

# DOMINUS JESUS

## Introduction

The declaration of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on Our Lord Jesus Christ is very timely and necessary, especially in the context of some of the new ways of presentation of our Savior in certain circles. The declaration is presenting the continuous and traditional teaching of the Catholic Church from the beginning. On the occasion of the Great jubilee of our Lord, it is pertinent to assert what we believe and what we have to tell others about Jesus Christ our Lord. We endorse it, appreciate its content and hold fast to its teaching as of paramount importance.

The document has an introduction, six sections, a conclusion and endnotes. It is rich in citing from the documents of Vatican II and from the recent teachings of the Magisterium. In the introduction it states why such a declaration has become necessary. It mentions certain relativistic theories, regarding certain fundamental doctrines of Catholic faith, which can endanger the missionary mandate of the Catholic Church (no.4). It mentions a few relativistic theories on the following dogmas: the definitive and complete character of the revelation of Jesus Christ, the nature of Christian faith as compared with that of the belief in other religions, the inspired nature of the books of Sacred Scripture, the personal unity between the Eternal Word and Jesus of Nazareth, the unity of the economy of the Incarnate Word and the Holy Spirit, the unicity and salvific universality of the mystery of Jesus Christ, the universal salvific mediation of the Church, the inseparability of the kingdom of God, the kingdom of Christ and the Church, and the subsistence of the one Church of Christ in the Catholic Church.(4). It appears to the Magisterium that these doctrines are not clearly and fully presented in certain circles of inter religious dialogues.

The document is quite aware of the concern of those engaged in inter-religious dialogues and their preoccupations. Especially in the multi-religious context of Asiatic countries, there is real earnestness from the part of many to present Christ in a way understandable to those of the other religions. It may be true that some of their opinions or even assertions can give the impression of diluting the salvific message and its uniqueness. But after reiterating the constant teaching of the Church, the Magisterium encourages the theologians to continue their difficult task: After quoting from the Second Vatican Document, *Ad Gentes*.7 (the salvific grace of God comes to individual non Christians in ways known to God alone) the document says, “Theologians are seeking to understand this question more fully. Their work is to be encouraged, since it is certainly useful for understanding better God’s salvific plan and the ways in which it is accomplished”(21). In the multi-religious context of some countries there exists a tension, and the concerns of the Magisterium is really understandable. It is a document of the Church to the theologians of the Church, as a guideline for their teaching and inter-religious dialogues.

### **1.Jeus Christ –the full and definitive revelation of God:**

God was speaking in several ways through the Prophets and others to humanity down through the centuries. He spoke in a special way to the Hebrew population. He was speaking to all. But at the end He spoke once and for all, in a definitive way and fully through His only Begotten Son, the Word of God. In Him we have the full revelation of divine truth. “Jesus perfected revelation by fulfilling it through his whole work of making himself present and manifesting himself...Hence we do not await another revelation of God before His glorious coming. We do not know of another dispensation or covenant. Unlike the Old Covenant, this will not pass away”(5). The document makes the clear distinction between the Christian faith as a gift of God and as a theological virtue infused by God, and the belief

in other religions. “Belief in other religions is that sum of experience and thought that constitutes the human treasury of wisdom and religious aspiration, which man has conceived”. People in the other religions are still searching for the Absolute Truth.

Quoting from the texts of the Second Vatican Council the document speaks of the relevance of the sacred texts of the non-Christian religions. It does not say that they are altogether useless, or their rituals and observances have no value in regard to their salvation. The Catholic Church does not preach exclusiveness. It says on the contrary: “Certainly it must be recognized that there are some elements in these texts which may be de facto instruments by which countless people throughout the centuries have been and still are able today to nourish and maintain their life-relationship with God. They often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men...God makes Himself present in many ways, not only to individuals but also entire peoples, through their spiritual riches. But these sacred texts receive their elements of goodness and grace from the mystery of Christ”(8). These texts are mixed up with errors, gaps and insufficiencies. Still they help the followers to their path of Salvation, because of their relationship with Christ the Supreme Goodness.

## **2.The Incarnate Word and the Holy Spirit in the Work of Salvation:**

The second section deals with the Working of the Word and the Holy Spirit in the salvation of mankind. It reiterates the teaching of the Church that all the activities of God outside the Trinity are common to the three Divine Persons. There is no separate and independent working of the Father and the Son and Holy Spirit. All the operations are the operations of the Triune God. The document says: “The doctrine of faith regarding the unicity of the salvific economy willed by the One and Triune God must be firmly believed”(11). One cannot separate the Working of the Holy Spirit from the working of the Word Incarnate.

The Word and the Spirit cannot be confined to the boundaries. Their working is one but it comprises the whole humanity and one cannot say that there is one salvation plan for those who are inside the visible boundaries of the church and another for those outside the church. The Son and the Spirit are transforming the whole creation to its final consummation. And the Son operates as Incarnate Logos. One cannot legitimately make a distinction between the Word as such and the Incarnate Word (1). There is only one Word of God and He is the Incarnate Word. Word of God operates as the Word becoming man, and in reality through His Church, His body. So the economy of the Word Incarnate is valid also for those outside the Church and visibly unrelated to her. Theologians are to explore the ways in which this operates. Hence Jesus cannot be considered as one among the mediators. He is not one of the revelators of God's will. He is not a complementary figure. The Church teaches that He is Absolute, the Ultimate Mystery of God. He who was beyond history entered into history, the Infinite entered into finitude. He reveals the divine in an exclusive way. He, indeed, perfects the human aspirations. Jesus of Nazareth is not one of the faces of the Logos. He is the Perfect Image of the Invisible Father, the Love Incarnate in an exclusive way (no.9). "The salvific action of Jesus Christ with and through His Spirit, extends beyond the visible boundaries of the Church to all humanity". The divine action extends "for all men of good will in whose hearts grace is active invisibly...Holy Spirit offers to all, the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery of our Lord Jesus Christ"(12). Jesus Christ associates the believer to himself in a living manner in the Church, and others through the Church in a manner not clearly known to us. It is therefore our task to explore the ways in which this is done. We must take into serious consideration the symbolism in the other religions, their rituals and their means of sanctification. One should discuss whether their means of sanctification which the Word in the Spirit offers to them in the

Church according to the one and unique economy of salvation, through ways known to God alone is purely of human origin and the making up of human genius. They have to be clarified in theological circles.

### **3.Unicity and Universality of the Salvific Mystery of Jesus Christ:**

The third section asserts with clarity that, “the truth of Jesus Christ, Son of God, Lord and only Savior, who through the event of his incarnation, death and resurrection has brought the history of salvation to fulfillment, and which has in him its fullness and center, must be firmly believed as a constant element of the Church’s faith”(13). Furthermore it asserts also that, “the universal salvific will of the One and Triune God is offered and accomplished once and for all in the mystery of the incarnation, death ad resurrection of the Son of God”(No.14). Jesus Christ has significance and a value for the human race and its history.

After asserting the Catholic Faith this section turns to the other religions and it is very important that the other religions are taken seriously and their value is in no way minimized: “Theology today, in its reflection on the existence of other religious experiences and on their meaning in God’s salvific plan, is invited to explore if and in what way the historical figures and positive elements of these religions may fall within the divine plan of salvation. In this undertaking theological research has vast field of work under the guidance of the Church’s Magisterium.” Then the document quotes from *Lumen Gentium*, which speaks of the importance of other mediators, the leaders of other religions: “the manifold cooperation which is but a participation in the one source.”(LG.62). “The content of this participated mediation should be explored more deeply”(No.14). The Church recognizes the place of the participated forms of mediation.

#### **4. Unicity and unity of the Church**

Church as the body of Christ is single and unique. The unicity and the universality of the salvific mediation of Jesus Christ lead to the unicity of the Church. The body of Christ subsists fully in the Catholic Church. The separated churches and ecclesial communities receive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church. The separated eastern churches which are not even in full canonical communion with the Successor of St. Peter in Rome remain all the same united to her by means of the closest bonds. The Church of Christ is present and operative also in these churches. The document quotes extensively from the documents of Vatican II. The church continues its distinction between the ancient eastern Churches and the ecclesial communities separated during the 16<sup>th</sup> century from the Western Church.

#### **5. The Church: Kingdom of God and Kingdom of Christ:**

In this section the document explains the relationship of the church with the kingdom. The Church is the sign and instrument of the kingdom. She is called to announce and establish the kingdom. She is the kingdom of Christ already present in mystery and constitutes its seed and beginning. The kingdom has also an eschatological dimension (18). The document quotes from *Lumen Gentium* and tries to clarify the relationship of the kingdom with the church. “Building the kingdom means working for liberation from evil in all its forms. Kingdom of God is the manifestation and the realization of God’s plan of salvation in all its fullness (19). The document warns against excessive one-sided view of the Kingdom.

#### **6. The Church and the other Religions in relation to Salvation:**

It asserts the faith that “the one Christ is the mediator and the way of salvation; he is present to us in his body which is the Church. So the pilgrim church on earth is necessary for salvation”(20). Since the

Church is the universal sacrament of salvation, in a mysterious way, every human being is related to this one Church of Christ. Therefore those who are not formally and visibly members of the church also receive salvation in Christ by virtue of a grace. The text quotes from the Second Vatican documents and says that the various religious traditions contain elements that come from God and which is part of what the spirit brings about in human hearts and in the history of peoples in cultures and religions. In other words, they are not purely of human origin. It further says that they have a preparatory value: “preparation for the Gospel, in that they are occasions for pedagogical helps in which the human heart is prepared to be open to the action of God. Finally the document says, “God wills the salvation of everyone through the knowledge of the truth. Salvation is found in the truth. Those who obey the promptings of the Spirit of truth are already in the way of salvation.”(22).

### **Conclusion**

The document demands serious study, especially in those countries where there are multi-religious context. All, especially the Indian theologians and professors, have a very serious obligation to go very deep into the values of the other religious traditions in India and see how far the Incarnate Word is preparing the individuals and groups through these religious traditions to His Kingdom for the glory of the Father. The other religions also have an obligation to examine their rituals and traditions and see their salvific value and enter into fruitful dialogue with Christianity.