

**Comments of the Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue of Canada
on the Observations of the CDF on
SALVATION AND THE CHURCH**

We are grateful for the "substantially positive" assessment which the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) makes of *Salvation and the Church* (SC). The CDF puts before us in unmistakable terms elements of convergence between Anglicans and Roman Catholics on salvation and the Church,¹ but as in a similar CDF document reacting to the *Final Report* of ARCIC-I, it is not ready to endorse the substantial agreement laid out in the document.

The actual Observations of the Congregation (Obs) are brief and succinct. The accompanying 14 page typed commentary (Comm), which does not purport to have the same official status, offers a rationale for the Obs and a more detailed critique of SC. This commentary does not have the authority of a text approved by the Holy Father, whereas the Obs do.²

The status of the Obs as a Church document is not totally clear. On the one hand we are told that the Obs constitute an "authoritative doctrinal judgement",³ but on the other the very title "Observations" chosen for this document indicates a lesser degree of definitiveness, and the observations are offered to the members of the Commission with a view to helping them further their dialogue, in response to the request of ARCIC-II for observations and criticisms. Indeed this response of the CDF can be counted among new tools of expression whose development the ecumenical dialogue of the last century has occasioned. These tools are helpful, even indispensable, but understandably confusion at times exists about their status and intent.

The Anglican Roman Catholic Dialogue of Canada, as a number of other national dialogues, is intimately involved in the work of ARCIC-II, and has chosen to enter into the conversation which the CDF wishes to foster on the agreed statement *Salvation and the Church*. The issues raised by the CDF are quite pertinent to the continuing dialogue of ARCIC-II on *koinonia* and the steps our two churches need to take towards full communion. They also have a

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1. This is especially true in the section of the CDF Commentary entitled A Point Emphasized in the Document, pages 1 and 2.
 2. Cf. Comm, page 1.
 3. The status of "authoritative doctrinal judgement" was not given to the *Observations of the CDF* on the *Final Report* of ARCIC-I. The term "authoritative doctrinal judgement" requires clarification. Is this a judgement emanating from the Congregation in particular or from the Holy See as such?

bearing on how our two churches receive the *Final Report* of ARCIC-I.

In order to justify its unwillingness to acknowledge that SC expresses a substantial agreement on the doctrine of salvation and the Church's role within it, Obs makes a number of points. The first, on the allegedly symbolic language of SC, and the last, on the role of Church and sacraments in salvation, are of greater substance than the observations which suggest improvements to SC when it deals with its main topic, the classic areas of 16th century controversy.⁴

In our comments on the CDF document, we shall begin with the less substantive points which CDF makes regarding SC. We will then deal with the two crucial issues, that of the Church and salvation and that of the language used by SC. We will base these comments not only on the observations themselves but also on the accompanying commentary, which is intended as a support and an elucidation.

THE CLASSICAL ISSUES OF JUSTIFICATION, SANCTIFICATION, SALVATION

In relation to *Simul Justus et Peccator*: The Commentary on page 3 makes a great deal about the incidental use of this formula in #21 of SC. But SC evokes this formula only to tell us that it was often used to express the main point made in #21. The *simul justus et peccator* formula is subordinate to the main point, and not the reverse. This phrase is not found in any Anglican formularies of faith.

The main point of SC #21, which has to do with the need of Christian believers to constantly seek freedom from sin, is expressed in impeccably orthodox terms. Nowhere does SC intimate the ontological coexistence of sanctifying grace and mortal sin in the justified person. The ontological transformation of those justified is not expressed in those exact words, but the reality is abundantly expressed in SC 17 and 18, which takes pains to reflect not only the "not yet" but also the "already now" of God's salvific action, in terms drawn mainly from Paul's major epistles.⁵ In sum, the CDF Commentary seems to

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4. This point is expressed more clearly towards the end of both the CDF observations and the accompanying commentary.
 5. One might also comment on the understanding which the Comm has of Luther's *simul justus et peccator*. He was not speaking of the simultaneous existence of contradictory ontological states in the Christian as much as alluding to the justified person's experience of being a sinner while at the same time trusting in God's forgiving mercy. According to Otto Pesch, Luther is operating in an existential mode (dealing with grace as it affects my own personal quest for salvation), whereas classical Roman Catholic theology is operating in a sapiential mode (contemplating the mystery of grace as part of the objective economy of salvation). To interpret Luther's positions from the sapiential perspective would be to do them an injustice. Cf. Otto Pesch's *Theologie der Rechtfertigung*

have misconstrued the sense of SC on this point.⁶

In relation to fides qua and fides quae (p. 3): Obs claims that the reference to *fides quae* is only made in passing. This appears to reflect a concern that Anglicans in fact subscribe to the position that faith is purely fiducial, without any cognitive dimension. In the sentence to which the Comm refers in SC #10, the point about cognitive faith is made quite clearly, even though the main clause of the sentence is to assert that faith implies more than a cognitive dimension, a point which needs to be made in the classical Catholic tradition as well. In addition, that section of SC abounds in references to the assurance and certitude, not that I am saved, but that the mercy of God is infinite and that the means of salvation are available to all. The cognitive dimension is present, but appears to have been missed by the CDF assessors.

In relation to assurance and certitude: The CDF Commentary reads SC on assurance and certitude as if SC were open to the views on assurance and certitude condemned at Trent (p. 5, top). It is very clear that SC #11 rejects the understanding condemned by Trent that I must have certitude of my own salvation in order to be saved. The first sentence, "Christian assurance is not presumptuous" reflects the first sentence of Chapter 12 of the Decree on Justification (DS 805) which makes that point with regards to predestination. SC clearly states that this assurance is based on God's faithfulness and not on the measure of our response, and that Christians may never presume on their perseverance. The concerns of the CDF are not based on the text of SC, which expresses a sound and balanced doctrine on this point.

In relation to sola fides: The Comm is particularly difficult to understand where it appears to seek traces in SC of the doctrine of *sola fides* as it was condemned at Trent. It fails to recognize that the justifying faith which SC speaks of is a living faith "inseparable from love" (#10) and "inseparable from hope" (#11). On the one hand it admits that for Paul faith is the foundation and root of justification, but then implies that this role is subordinate, without explaining how something foundational can be subordinate. SC does state that baptism is the sacrament of faith (#12) and implies that it is the sacrament by

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bei Martin Luther und Thomas von Aquin (Mainz: Grünewald, 1967). A similar approach is taken in the dialogue between American Lutherans and Roman Catholics: cf. Anderson, T.A., Murphy, T.A., and Burgess, J.A. (editors), *Justification by Faith: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue: VII*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), pp. 49-52.

6. The last paragraph on page 2 of the Comm expresses the drift of SC succinctly and accurately. That God declares our acquittal implies ontological change because God's word is creative.

which justification is normally imparted (#16).⁷ Yet at this point the Comm appears to subordinate the reality of which the sacraments are efficacious signs to the efficacious signs themselves. Moreover it does not advert to God's ability to impart the transforming grace of justification apart from the normal sacramental means. In effect it appears to subordinate the gift of faith to the objective grace of justification imparted by baptism, as if that gift of faith -- remember that by faith SC means living faith which includes love and hope -- were distinct from the grace of justification imparted by baptism.

The Comm (bottom of page 4) asks for a reference to faith in the case of the baptism of children (presumably infants rather than children are meant here). In that case justification takes place with faith as a habitual gift but without faith as an explicit act. The gift of faith is no less foundational within the grace of baptism for the one incapable of a deliberate human act than it is for the adult.

In relation to the gratuity of salvation: SC in #14 alludes to the traditional Protestant fear that Catholic doctrine threatens the absolute gratuity of salvation. This allusion is part of the structure of the document, which mentions both Catholic and Protestant fears and considers both unjustified in terms of the newer understandings reached in recent scholarly and ecumenical dialogues. SC mentions that fear as a fact, but in order to show that it is not well-grounded. The reaction of the Comm (middle of page 5) is particularly sensitive on this point. The very mention of the Protestant position by SC seems for Obs to imply that the SC endorses it.

In relation to freedom and merit: The puzzlement of the CDF Commentary (p. 6) is itself puzzling, since it appears not to recognize the reliance of ARCIC-II on the theology of Augustine and his role as the common doctor of grace in the Western tradition. Augustine draws a clear distinction between the different forms of freedom, the *liberum arbitrium*, the foundational power of free choice which is not destroyed but weakened by sin, and the *libertas arbitrii*, the power to effectively say yes to God, which is taken away by sin and restored by grace.⁸ When SC speaks of a natural freedom to choose between alternatives, a freedom not taken away by sin and underlying our free response to God's grace (#19, second paragraph), and the freedom to do God's will, it is simply echoing the basic Augustinian distinction. SC uses the term "natural" for the freedom to choose between alternatives, and does not imply that this freedom is taken

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7. This is abundantly reflected in Article 27 of the *Thirty-Nine Articles*, and, what is more important for the adjudication of Anglican belief, in the formularies for the Sacrament of Baptism. What is expressed there is the ontological transformation which is imparted through the sacrament of baptism.
8. This distinction, and the supporting texts, are ably presented in M. Huftier, "Libre arbitre, liberté et péché chez S. Augustin", *Rech. Th. Anc. Méd.*, 33(1966), 187-281.

away by sin. This section of SC is not an attempt to paper over what the Comm sees as an unsatisfactory Anglican understanding of these matters but rather faithfully reflects the doctrine of Augustine and finds its meaning in that doctrine.

The point which Obs goes on to make about merit and indebtedness suggests another misunderstanding of SC. The point about not putting God in one's debt in SC #24 is a summary of what is developed in SC #23. If #23 is an overly extrinsic statement, as the Commentary asserts, so too is the scriptural passage about the unprofitable servant on which it is based. Indeed, SC #23 expresses a balanced doctrine of merit based on Augustine. Our free cooperation under grace is adequately expressed in SC: cf. the last paragraph of #19. Freedom does not entail that we can do good works "on our own or in a self-sufficient independence". It does entail that we ourselves do them in a fully human way, activating the freedom to choose between alternatives which is part of our natural endowment.⁹

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH AND SALVATION

It is not clear that for the CDF the above criticisms of SC would by themselves have sufficiently supported its judgement that SC fails to reach a substantial agreement between Anglicans and Catholics on salvation and the Church. It does seem clear that the deficiencies that the CDF claims to find in SC with regards to the sacramental and ecclesial dimensions of salvation do constitute their grounds for this judgement.¹⁰

The first point that must be made is that SC did not intend to offer a complete doctrine on the sacramental dimension of salvation. SC was elaborated in response to questions arising out of the 16th century disputes on justification, and it makes quite clear that on these questions nothing need keep us apart.

The CDF Commentary offers a clear summary of the agreement which Salvation and the Church arrived at in response to its mandate under the

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9. More important than the *Thirty Nine Articles* in determining Anglican belief are the liturgical formularies of the *Book of Common Prayer*. Many of the Sunday Collects are translations of Roman Collects of the time of Augustine, and in this way the basic Augustinian understanding is part of the *lex orandi* as well as the *lex credendi* of the Anglican communion. The Collect to be used in the last Sunday before Advent (The Sunday Next before Advent) admirably expresses the points SC makes in more technical language: "Stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people; that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may of thee be plenteously rewarded; through Jesus Christ our Lord."
 10. Cf. the Comm, page 8: "The Commission presents a rather vague conception of the Church which seems to lie at the base of all the difficulties which have been pointed out."

heading of "A Point Emphasized in the Document" (bottom of page 1 to the top of page 3). While SC did not consider the sacramental dimension to lie within its mandate, and thus does not develop it fully, it does make clear allusions to it as required in its text, with regards to baptism and eucharist which are organically linked with justification and sanctification, and with regards to penance. In this regard, the Comm missed a clear reference to the sacrament of penance in #22: "The Church is entrusted by the Lord with authority to pronounce forgiveness in his name to those who have fallen into sin and repent". The sacrament of penance is not reduced to optional "penitential disciplines": that term refers to the "practical amends for what has been done amiss" which is only one part of the sacrament of penance. Admittedly SC does not present a full doctrine of the sacrament of penance. Nonetheless SC recognized that this was an important cognate area and referred to it in an appropriate way. To presume that lack of full development on a point of doctrine hides some disagreement is unjustified. The same point can be made with respect to the Eucharist. The reference SC makes to the Eucharist (# 16), amounts to more than a "passing allusion". In brief and precise terms it lays out for us the structural relationship between baptism and eucharist in the context of God's work of justification and our response.¹¹

This perception by the CDF that the absence of a full treatment of the sacramental aspects of our salvation might vitiate the agreement achieved by SC is related to its concern for a proper doctrine of the Church as the sacrament of salvation. Is the Church simply a witness to a grace which it cannot efficaciously make present, or is it an authentic actualization of that grace (p. 10)? Is it nothing more than a community of those who are in constant need of repentance, or is it endowed in its inmost essence with a holiness it can communicate to human persons (p. 11)?

The language of efficacious actualization is not used by SC, but the reality is amply present: the Church embodies as well as reveals the redemptive power of the Gospel (#26); the once-for-all atoning work of Christ, is realized as well as experienced in the life of the Church (#27); in the Church the Gospel "becomes a manifest reality" (#28); the Church is used by God for the achievement of his purpose (#29). SC evidences a careful attempt to balance the noetic and the ontological aspects of God's work. Its language might not be that of scholastic theology, but the reality to which we agree is expressed quite adequately.

SC is careful to maintain yet another foundational equilibrium in its text. The Church not only is called to be but already is a sign, a steward, and an instrument of God's design (#29). Repentance and renewal are needed (the "not

11. Indeed one of the statements drawn up by ARCIC-I deals with Eucharistic Doctrine.

yet" aspect) so that the Church might more clearly be seen for what it "already now" is: the one, holy body of Christ (#29). The Church which in this world is always in need of renewal and purification (#30) is already here and now a foretaste of God's kingdom in a world still awaiting its consummation (#30).¹² What SC does at this point is carefully reflect the delicate balance between the holy Church and the Church of sinners, between the "already now" and the "not yet" aspects of God's kingdom, between God's action which we proclaim and celebrate and our own human action which is the constant object of paranesis.¹³ This balance was established by Paul and was reflected by Vatican II. The use of less familiar scriptural language should not lead to doubts about the reality which is affirmed.

Over and over again on the points we have examined the criticisms and suggestions made in the Obs and in the Comm are based upon what appears to be a misconstrual of the text. The point of SC is to establish a careful balance between possible excesses on both sides, and to express in succinct terms an understanding of our common tradition, one that does justice, especially on the basis of Augustine, to the positive contributions of both Trent and Reformers. One easily gathers, by contrast, that from the outset the Obs and the Comm seek to confirm an impression that what SC is really doing is to slide into Protestant excess under the guise of a balanced approach.

THE LANGUAGE OF SALVATION AND THE CHURCH

According to the Comm, SC fails to find sufficiently univocal formulations that can guarantee that Anglicans mean the same thing as Catholics when they agree to them. In sum, SC is insufficiently rigorous. Our comment on this point will be developed under three headings: 1) language and mystery, 2) dialogue and trust, and 3) plenitude and truth.

Language and Mystery: The broader issue of the role to be played by symbolic and analogical language has been dealt with before in the response of the Canadian dialogue to the CDF observations on the Final Report, and needs no lengthy elaboration here.¹⁴ The interesting point that emerges here is the lament in the Comm that

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12. "Foretaste" relates to the Pauline doctrine of our possessing here below not the fullness but the first-fruits, the down-payment of salvation.
 13. One might briefly refer at this point to the distinctive aspects of the Church found in *Lumen Gentium* 6 and in *Unitatis Redintegratio* 6, and to the sharp contrast between Paul's injunction to work out our salvation in fear in trembling with the triumphal ending of Romans 8.
 14. Cf. *One in Christ*, 20(1984), 257-284.

the symbolic nature of the language [of SC] makes difficult, if not impossible, a truly univocal agreement, where, as is the case here, questions are treated here which are decisive from the dogmatic point of view, and figure among the historically most controversial articles of faith... (p. 12)

This approach is not easy to square with the traditional theological view that statements about God and the things of God are not univocal but analogical. Mystery will never be exhausted by language. Language can point to it, can put us on the path to it, but will never allow us to control it through formulas that exclude ambiguity as if they comprehended the mystery in all its facets.

Analogy does not mean imprecision. The Ecumenical Councils strove with might and main to achieve clarity in the exposition of controverted areas of doctrine, but none of them achieved a clarity that rendered further interpretation and discussion unnecessary.¹⁵ When language is used to speak about mystery, only a continuing community of interpretation and dialogue guided by the Spirit will preserve and foster our path towards the fulness of truth. Issues will continue to arise, but they can be dealt with in the course of time. Substantial agreement does not mean that we have reached eschatological transparency but that in faith and in trust we are able to state that in our common quest for the truth a significant meeting of minds has taken place, a meeting of minds which to the extent that it has taken place situates us in a community of dialogue by which we can further test and clarify our agreement, and expand it to other areas. That dialogue requires patience as we struggle for each successive increment of clarity.

Dialogue and Trust: Just as the indispensable condition of progression towards the truth is dialogue, so too the indispensable condition of all dialogue is trust. Trust can be betrayed, but such betrayal will eventually come to light in the course of time, and the ensuing dialogue designed to restore trust can only be carried out under the renewed presumption of trust. Not to trust is to make all dialogue, all progression towards a common sharing of the truth impossible. The presupposition of all conversation between Christian partners is that others say what they really mean, and that indeed human minds can meet.¹⁶

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15. The centuries of continuing debate and conciliar clarification which followed the Council of Nicaea are an outstanding example of this. The Nicene Fathers tried to achieve a clear and definitive settlement, but the clarity they sought emerged only later, for instance on the implications of *homoousia*.
 16. This form of courtesy in dialogue relating to spiritual matters finds a classical expression in Ignatius Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* (# 22): "one must presuppose that all good Christians should be more ready to put a good interpretation on another's statement than to condemn it as false.

That partners in dialogue express agreement on some matter of substance does not imply that their substantial agreement comes out of identical perspectives and experiences. Each partner in the dialogue has a unique standpoint on reality, and this standpoint is especially operative in dealing with the realm of mystery. Hence the genuine agreement which results from a dialogue is always accompanied by different perspectives on the same truth. These perspectives can to some extent be articulated and brought to the light, thus generating more clarity about the truth that is sought, but their distinctiveness will never disappear. With patience and trust, genuine agreement can be forged, an agreement which is not simply lips repeating a prescribed formula -- by itself this would have little significance -- but which is the fruit of hearts and minds at one within Christ's body.¹⁷ The language of such agreements will be at once analogous, symbolic, and precise. In such language has the Church hammered out its definitions, not in a spirit of partisanship by which a set of precise theological formulations (considered orthodox by their proponents) are to supplant another set (considered heretical),¹⁸ but in a spirit which above all treasures that fragile space in which genuine dialogue between different perspectives and ever more fruitful articulation of the mystery are possible.¹⁹

The following question can help us apply this point to the issue at hand: Had SC simply reexpressed the decrees of the Council of Trent -- and the Comm seems to find fault with SC especially in its failure to re-echo the magis-

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17. Such agreement is the result of a process described at Vatican II: "At the same time, Catholic belief needs to be explained more profoundly and precisely, in ways and in terminology which our separated brethren too can readily understand." (*Unitatis Redintegratio* 11)
 18. This is a noteworthy aspect of the Council of Trent, which was very careful not to give primacy to one or other of the clearly delineated schools of theology current at that time in the Catholic Church. The result was a set of documents expressed in a language which was precise, yet very much impregnated with the symbolic and analogical ways of speaking found in Holy Scripture.
 19. Here one might allude to the helpful remarks made in the preface to the study edition of *Salvation and the Church*, London, Catholic Truth Society / Church House Publishing 1989, pp. 3 and 4: "...Human language is never wholly adequate to express the mysteries of God. Its range of meaning becomes even more narrow and limited in times of controversy when carefully defined terms are used to safeguard essential truths. Sadly these terms become the symbols of division. The policy explicitly adopted by ARCIC requires that vital truths be re-expressed in less 'loaded' language. Because of the absence of theological terms associated with particular traditions, the ecumenical expression of doctrinal agreement might appear to some to lack rigour and precision. In fact the partners in dialogue hammer out their language during long and often painful debate...the language of an *Agreed Statement* should be interpreted in the context of the joint theological discussion which has produced it." The upshot of this last statement is that the reliable way to interpret words and phrases in a document such as SC is to begin by referring to the context set by the document itself.

terial and theological formulations with which it is familiar -- would that have offered the CDF the guarantee that it seems to be looking for? It is just as easy to suspect dialogue partners of dissembling under the guise of formulas totally acceptable to the other partner as it is to suspect them of deliberately wishing to cover up disagreement on essential matters under the guise of a loosely worded agreement. If we are looking for an agreement which goes beyond the purely verbal and formal, we cannot bypass trust, dialogue, and the gradual unfolding of the truth within a human community which is essentially inserted in space and time; to do so would be akin to seeking salvation apart from the One who became incarnate, entered into the limitations of space and time, found fulfillment by becoming vulnerable unto death.²⁰

The CDF does point out cognate questions which emerge out of SC, and offers helpful points for further dialogue between Anglicans and Roman Catholics. If what we say about dialogue and trust is correct, the fact that there is an unfinished dialogue agenda beyond SC does not preclude a genuine substantial agreement on the matters examined by SC. Indeed it is precisely that agreement which will strengthen and authenticate the community of discourse between Anglicans and Roman Catholics and will facilitate our further dialogue towards full communion in the truth.

Still the way in which the text of SC has been read by CDF does raise some serious issues. Obviously CDF was operating out of its commitment to safeguard the integral Catholic tradition. Our experience in dialogue suggests that a genuine agreement which respects the tradition is more readily achieved in a atmosphere free of any hint of suspicion or polemics.

Plenitude and Truth: A leitmotif that runs throughout the Obs is that in many of the areas it deals with SC ought to have developed cognate points much more fully. For instance the CDF seems to suggest that unless there is substantial agreement on this or that additional point (e.g. the sacramental dimension of justification) the substantial agreement claimed by SC in each area is not trustworthy. The methodology of ARCIC, however, is that of dealing with issues one by one. That substantial agreement has not been reached on every issue relating to the petrine ministry, for instance, does not exclude substantial agreement on more precise and limited points relating to the role of authority within the Church. The strategy entailed here is one of establishing

20. A more pointed parallel in the life of Christ may be found in the temptations in the desert. In sum, the temptations urged Jesus to take the short-cuts which would win the superficial acclaim of the multitudes, playing on their short-sighted expectations of liberation, impressing them with magical deeds. The messianic path to which Jesus committed himself was that of gaining the deep adherence of faith of a few by taking the risks inherent in any personal dialogue and accepting the full consequences of this vulnerability. The contrast here is between the mere repetition of a formula and the personal appropriation of a truth.

beachheads of shared agreement. If we have achieved breakthroughs in certain precise areas of controverted doctrine, and as a result have established a genuine community of dialogue, then the resolution of thornier and more difficult issues becomes more feasible.

The CDF approach is less clear. Pushed to its logical limits, a refusal in each instance to recognize substantial agreement because there are unresolved issues in cognate areas would imply that we will never have substantial agreement on any doctrine unless there is substantial agreement on every doctrine. To come to the precise point at hand, the CDF seems to want SC to deal explicitly with a broad range of ecclesiological and sacramental issues, whereas the authors of SC, in response to their mandate, have dealt with the precise issue of salvation and of the role of the Church within it, entrusting unresolved cognate issues to further dialogue and further agreed statements. Indeed the major work of ARCIC-II on the mystery of the Church is a task that lies ahead of it, not behind it. To know that the work of SC in the precise frame of reference in which it was conceived is recognized as sound by both Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches is to give a solid impetus to the work that lies ahead. We wish to avoid the extremes of gullibility and suspicion. We advocate a middle ground, that of a trust which is realistic, alert to difficulties along the way, able to deal with them constructively, a trust that flows from the love which Paul so eloquently praises in I Corinthians 13.

This point can be put in still broader terms. The Pauline "now through a glass darkly, then face to face" applies to all Christians without exception, including those who have official teaching functions in our different Churches. We cannot demand of ourselves or of others a total state of cognitive transparency before God which is impossible to achieve in our condition of "not yet". As pilgrims we do receive from time to time intimations of the truth we do not yet see. Moments of agreement such as those achieved by the dialogue partners who produced the statement *Salvation and the Church* are evidences of the "already now" present in our midst. We should celebrate them and make use of the opportunities they afford us.