

(Rom. 5:1, 2).

'If we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood Of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.' (1 Jn.1:7).

5. Salvation has to be viewed from two perspectives. For God, who transcends human history and who knows the end from the beginning, all events are present simultaneously in their totality. Thus the fulfilment of our salvation is inseparable from its beginning. But for man, Christian vocation has to be worked out in hope through a temporal succession of events, so that the fulfilment of salvation cannot be wholly apprehended until the end. Some of the problems between us have arisen from a tendency to view salvation from one of these perspectives to the detriment of the other. Each perspective emphasises a complementary facet of the mystery of salvation in Christ. In the first case, salvation is identified with God's declaration

that those who have truly responded in faith are saved. This declaration of ~~divine~~ forgiveness is inseparable from the gift of a new life in Christ in which God recreates and sustains a freedom to respond in faith and obedience. Hence in the second case the emphasis rests upon the continuing necessity for Christians to remain faithful to the gift they have received and to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling. (Philip. 2.12). Together these two emphases elucidate the full meaning of salvation. Different traditions have inherited a stronger attachment to one of the two, which only becomes a problem when this involves an undue diminishment of the other. A proper balance in holding these emphases together is necessary for a healthy spirituality. Everything in the Christian life stems fundamentally from God while also entailing human responsibility. God's initiative and man's response are both of grace.

6. Another source of difficulties comes from the New Testament's use of a variety of terms to express the saving work of God. We find words such as redemption, reconciliation, adoption, regeneration, and new creation, as well as justification and sanctification. All these complementary images describe the nature of the same mystery of salvation but with different emphases. Redemption speaks of freedom from slavery: Reconciliation describes a restored relationship: Adoption implies being received into God's family: Regeneration means a new birth: The New Creation is the restoration of God's work:

Justification is understood as a new standing in God's sight: Sanctification denotes our belonging to the realm of the Holy God. In each of these images there is a tension between what God has done once for all in Christ and the resultant new life with its responsibilities. Controversies have arisen in the past, partly when too much emphasis has been attached to one of these images in isolation, partly through disagreements about the meaning of the terms.

7. A just evaluation of the mission and ministry of the Church in the salvation of mankind has to be made in the light of the two perspectives we have described and the diversity of images in the New Testament. The Church is both the reconciled and reconciling community, redeemed and the responsible agent of redemption throughout history. It is because the Church is not merely associated with Christ, but has become his body, that it is both called and enabled to fulfil its task of proclaiming the good news as well as making available the means of salvation. It necessarily becomes involved in working for the salvation of all mankind to the glory of God. The word of God has to be preached, but this issues from a redeemed and believing community. Having been reconciled to God the Church is also given a ministry of reconciliation in consequence of which all the children of God saved by Jesus Christ are bound together by the Holy Spirit. Through God's grace the Church has the responsibility to give to the faithful what is necessary to be the pilgrim people of God. All the barriers which divide humanity have no place within its fellowship. To the extent that this is so

it is a sign to the world of God's reconciling power and serves the promotion of justice, peace and love.

8. Similarly, in our understanding of the relationship between Church and Salvation it is important to be attentive to the two perspectives and to balance the images that we employ with each other. For instance, in speaking of the Church's ministry of reconciliation, we must complement what we say by reference to God's new creation, adoption and regeneration. This principle applies particularly to justification and sanctification which must not be isolated from the other New Testament images. Both perspectives of which we have spoken are as essential for a right understanding of these two controversial terms as they are for the other images.