

CHURCH and SALVATION

1. Church and salvation cannot be rightly understood except within the context of the mystery of the love of God for humanity. God's purpose is to draw humanity into a relationship with himself so as to share together in his life. This creates a communion in Christ through the Holy Spirit of those who would otherwise be estranged from God and from one another.

2. Our two churches are in agreement on the absolute initiative of God in salvation and on this theocentric view of the church. We have never doubted our common conviction that the church is the fruit of salvation. Yet we have not been of one mind in our understanding of the role of the church as steward of salvation. Our difficulties stem from the crucial issue of the relationship between the transcendence of God's grace and human responsibility in salvation.

3. This salvation is God's free gift, offered to all humankind. Its once-for-all completion in the saving work of Christ, on which we all agree, and its continuing actualisation in the life of the church together constitute the free gift of God. God's grace encompasses the Church's ability to nourish the new life given by the Spirit as well as to proclaim the gospel. The salvation gratuitously offered in Christ involves the restoration of the image of God in man which was marred by the fall. To be created in the image of God is to be placed in a special relationship with the Creator and consequently to be given the responsibility of stewardship over the rest of creation. In the new creation, however, the special relationship is now an adoption into the family of God for everyone who has faith and is baptised: this new humanity is the new Israel, the Bride of Christ, the temple of God, the body of Christ, a royal priesthood. Together with its privilege and dignity the Church is given the responsibility to produce the good works of the life given by the Spirit (Eph. 2:10): its duty is to proclaim the good news

of salvation and to provide what is needful for believers to remain faithful to Christ.

4. Faithful transmission of the gospel involves more than mere repetition of the apostolic message. The manner in which the Christian community lives its faith affects the credibility of what it proclaims, for it is within the Church that the Holy Spirit gives and nurtures the new life so that the gospel becomes a manifest reality. It is also through the power of the Holy Spirit that the Church proclaims to the world that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself (2 Cor. 5:19). In this way the Church is called to share in God's work. Such cooperation in no way detracts from the sovereign work and grace of God. This is what is meant by the instrumentality of the Church.

The Church as Sign

5. 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 realised even for sinful humanity. 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 and in its constant struggles with sin and its own weakness, 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

6. From the beginning the people of God have been called to be a servant people. So the Church as a whole is called to serve and given a responsibility of stewardship. This includes both the faithful proclamation of the Gospel and the provision of what is needed for perseverance in the faith and growth in holiness, of which the source is always the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Church has no authority over the essential content of the Gospel of God nor has it any power of itself over its effect in the heart. However, the manner in which the word is preached, taught and demonstrated in the Church's life is crucial. Its presentation by the Church must vary from age to age in different cultures. What the Church also does in nurturing and strengthening the spirit-given life through its sacramental, pastoral and missionary activities can only be carried out effectively through the power of the Holy Spirit. In this way the Church is the servant of God's design.

The Church - called to share in God's work

7. All the distinctive activities of the Church as servant of God's design spring from what the Church is already experiencing as the community of people redeemed by God's grace. The Church is called to be a living gospel, evangelised and evangelising, reconciled and reconciling, gathered together and gathering others. In its ministry to the world the Church seeks to share the grace by which its own life is created and sustained. Thus the Church as living gospel is inseparable from the Church as steward of the Gospel.

8. The New Testament contains many images and concepts

representing this gospel of salvation. They all concern at the same time both the Church as a whole and its individual members. 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; 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 concept 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 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. In fact the polemics associated with justification by faith arose mainly from the application of this Biblical image to the salvation of individuals.