

RE-DRAFT OF CONCLUSION

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Comments need to be made on certain aspects of the theology of Church and Salvation, which have been emphasized in this statement; namely, the affirmations of God's righteousness and the effects of his grace. It remains also to stress the contemporary relevance of these affirmations and to note their abiding social and ethical consequences.

In considering the question of relevance, if it is submitted that the concepts of justification and grace are of little concern today, we would reply that when these concepts are studied seriously, they deal with issues which are of permanent concern. Humankind in every generation is preoccupied with both the meaning of life and the search for happiness. The English phrase, "justifying one's existence" is itself noteworthy. Humankind searches for validation of both existence and purpose. Apart from God, this search leads only to captivity to one's own efforts and slavery to lesser goals and values. Belief in God, who has created and who freely accepts human beings in Christ Jesus, provides a foundation for the sense of self-worth which we seek. The recognition that each individual and the whole of humanity is the object of God's love, provides the foundation on which all authentic self-worth is to be found, and gives enduring value to all that we do and achieve in obedience to God.

Turning now to the social and ethical consequences of God's declaration of righteousness and the effects of his grace, we note first, that immediately after referring to God's act of justification in the Galatian letter, Paul goes on to speak of a new community where the greatest divisions of his world had been transcended. There had been a "putting-on of Christ", an incorporation into a new community where seemingly insuperable distinctions had been overcome, and where all stood equal in the sight of God. The presence of such a community where irreparable divisions had been healed, speaks with immediacy to our own world. Such a definition of the Church imposes the obligation on the Church so to live, and offers the world hope in the midst of its divisions.

Second, the effects of his grace opened up the potential, not only for individual righteousness, but also corporate righteousness - a newness of corporate life whereby the Church may truly be a sign both of God's grace and also his righteousness.

The affirmations of God's declaration of righteousness and the effects of his grace in human lives have often in the past been understood to represent contradictory positions. We have tried to show that these affirmations are not only compatible but are indispensable for the fullness of Christian faith. The first statement places the believer in reverence before the mystery of God's eternal and free decision on our behalf. The second reminds us that God's intention, achieved through the incarnation of the Eternal Son, restores and makes God's own all that is of value in human existence. The very fact that these positions, understood to be in opposition, were held with such conviction, indicates their lasting importance for the understanding of the Christian faith and the living of the Christian life.

The Christian faith cannot be held with consistency, the Christian life cannot be lived with authenticity, without conviction both of God's forgiveness and human need of that forgiveness, a sense of acceptance by God, incorporation into a divinely-ordained community and an awareness of God's love freely given and joyfully received. If the issues considered by us in this statement were the cause of division in the past, our reflection on them has enabled us to become more deeply aware of their eternal significance. Such reflection applies also to our mutual understanding of the role of the Church.

To see the Church of Jesus Christ as a sign or instrument of God's saving action in the world helps us to understand what we mean when we say, "I believe in the Holy Catholic Church". To see the Church as not only the sign but also the steward of God's gifts, helps us to appreciate the responsibility of all Christians to spread the word of God and to give witness to Christ in the world of today. For if the sign is to be truly effective, if the stewardship is to be truly faithful, then Christ's will that the Church should be united is crucial. For our two Churches, growth towards unity is not for our own sakes, but "so that the world may believe that it was God who sent me".