

## The Call of God to the Church.

The Church of Scotland commissioned the Theological Forum to present its findings on the Call of God to the Church at the General Assembly which is taking place this week. The document promotes what we would call **Incarnational Theology** which means that salvation is through the coming of Christ into the world as the image of God who will restore His image in mankind. Therefore, salvation comes by the restoration of the divine image and not through the death of Christ on the Cross.

The Church's position, therefore, is of universal salvation where at the end of the day, everyone is saved. The death of Christ on the Cross as the means of our salvation through Him dying in our place, is dropped. Sin, which is the dire enemy of God does not appear in this document.

If we go back to AD 325, the Nicene Creed was developed following from the Council of Nicaea which was called to deal with a heretic called Arius who taught that Christ was not God and was just a man. He was condemned as a heretic at this Council, with Athanasius leading the charges against him. Athanasius himself had an incarnational view of salvation but recognised that corruption (sin) in mankind had to include the Cross and the death of Christ to address the problem. Athanasius was considered a hero at the time.

The proposed Church of Scotland documents also deal with all people being restored through Jesus coming bodily into the world. But in this document, there is **no Cross, no Gethsemane, no betrayal by Judas, no death of Christ, no passion, no atonement, no Easter, no suffering, no judgment and apparently, no resurrection.** The Lord's Supper, therefore, is robbed of its purpose and significance which is to remember His death until He comes.

To be clear, in the Church document salvation, in contradiction to the Westminster confession, is not by the death of Christ on the Cross in our place, but by the restoring of the image of God in all mankind. As we stated above, Athanasius saw that this corruption (sin) continued and so included the cross as the means of dealing with it. Athanasius lived in the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

### The Call of the Church to Mission

There are inestimable weaknesses in the proposed document of the Theological Forum, which follows incarnational theology, for it also holds to belief in universal salvation. This means that everyone is saved, and no one is lost. This is unbiblical.

Although we see these weaknesses, we also see a good argument in the document for the call of the Church to Mission. The Church proposes joining mission with ministry. This is closer to the biblical pattern where the Early Church was sent out on mission. It was a missional church, as all churches should be.

The call to become a member of the church community ought to be grounded in the call to repent, as we see from John the Baptist who called Jews from the synagogue to repent and be baptised. The document omits the necessity for repentance. However, it does rightly state: "We did not choose Christ. He chose us and appointed us to go and produce fruit. (3.2.7). This new birth from above enables us to enter the Kingdom of God. New converts then are chosen by God. Indeed, the whole movement is of the Spirit of God and not by people. Converts have the purpose according to the document to **become like Christ.** This is more often termed "sanctification" in theological terms. Paul says that we must "die to self and live to Christ "

**Becoming like Christ is excellent**, but Athanasius found that human beings, even those who knew and loved Him were still corrupt. The corruption of the old human nature remained and had to be dealt with. 3.4.6 states: “If the Church is called to become like Jesus, then it is called to worship, love, serve, and witness. (3.4.7) It should not be thought that the church does this by itself or in its own strength”. As the Westminster Confession of Faith says, He continues to minister as prophet, priest, and king. This work will continue until the world is fully restored. (I have to say here that, the world will not be fully restored. It will be destroyed by conflagration and then there will be a new heaven and a new earth).

**Mission means sending.** “*Missio dei*” is the sending of God 3.5. We are partners with God in Mission and as we stated earlier, the document joins mission and ministry together as one. I believe that this is right and that the essential task of the church is mission. The disciples were sent out from Jerusalem by the Spirit. The church met in “the court of the Gentiles” in the Jewish temple. They had to wait there until the Spirit came.

The Mission is primarily Jesus’ mission - He is *the sent one*. True members of the Church are sent by Jesus on God’s mission to the world. In this respect Paul was determined to preach the cross (Christ’s death) 1 Cor 2:2. He termed himself the chief of sinners. Paul is the great missionary to the Gentiles, which the church mostly consists of. Paul found corruption in the young Church and wrote dealing with it.

We may consider Luther’s maxim that the Church is two-fold; visible and invisible. The visible church includes both believers and unbelievers (true and false members), but the invisible church includes only believers, “born from above”. Remaining corruption lies with the world and includes the visible church. Not everyone believes and remains in Christ. They don’t abide in the Church even if they register to do so. Or they remain whilst unbelieving in their hearts. The Theological Forum rightly talks negatively of those who are registered but don’t attend church life. They are not real members.

**We have the reality** of those who believe and those who will not believe. Even in the church there are false members. The secular society of today often mocks the church and they use Christ’s name as a swear word. The document proclaims that all will enter the kingdom of God, but this is not found in the bible. A question is raised, however; how such a secular influenced church can abide in dynamic mission if they do not listen to the Apostle Paul and deny the Word of God, the Holy Bible.

Another great weakness of the Theological Forum’s paper is what happens to the false members and unbelievers? John chapter 3 states that they are condemned already. They cannot receive salvation.

In conclusion, the central theme of salvation through the death of Christ on the Cross has been omitted by the Theological Forum – a deathly silence on the critical doctrine of atonement. As stated above, the incarnation alone does not bring salvation. If we are saved by the life of Christ and not the death, then this is in direct conflict with the Westminster Confession of Faith and renders the call of the Church impotent.

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