

SALVATION AND THE CHURCH: A SUMMARY ON PUBLICATION

In May 1982 on the occasion of the visit of Pope John Paul II to Canterbury, the Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Robert Runcie, proclaimed and celebrated the one baptismal faith which we all share. They also gave thanks to God for the work of the first Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC-I) whose Final Report had just been published, and agreed to the establishment of a new commission (ARCIC-II).

The task of ARCIC-II was to examine and try to resolve those doctrinal differences which still divide our Churches and are obstacles to the establishment of a fuller communion of faith and sacramental life. At the request of both our Churches the Commission has addressed itself to the doctrine of justification, which at the time of the Reformation was a particular cause of contention. This request sprang out of a widespread view that the subject of justification and salvation is so central to the christian faith that, unless there is assurance of agreement on this issue, there can be no full doctrinal agreement between our two Churches. The work of ARCIC-II on justification has been helped by the discussion and progress in this area made in the wider ecumenical movement. In its statement the Commission acknowledges that the doctrine of justification can be properly treated only within the wider context of the doctrine of salvation as a whole. This in turn involves a discussion of the role of the Church in Christ's saving work. Hence the title of the agreed statement: Salvation and the Church.

The Commission does not claim to have composed a complete treatment of the doctrine of the Church: the discussion is limited to the role of the Church in salvation. Although the doctrine of salvation and justification in the past has been a cause of contention between Anglicans and Roman Catholics there was nevertheless always much agreement. Above all it was agreed that the act of God in bringing salvation to the human race and summoning individuals into a common unity is due solely to the mercy and grace of God. It was also agreed that God's grace evokes an authentic human response of faith which takes effect not only in the life of an individual but also in the life of the Church. The difficulties arose in explaining how divine grace related to human response and those difficulties were compounded by a framework of discussion that concentrated too narrowly on the individual.

God's love for us is expressed in the language of grace, whereby we receive salvation. Even our human response of faith is itself also a gift of grace. Faith involves both an assent to the truth of the gospel and the commitment of our will to God. Thus faith is inseparable from love. Christian assurance of salvation is not presumptuous because it is founded upon what God has accomplished - Christ and his continuing faithfulness. Thus faith is also indissolubly linked with hope.

The Scriptures speak of salvation in numerous ways. The terms employed are complementary to one another, with salvation the most comprehensive. Confusion was caused in the sixteenth century by different understandings of the word

'justification'. Catholic theologians tended to include under this term what Reformation theologians would describe as sanctification. In reality, both justification and sanctification are part of the one decisive act of salvation. God's declaration of our freedom from condemnation is bound together with our sanctification. The finality of the one and the continuing process of the other are reflected in the relation between baptism and the eucharist. The declaration of acquittal is not through any entitlement on our part. It also establishes a new and personal relationship.

Faith is no mere private matter: it must issue in good works. God has brought into being in Christ a new humanity, formed to do his will and to bring forth the fruit of the Spirit. We are only able to live this fully human life through our freedom in Christ. This necessitates living in community with its attendant mutual obligations. Our human condition necessitates daily repentance, renewal of faith and a communion of prayer. God promises to reward faithfulness, yet the faithfulness to be rewarded is ultimately his own enabling. The language of 'merit', so often misconstrued, does not imply our making God in any way indebted to us.

Since justification through God's grace admits us into the fellowship of those who have been reconciled in Christ, the doctrine of salvation is ultimately associated with that of the Church. The Church is a sign of the gospel, as it seeks to follow the way of Christ through the grace of the Spirit. It is also entrusted with the responsibility of stewardship of all that it has received, both for its own life and for

the faithful proclamation of the gospel. As instrument, the Church is called to be a living expression of the gospel, being evangelised and evangelising. It can thus be described as a sacrament of God's saving work. For all its shortcomings, the Church is here and now to be a foretaste of God's Kingdom, a challenge to the world's divisions, injustice and lack of compassion.

Conclusion

The Commission has tried to express the balance and coherence of the constitutive elements in the doctrine of salvation obscured in the course of history and controversy. They believe that our two Communion can be agreed on the essential elements of the doctrine of Salvation and the Church's role within it. The Commission affirms that this is no longer an area where any remaining differences of theological interpretation or ecclesiological emphases, either within or between our two Communion, can justify our continuing separation.