

si si no no

"But let your speech be, 'Yes, yes,' 'No, no,' and whenever it beyond these comes from the evil one. (Mt. 5:37)"

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Dominus Jesus The Religions

Fr. Johannes Dörmann

The Declaration *Dominus Jesus* [hereafter *DJ*] published on August 6, 2000, by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith was particularly connected with the Pope and the Holy Year, as Cardinal Ratzinger has pointed out:

The Pope has followed every stage of the development of this Declaration with great attention, desiring to mark the culmination of the Holy Year with a great, solemn profession of faith in the Lordship of Jesus Christ; in doing so he wished to focus on what is essential and avoid the trivializing of issues which so often accompanies such events. (*Die Tagespost*, Sept. 22, 2000, p.51)

We can be certain, therefore, that *DJ* is the mindset of the Pope and his ecumenical theology.

Conservatives have warmly welcomed this resolute and entirely "inopportune" proclamation of the absolute claim of Jesus Christ and the Catholic Church, while enthusiasts for ecumenism have for the most part decisively and indignantly rejected it. The traditional claim to the uniqueness and universality of Christ and the Catholic Church, which are thus exalted far above all other religions and denominations, is felt to be arrogant, pre-Conciliar and antiquated.

In fact, the document is noteworthy for its calm and objective style, and for its perceptive rejection of those theologies which arose in connection with inter-religious and interdenominational dialogue, and which present a danger to the Faith. But what of the argument that the publication shows an insensitivity in the matter of timing?

Coming as it did at a time when a very lively process of ecumenical *rapprochement* was going on, *DJ* causes us to ask what moved Rome to make such a clarification at this particular time? The answer comes from the document itself: it is the devastating consequences of this dialogue to the life of the Church. *DJ* explicitly deals with these consequences. The destruction wrought by post-Conciliar ecumenism in theology and the Church's life has given Rome a shock. The Church's leadership has been forced to put a brake on wayward tendencies so that the desired ecumenical dialogue can still continue though within the framework of *DJ*.

Unmentioned in the document, however, is that Rome itself, in the wake of the last Council, set the example by initiating and promoting the very ecumenical *dialogue* whose destructive influence on Faith it now deplores. Not only did Rome do all it could to promote dialogue with all religions and denominations, it actually laid the foundation for inter-religious *prayer and worship*. *DJ*, however, contains no "*mea culpa*" for Rome's own contribution to the devastating consequences of ecumenism.

Regarding the Introduction

The Introduction to *DJ* announces its various themes and presents its outline (*DJ* §1).

DJ is a *missionary* document. It begins with Christ's missionary command: "Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mk. 16:15-16).

Christ's missionary command to the disciples is reproduced in the Church's universal mission, which is realized out to our own day "in the proclamation of the mystery of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and the mystery of the incarnation of the Son, as saving event for all humanity" (*DJ* §1). In this way *DJ* starts out by reviewing the Incarnation and the Trinity. Then follows the text of the Creed of Constantinople (which lacks the "*Filioque*") and an insistence that the unabridged totality of the Catholic Faith must also be the content of the Church's missionary preaching.

Since, to date, the Church's mission is far from completion, *DJ* devotes special attention to the Church's missionary task, "above all in connection with the religious traditions of the world" (*DJ* §2). It follows that the relationship of Christ and the Catholic Church to these "religious traditions" is the main theme of *DJ*. We see how the Congregation for the Faith understands and wishes to present this relationship in the following passage, which, in virtue of its importance for the whole *DJ*, is given in full (*DJ* §2):

In considering the values which these religions witness to and offer humanity, with an open and positive approach, the Second Vatican Council's Declaration on the relation of the Church to non-Christian religions states: "The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and teachings, which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men" (*Nostra Aetate* [NA] §2). Continuing in this line of thought, the Church's proclamation of Jesus Christ, "the way, the truth, and the life" (Jn. 14:6), today also makes use of the practice of inter-religious dialogue. Such dialogue certainly does not replace, but rather accompanies the "*missio ad gentes*" directed toward that "mystery of unity," from which "it follows that all men and women who are saved share, though differently, in the same mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ through his Spirit" (*Dialogue and Proclamation* §29:AAS 84 (1992) 414-446; *Gaudium et Spes* §22).

In other words, the Congregation for the Faith's Declaration is dealing with the same topic as *NA*, i.e., the relationship between the Church and the non-Christian religions. Here, the Congregation for the Faith resolutely declares the absolute claims of Christ and the Church, but at the same time adopts an "open and positive" view of the other religions in its fostering of inter-religious dialogue. The latter is distinguished from the Church's specific mission, which is the mission to the nations, which aims at conversion in the traditional sense (cf. *DJ* §22). Inter-religious dialogue, however, does not aim directly at conversion but at the positive evaluation of the elements of truth in the other religions and so leads to "an attitude of understanding and a relationship of mutual knowledge and reciprocal enrichment, in obedience to the truth and with respect for freedom" (*DJ* §2).

A dialogue that is only concerned with "positive evaluation of elements of truth" and avoids dealing with elements of contradiction is grasping only half of the situation and is deceptively one-sided. What *DJ* says, however, is that dialogue does not replace *missio*, but accompanies it. This parallel thrust has its dogmatic roots in the *mystery of unity*, which must be understood as the unity of God's saving work in Jesus Christ for all mankind.

The "mystery of unity" is the basic theological principle of all of *DJ* and the key to understanding it. An absolute claim is made for this "mystery of unity," not (as in tradition) in an exclusive sense [i.e., excluding sects, schismatics, and non-Christians from the *Church-Ed.*] but—and this is what is new—in an "open and positive," that is, inclusive and integrating sense, so that now *all*, though in different degrees, have a share in the absolute mystery of unity. As *DJ* often says, this mystery embraces all mankind and includes not only all men, but also all religions. So it can say that "all men and women who are saved share, though differently, in the same mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ through his Spirit" (*DJ* §2). The formulation is ambiguous. "All men and women who are saved" can quite easily be understood in the sense of universal redemption, as if salvation were guaranteed to all "anonymously," without the need to convert to Catholicism; this is one of the most pernicious errors of the "New Theology-*Ed.*].

DJ does not set out to explain the uniqueness and salvific universality of Christ and the Church in an organic way, but insists on those truths of the Faith which are endangered by erroneous theological theories (*DJ* §3). The whole array of these inalienable and yet endangered truths of the Faith is included in the Introduction. The six chapters of the encyclical (of which I treat in the subtitles ahead) treat them fully alongside the erroneous theologies which are in conflict with them. First we will reproduce the brief summary of the endangered truths of faith (*DJ* §4): Erroneous are relativistic theories which seek to justify religious pluralism, not only *de facto* but also *de jure (or in principle)*. As a consequence, it is held that certain truths have been superseded, for example, the definitive and complete character of the revelation of Jesus Christ, the nature of Christian belief as compared with that of 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 unity and salvific universality of the mystery of Jesus Christ, the universal salvific mediation of the Church, the inseparability—while recognizing the distinction—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.

DJ also gives a brief mention of the "roots" of these ideas, which "hinder the understanding and acceptance of the revealed truth" (*DJ* §4). These roots are philosophical and theological:

...the conviction of the elusiveness and inexpressibility of divine truth, even by Christian revelation; relativistic attitudes toward truth itself, according to which what is true for some would not be true for others; the radical opposition posited between the logical mentality of the West and the symbolic mentality of the East; the subjectivism which, by regarding reason as the only source of knowledge, becomes incapable of raising its "gaze to the heights, not daring to rise to the truth of being"; the difficulty in understanding and accepting the presence of definitive and eschatological events in history; the metaphysical emptying of the historical incarnation of the Eternal *Logos*, reduced to a mere appearing of God in history; the eclecticism of those who, in theological research, uncritically absorb ideas from a variety of philosophical and theological contexts without regard for consistency, systematic connection, or compatibility with Christian truth; finally, the tendency to read and to interpret Sacred Scripture outside the Tradition and Magisterium of the Church.

I propose to isolate *DJ*'s theological core and answer the following question: How is the relationship of Christ and the Catholic Church to the other religions and denominations to be understood as both absolute and yet "open and positive" and what kind of consistent theological view of *DJ* flows from the "mystery of unity"?

I. The Fullness and Definitive Nature of the Revelation of Jesus Christ

DJ begins with the principles of theological knowledge, with *revelation and faith*, and compares them, in this context, with the other religions. Using many quotations from Scripture, Council texts, and the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* [RM], *DJ* affirms the traditional truth of the definitive and complete nature of the revelation of Jesus Christ (*DJ* §5). The deepest layer of this truth of faith is the fact that God Himself has become man in Jesus Christ. It concludes that nothing the other religions say about salvation can be put on the same level as this, nor can they be regarded as *complementary* to Christianity (*DJ* §6).

Man's response to God's final and complete revelation in Jesus Christ is the obedience of faith, a grace-given assent to the God who reveals Himself and to the truth He has revealed (*DJ* §7). In the other religions this "theological faith" is replaced by "inner conviction." The latter is defined (*DJ* §7) as "that sum of experience and thought that constitutes the human treasury of wisdom and religious aspiration, which man in his search for truth has conceived and acted upon in his relationship to God and the Absolute" (*DJ* §7). Compared with theological faith, the "inner conviction" found in other religions [this is a purely subjective conviction that is not founded on revealed truth-*Ed.*] is imperfect; it is "still searching" for the absolute truth and it lacks the "assent to [the] God who reveals himself."

The Declaration goes on to contrast the Holy Scriptures of Christianity with the holy writings of other religions (*DJ* §8). The canonical books of the Old and New Testaments are inspired scriptures. They "firmly, faithfully, and without error, teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the Sacred Scriptures" (*Dei Verbum* §11). This is the notorious passage of *Dei Verbum* which is contested because of the ambiguous and unnecessary phrase "for the sake of our salvation-*Ed.*]. On the contrary, the holy writings of the other religions are not inspired at all, although one can find in them many elements which are "*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" (*DJ* §8).

DJ concludes by saying why and how God makes Himself present not only to individuals, but also in the non-Christian religions and their holy books:

Nevertheless, God, who desires to call all peoples to himself in Christ and to communicate to them the fullness of his revelation and love, "does not fail to make himself present in many ways, not only to individuals, but also to entire peoples through their spiritual riches, of which their religions are the main and essential expression even when they contain 'gaps, insufficiencies and errors'" (*RM* §6). Therefore, the sacred books of other religions, which in actual fact direct and nourish the existence of their followers, receive from the mystery of Christ the elements of goodness and grace which they contain (*DJ* §8).

From what *DJ* says, given that God is present not only in the individual but also in the spirituality of the non-Christian religions, and that the latter possess many elements that come from the mystery of Christ, enabling non-Christians-now as in the past to nourish and maintain their religious life-relationship with the Triune God, it follows that the non-Christian religions, even if only in an imperfect manner, are genuine paths of salvation leading to God. In fact they can most definitely be termed "anonymous Christianity."

In *DJ*, the full and definitive nature of the revelation of Jesus Christ is indeed absolute, but in a sense which does not exclude, but rather includes, the other religions. On the basis of the all-embracing, absolute "mystery of unity" in Christ, all men and religions, by participating in this mystery, also share in the elements of grace that lead to salvation.

II. The Incarnate Logos and the Holy Spirit in the Work of Salvation

The second chapter of *DJ* (*DJ* §§9-12) begins by opposing those theological opinions which see Jesus of Nazareth as "complementary with other revelatory and salvific figures." To substantiate the universality of the Christian salvation and religious pluralism, erroneous theologians distinguish between a more universal economy of salvation of the Eternal Word which takes effect even outside the Church and without any relationship to her, and an economy of salvation of the Incarnate Word which is limited to Christians (*DJ* §9). Basing itself on Scripture, the Councils of Nicaea and of Chalcedon, Vatican II and of Pope John Paul II, *DJ* stresses the traditional truth of the personal union between the Eternal Word and Jesus of Nazareth. From this personal union flows, naturally, the unity of the one, all-embracing, divine economy of salvation in Christ (*DJ* §10).

However, the text of *Gaudium et Spes* (§22), quoted in support of the Declaration, does not teach that Catholic doctrine. The text is quoted as follows (*DJ* §10):

...the Second Vatican Council states that Christ "the new Adam...image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15) is himself the perfect man who has restored that likeness to God in the children of Adam which had been disfigured since the first sin ...

According to the Church's teaching, Adam's supernatural likeness to God was not only disfigured by original sin, it was forfeited for all Adam's descendants. If this likeness to God was not forfeited but only disfigured, mankind would still exhibit this likeness to God even after the original sin, albeit in a defective manner. This, however, is not Catholic teaching but a particular form of the heterodox theory of universal pardon, according to which grace is given "a priori" to all men.

Next, *DJ* relates the perfect revelation of the *Logos* (who became man for the salvation of all men) to the spiritual treasures of the nations, found primarily in their religions (*DJ* §10):

In the process of discovering and appreciating the manifold gifts—especially the spiritual treasures—that God has bestowed on every people, we cannot separate those gifts from Jesus Christ, who is at the center of God's plan of salvation (*RM* §6).

Since, in the Declaration, the spiritual treasures of the religions are identified as "*semina Verbi*," [literally, "seeds of the Word"] it follows that they cannot be separated from Christ.

Christ's central position, which is inseparably linked with the Holy Spirit, has further consequences for the relation with the non-Christian religions. These are drawn out in § 12 of *DJ*. The starting point here is what the theologians propose as "the hypothesis of an economy of the Holy Spirit with a more universal breadth than that of the Incarnate Word, crucified and risen" (*DJ* §12). The response of *DJ* is the following:

This position also is contrary to the Catholic faith, which, on the contrary, considers the salvific incarnation of the Word as a Trinitarian event. In the New Testament, the mystery of Jesus, the Incarnate Word, constitutes the place of the Holy Spirit's presence as well as the principle of the Spirit's effusion on humanity, not only in Messianic times (cf. Acts 2:32-36; Jn. 7:39, 20:22; 1 Cor. 15:45), but also prior to his coming in history (cf. 1 Cor. 10:4; 1 Pet. 1:10-12).

While *DJ* rightly rejects the hypothesis of a universal economy of salvation of the Holy Spirit, it puts forward the view that the Holy Spirit is sent forth upon all of *mankind*. The Scripture adduces in no way justifies that the Holy Spirit has been sent upon mankind since the beginning of history. The farewell discourse of Jesus in the Gospel of John shows that Christ promised to send the Holy Spirit only to His disciples and the Church. He did not send the Holy Spirit to the world or to mankind as a whole, which, insofar as it does not believe, could not and cannot receive this Holy Spirit. As a result of the intimate bond between the mystery of Christ and the mystery of the Holy Spirit, *DJ* deduces a twofold salvific operation of Christ with and through the Holy Spirit in the Father's plan of salvation (*DJ* §12): *1)* The entire work of building the Church through its Head, Jesus Christ, in fellowship with the Holy Spirit down the centuries; *2)* The salvific work of Jesus Christ with and through the Holy Spirit beyond the visible borders of the Church.

This second work gives all men of goodwill the same life of grace that those who believe in Christ already possess (*DJ* §12). *DJ* sums up its view of the collaboration of Christ and the Holy Spirit in the work of salvation as follows (*DJ* §12):

Hence, the connection is clear between the salvific mystery of the Incarnate Word and that of the Spirit, who actualizes the salvific efficacy of the Son made man in the lives of all people, called by God to a single goal, the both of whom historically preceded the Word made man, and those who live after his coming in history: the Spirit of the Father, bestowed abundantly by the Son, is the animator of all (cf. Jn. 3:34).

This text of *DJ* fixes the idea that all men experience the Holy Spirit's operation. This can be understood, all too easily, in the sense of universal redemption. This is not all, however. The Declaration sees the Holy Spirit's salvific work not only in individual human beings, but also in the religions. It affirms this by the words of Pope John Paul II (*DJ* §12):

The Spirit's presence and activity affect not only individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions... The Risen Christ "is now at work in human hearts through the strength of his Spirit"... Again, it is the Spirit who sows the "seeds of the word" present in various customs and cultures... (*RM* §§28-29).

It is therefore one and the same Spirit who was operative in the Incarnation and is at work in the Church and the other religions for the salvation of all men and in relation to Christ (*DJ* §12):

Whatever the Spirit brings about in human hearts and in the history of peoples, in cultures and religions, serves as a preparation for the Gospel and can only be understood in reference to Christ, the Word who took flesh by the power of the Spirit "so that as perfectly human he would save all human beings and sum up all things" (*RM*, §29).

The Declaration sums this up as follows (*DJ* §12):

In conclusion, the action of the Spirit is not outside or parallel to the action of Christ. There is only one salvific economy of the One and Triune God, realized in the mystery of the incarnation, death, and resurrection of the Son of God, actualized with the cooperation of the Holy Spirit, and extended in its salvific value to all humanity and to the entire universe: "No one, therefore, can enter into communion with God except through Christ, by the working of the Holy Spirit" (*RM* §5).

In criticism of this section the following must be said: it is true that there is only one, single economy of salvation of the Triune God which is founded on the mystery of Christ and the Holy Spirit; but according to Scripture the Holy Spirit was not poured out upon all mankind, nor is the Holy Spirit present in all religions, which [allegedly] lead to Christ and to God.

III. The Saving Mystery of Jesus Christ Is One and Universal

The unity and salvific universality of the mystery of Christ is a permanent element of the Church's deposit of faith, as the Declaration recalls (*DJ* §13). It is firmly to be believed that

Jesus Christ, Son of God, [is] Lord and only Savior, who through the event of his incarnation, death, and resurrection has brought to fulfillment the history of salvation which has in him its fullness and center.

DJ supports this article of faith with many passages from the New Testament and goes on to point out that "the universal salvific will of the One and Triune God is offered and accomplished once for all in the mystery of the incarnation, death, and resurrection of the Son of God" (*DJ* §14). What is astonishing is that *DJ*, having set forth the truth of the faith that God wills the salvation of all men invites theology to "explore if and in what way the historical figures and positive elements of these religions may fall within the divine plan of salvation" (*DJ* §14). It is asserted that Vatican II set the course for such exploration by saying that "...the unique mediation of the Redeemer does not exclude but rather gives rise to a manifold cooperation which is not a sharing in this one source" (*Lumen Historiarum* [LGH] §62). Pope John Paul II also expressed the same idea in *RM* (§5):

Although participated forms of mediation of different kinds and degrees are not excluded, they acquire meaning and value *only* from Christ's own mediation, and they cannot be understood as parallel or complementary to his. (*DJ* §14)

The Declaration also holds fast to the claim of the unity and universality of Jesus Christ's salvific mystery *vis-a-vis* the other religions. This claim flows from the sources of faith: the divine work of salvation in Christ has the aim of giving "revelation" (cf. Mt. 11: 27) and divine life (cf. Jn. 1:12; 5:25-26; 17:2) to all humanity and to every person" (*DJ* §15). Yet it grants that in connection with the unique mediation of Christ there are other mediations, which are to be regarded as participations in Christ's mediation. In this way the other religions become also mediators of salvation through their participation in the mediaship of Christ.

If Christ is operative in all people and religions through the Holy Spirit, uniting men with God and pointing them to Himself through the "*semina Verbi*" it follows from the mystery of unity that all religions participate in the unique, universal mediaship of Christ.

IV. The Church Is Unique and One

In this chapter *DJ* deals with the Church's uniqueness and oneness (*DJ* §16), and in this context speaks of the Catholic Church's relation to the Orthodox and Protestants.

It follows from the unity and universality of the salvific mystery of Jesus Christ that the Church founded by Christ and united to him in one Body is also unique and universal. According to the personal Catholic faith, the Church's essential unity consists in the unity of faith, of hierarchical order, and of cult. The historical continuity of the Church founded by Christ has its roots in the unbroken *apostolic succession* (*DJ* §6). As traditionally understood, the unity of faith is destroyed by heresy, and the unity of communion is destroyed by schism. The Church's uniqueness and unity were understood in an absolute and exclusive way. The Declaration wishes to overcome this exclusivity by a new and modified inclusivity. Its starting-point here is the famous passage in *LG* (§8):

This Church, constituted and organized as a society in the present world, subsists in [*subsistit in*] the Catholic Church, which is governed by the Successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him. (*DJ* §16)

DJ teaches us that by the use of the term "*subsistit in*" the Council wished to express three things: *1)* The Church of Christ continues to exist fully only in the Catholic Church; *2)* outside of her structure, many elements can be found of sanctification and truth, that is, in those Churches and ecclesial communities which are not yet in full communion with the Catholic Church; *3)* but with respect to these, it needs to be stated that "they derive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church" (*Unitatis Redintegratio* [UR] §3).

Thus, according to *DJ*, the Catholic Church's relation to non-Catholics is analogous to her relation to non-Christians: the Catholic Church's absolute claim is not to be understood as being exclusive and separating, but inclusive and uniting. There is *a full and a less full* communion with the one Church of Christ. There is the fullness of truth and grace in the Catholic Church and an imperfect participation in it in the non-Catholic communities.

This said, *DJ* distinguishes between Orthodox and Protestants. Both are "not in perfect communion with the Catholic Church..." (*DJ* §17), that is, they are linked to the Catholic Church in an imperfect communion and so are not really separated from her. The Orthodox are closer to the Catholic Church. They "remain united to her," even though the closest bonds, that is, by apostolic succession and a valid Eucharist. They are "true particular Churches" in which the Church of Christ is "present and operative," by means of their they lack full communion with the Catholic Church since "they do not accept the Catholic doctrine of the Primacy," which, as *DJ* teaches, is "the will of God."

The other Christian communities, who have preserved neither the Episcopate nor "the genuine and integral substance" of the Eucharistic mystery, "are not Churches in the proper sense" (*DJ* §17). This verdict, which has created such a stir, follows entirely logically from the Catholic concept of the Church. Nonetheless, "those who are baptized in these communities are, by Baptism, incorporated in Christ and thus are in a certain communion, albeit imperfect, with the Church." The result (*DJ* §17) of all this is that the Church of Christ is neither the sum of churches and ecclesial communities, nor a goal to be sought by them. Complete fullness is already given in the Catholic Church, not in other communities. In God's saving plan, however (*DJ* §17), "the spirit of Christ has not refrained from using them as means of salvation which derive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church" (*UR* §3).

The only logical consequence to be drawn from the Declaration's position would surely be that people should be clearly summoned to return to the bosom of the Catholic Church in order to attain there the fullness of grace and truth. It is difficult to regard heresy and schism—which have destroyed the unity of the Church—as means of salvation in the divine plan of salvation.

V. The Church, the Kingdom of God, and the Kingdom of Christ

According to *DJ*, the meaning of the expressions "kingdom of heaven," "kingdom of God," and "kingdom of Christ" "in Sacred Scripture, the Fathers of the Church, and the Magisterium, is not always the same, nor is their relationship to the Church, which is a mystery that cannot be totally captured by a human concept" (*DJ* §18). Nonetheless, *DJ* lists the following truths which flow from revelation:

Firstly, it must be held fast that the kingdom of God cannot be separated from Christ or the Church (*RM* §18). The inseparable relationship between Christ and the kingdom does not signify that the kingdom of God "is identified with the Church in her visible and social reality" (*DJ* §19). In fact, "the action of Christ and the Spirit outside the Church's visible boundaries" must not be excluded (*RM* §18).

Therefore, *DJ* sees the kingdom of God as open to the world, to all mankind, for the kingdom includes *everyone*, that is

individuals, society and the world. Working for the kingdom means acknowledging and promoting God's activity, which is present in human history and transforms it. Building in kingdom means working for liberation from evil in all its forms. In a word, the kingdom of God is the "manifestation and the realization of God's plan of salvation in all its fullness." (*RM* §18)

DJ's thesis that the Holy Spirit has been given not only to the Church but to the whole of mankind (*DJ* §12) is in accordance with the concept of the kingdom of God, to which *all* men are regarded as belonging. It embraces all mankind. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is the "divine dynamism" (i.e., "God's activity") that not only animates the Church but transforms the entire history of mankind. We are all involved in building up this kingdom, freed from all forms of evil. This is the ultimate realization of the fullness of God's plan of salvation. However, this thesis plainly points to a kingdom of *this* world, one of the New Age, not the New Testament.

VI. The Church and the Religions in the Context of Salvation

DJ intended to indicate the direction theology should take "as it explores the relationship of the Church and the other religions to salvation" (*DJ* §20). In accord with the New Testament (Mk. 16:16; Jn. 3:5), *DJ* underscores the traditional teaching that the Church, faith, and baptism are necessary for salvation. But in the same breath it adds (*DJ* §20): "This doctrine must not be set against the universal salvific will of God" (cf. 1 Tim. 2:4). Quoting the words of John Paul II, *DJ* formulates the problem this way: "It is necessary to keep these two truths together, namely, the real possibility of salvation in Christ for all mankind and the necessity of the Church for the salvation" (*RM* §9).

This is also the view of tradition. Tradition has resolutely taught the general necessity of the Church for salvation while at the same time envisaging that individuals who do not *actually* belong to the Church can attain salvation if they are in a state of invincible ignorance of the true religion. In such a case actual membership of the Church can be replaced by the *desire* for it. This means that the possibility of salvation outside the visible Church is located in the individual's conscience, i.e., it concerns the most intimate relationship between God and the soul, which is *per se* inaccessible to theological investigation.

On this issue *DJ* quotes Pope John Paul II. For those who are not formally and visibly members of the Church,

salvation in Christ is accessible by virtue of a grace which, while having a mysterious relationship to the Church, does not make it the formal part of the Church, but enlightens them in a way which is accommodated to their spiritual and material situation. This grace comes from Christ; it is the result of his sacrifice and is communicated by the Holy Spirit (*RM* §10).

In traditional terms, this is "*gratia Christi*" ("grace of Christ"). The quoted text can be understood in the traditional sense.

DJ points out (*DJ* §21) that, as regards the way in which the grace of salvation reaches the non-Christian, Vatican II asserts this takes place "in ways known to God" (*Ad Gentis* §7). It encourages theologians, however, to continue to explore what is the most intimate relationship between God and the soul.

DJ leaves to one side the unfathomable work of *salvation* in the individual heart, moving on to the Holy Spirit's salvific operation in non-Christian religions, i.e., to what is the real reality of this chapter: the Church and the *religions* in the context of salvation. It begins with a fairly general statement regarding the role of the religions in salvation (*DJ* §21):

Certainly, the various religious traditions contain and offer religious elements which come from God (*NA* §2, "*semina Verbi*") and are part of what "the Spirit brings about in human hearts and in the history of peoples, in cultures, and religions" (*RM* §29).

Given what has been said earlier, this means that even the non-Christian religions, as religions, mediate salvation. They are genuine means of salvation, legitimate paths of salvation, albeit of lesser rank, as *DJ* explains (*DJ* §21). It is acknowledged that some of the prayers and rites of the other religions can open hearts for God's operation. But, in contrast to the Christian sacraments, "One cannot attribute to these, however, a divine origin or an *ex opere operato* salvific efficacy [i.e., a saving efficaciously *worked by the work of the Sacrament itself-Ed.*], which is proper to the Christian sacraments."

The conclusion of *DJ* does not follow; for if the religious elements in other religions come from the Holy Spirit, they must be recognized as having a divine origin, even if, in this context, it is said (*DJ* §21) that "it cannot be overlooked that other religions, insofar as they depend on superstitions or other errors (cf. 1 Cor. 10: 20-21), constitute an obstacle to salvation." *DJ* goes into further detail as to the difference between the Church and the religions (*DJ* §22): it is a truth of faith that God has instituted the Church for the salvation of *all* men, but

[T]his truth does not lessen the sincere respect which the Church has for the religions of the world, but at the same time, it rules out, in a radical way, that mentality of indifference...If it is true that the followers of other religions can receive divine grace, it is also certain that objectively speaking they are in a gravely deficient situation in comparison with those who, in the Church, have the fullness of the means of salvation.

That is why the Church is bound to proclaim Christ, in whom "men find the fullness of their religious life." So it is not a question of salvation versus perdition, but only of salvation versus the fullness of salvation. This chimerical alternative is erroneous in itself and a source of heresy.

Here *DJ* has given the fundamental reasons why the Church must continue to pursue her mission to the world with the inter-religious dialogue. It is generally agreed that the precondition for dialogue is *equality*. Accordingly, *DJ* says (*DJ* §22) that this

refers to the equal personal dignity of the parties in dialogue, not to doctrinal content, nor even less to the position of Jesus Christ—who is God himself made man—in relation to the founders of the other religions.

But in an inter-religious dialogue the partners meet not only as persons, but also as representatives of religions. It is impossible to abstract from the religions themselves.

DJ summarizes the Catholic Church's necessity: the Church must proclaim

the necessity of conversion to Jesus Christ and of adherence to the Church through Baptism and the other sacraments, in order to participate fully in communion with God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, (*DJ* §22)

In other words, although the Church is necessary for salvation, when it comes to her relationship to the other religions it is not a case of salvation or perdition, but only of *fuller* participation in communion with God. This is logical, since *DJ* has already stated that non-Christian religions are genuine paths of salvation, connecting their adherents to God.

Conclusion

DJ concludes its theological process in three points (*DJ* §23). *1)* It re-states only traditional doctrine, following the example of the St. Paul: "I handed on to you as of first importance what I myself received" (1 Cor. 15:3). However, with its high esteem of the non-Christian religions, *DJ* is not the faithful to Scripture nor St. Paul. *2)* With Vatican II, *DJ* asserts that "this one true religion continues to exist in the Catholic and Apostolic Church, to which the Lord Jesus entrusted the task of spreading it among all people." In accord with the Council fathers, and on the basis of the missionary command, the Declaration concludes that "all persons are required to seek the truth, and when they come to know it, to embrace it and hold fast to it" (*Dignitatis Humanae* §1). But it follows from Christ's command to spread the Gospel that the *search* for the truth has ended. Man must accept and preserve the truth of Christ already and fully available to him now; *3)* Finally, *DJ* repeats its underlying theological principle: the *mystery of unity* in Jesus Christ (*DJ* §23):

The Christian mystery...overcomes all barriers of time and space, and accomplishes the unity of the human family: "From their different locations and traditions all are