

GROUP 3

1. The doctrines of salvation and the Church can be understood only in the context of the mystery of the eternal love of God for humanity. God created us in order to make us partakers in his nature, his sons and daughters in the image of his Son. It is only in God's love for humanity that the mystery of his own trinitarian love is revealed.
2. In establishing a communion of human beings with himself and with one another in Christ through the Holy Spirit, God draws human beings into his own trinitarian life. It is a communion of human beings who are otherwise estranged from God and from one another. When individuals are called to membership of this Koinonia, it is not only for their own sake but also for the sake of all humanity.
3. The New Testament contains many images representing this inexpressible mystery of God's saving love. Among them the language of reconciliation, forgiveness and expiation stresses the restoration of broken relationships (e.g. 2 Cor. 5:18; Eph. 2:13-18; 4:32; Rom. 3:24-25); that of adoption, our restoration as children of God, made and renewed in his image (e.g. Rom. 8:15-17, 23, 29); that of regeneration or rebirth, a work of recreation and the beginning of new life (e.g. 1 Pet. 1:23). The language of new creation speaks of radical renewal (e.g. 2 Cor. 5:17); that of redemption or liberation, of rescue from bondage so as to become God's own possession, and of freedom bought for a price (e.g. Eph. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:18f, 2:9); that of justification, of removal of condemnation and of a new standing in the eyes of God (e.g. Rom. 5:1; 1 Cor. 6:11). The language 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); while passages which speak of the giving of the Spirit tell us that God, in claiming us for his own, has given us a share in his own life (e.g. Rom. 5:5; 8:9-11;

1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:2; Eph. 1:14). Finally the language of salvation (soteria) has the wide connotation of deliverance of human beings from evil and their restoration to what God wants them to be (Lk. 1:77; Jn. 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.

4. All human beings stand in need of salvation and forgiveness, which can come only from God. Their entire hope rests on God's incarnate Son and on the Gospel of God's freely given and merciful action in Him. In describing this merciful action we use the language of grace. Grace is not to be conceived as a thing or substance. Primarily it is used to characterize God's saving action as a free gift and totally undeserved on our part. Secondly it refers to what, in this saving action, God bestows: the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit. The power to respond to God's saving action is itself a gift of grace. This response is nevertheless a truly human and free response. We are not passive under God's grace.

5. God's gracious action in Christ is conveyed to us by the Gospel. Our God-given response to the Gospel is faith. By faith we appropriate the effects of Christ's saving action on our behalf. This faith, expressed in the reception of baptism, unites believers with Christ and makes them members of Christ's body. Faith is sustained and deepened by the life of the eucharistic community. Faith is the obedient assent by which human beings offer up to God their whole self, intellect, feeling and will. Faith is not to be identified with merely intellectual assent to credal propositions, though it includes intellectual assent to such propositions. Faith is a sure confidence in God's mercy and in the efficacy of Christ's saving work on behalf of each ('I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me' : Gal. 2:20), but is not at all

a presumptuous confidence which removes the necessity of working out one's salvation in fear and trembling. Faith is inseparable from hope and love and issues in good works which are pleasing to God (cf. Eph. 2:8-10).

6. The Scriptural images we have spoken of in para. 3 combine two contrasting but complementary aspects of God's saving love : the 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 gift of grace; both of God's saving action and of our response; both of our initial response to the Gospel and of our continuing life and growth in grace. This last instance is reflected in the relation between baptism, which is the unrepeatable 'sacrament of justification' (St. Augustine, Sermon 152.3) and of incorporation into the Church, and the eucharist, which is the repeated sacrament by which the life of the body of Christ is deepened.

7. Many examples can be given of the polarity of the biblical language of salvation. Thus St. 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). Again, sanctification on the one hand denotes consecration to God and is associated with the moment of baptism (1 Cor. 7:11); 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).

8. The image of justification refers to salvation primarily under the aspect of God's once-for-all action in declaring that we are forgiven and accepted and that through the blood of Christ no barriers exist between God and ourselves (Rom. 5:1, 9). However, this image is inherently linked with complementary images which express the process by which God's declaration achieves its full effect in human lives : God's grace effects what it declares. For example, Paul speaks of a humanity renewed and of the transformation of the Christian's mind (Col. 3:10; Rom. 12:2).

9. Misunderstandings have occurred in the past* through the dissociation of justification from the complementary terms, notably when an unreal distinction is drawn between justification and sanctification. This misunderstanding has been compounded when the act of justification has been seen not so much as God's decision to justify the ungodly as the beginning of a temporal process continued by sanctification.

10. Beyond the misunderstandings which may arise from these two emphases we may recognize concerns which have a lasting importance for the believing community. To speak of God's once-for-all declaration places the believer in reverence before the mystery of God's eternal and free decision on our behalf. To speak of the effects of God's grace in human lives reminds us that God's plan, achieved through the Incarnation of the eternal Son, restores and makes God's own all that is authentic in human existence. Our discussions lead us to recognize not only that these two emphases are compatible but also that they are both important for the fulness of Christian faith.

*FOOTNOTE. In the sixteenth century discussion of these issues was confused by a misunderstanding between Protestants, who followed the New Testament in referring justification (dikaiosis) primarily to the act of salvation, and Catholics, who followed medieval usage in referring justification (justificatio) also to the process.

11. The language of merit and reward has caused difficulty and misunderstanding in the past, because it has been thought to imply that human beings are the authors of their own salvation. Neither of our two churches has ever held that justification itself is anything but a gift. Even the very first movements of the soul, such as repentance and the desire for forgiveness, which lead to justification, are God's work in us touching our heart by the illumination of the Holy Spirit. 'What have you that you did not receive?' (1 Cor. 4:7). On the other hand, Scripture speaks of the good works of the justified performed in grace as recognized by God, the righteous judge (Mt. 25:14-46; 2 Tim. 4:6). The New Testament also sees that eternal life is the consequence of faith while judgement is the consequence of unbelief (Jn. 3:18; 5:24).

12. The eternal reward promised to the righteous is itself a gift, depending wholly on God's grace. It is only with this understanding that following St. Augustine we can speak of the believer's merits : 'When God crowns our merits it is his own gifts that he crowns' (Ep. 194.5). While he is true to his promise to 'render to everyone according to his works' (Rom. 2:6), 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).