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## PRÉSENTATION

In an ever changing world and in a Church constantly in the spotlights, the important informations and the meaning to give them may be buried under a mass of commentaries, opinions and fake news. At a time when it is urgent to restore the magisterium and pontifical authority so that the Church may continue its mission received from Christ, *Res Novæ* intends to be an informational and analysis tool at the service of the petrinian power. By subscribing now you will help with the start of *Res Novæ* and its development.

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## THE ÉDITORIAL

# Dialogue with religions or introspection?

The rather peculiar assembly of the Amazon Synod, among the various subjects it discussed, pointed out the theme of dialogue with non-christian religions, in this case with non-christian religiosities (Final document, nn. 23-25 : « *Iglesia en diálogo ecuménico, interreligioso y cultural* »), and the related topic of inculturation of catholicism within cultures marked by these religiosities. It seemed that the Amazonian religious diversity, sort of a fresh new Pentecost, would give the opportunity to discover other ways of salvation (of salvation/health) for men. We entrust don Pio the care of evaluating the signification in concrete actions that this approach received. But, this gives us the opportunity to consider, in a more general way, the paradoxical aspect of this perilous religious dialogue, which stakes might be the conciliar decree *Nostra ætate*. More than fifty years after it was ratified, the decree shows that, and the Synod is an additional proof of that, in terms of dialogue with others, it is most of all an introspection.

## The Church respects other ways of salvation (*Nostra ætate*)

The Declaration *Nostra ætate* which is extremely succinct in regards to the theological principles of the dialogue it describes, gives itself a very general goal : « *the Church examines more closely her relationship to non-Christian religions* » (no.1). This examination of our relationship prevents from making an essential exam regarding the nature of these religions. The Council nonetheless evokes this nature but only as a passage, and following its usual *transactional* ways, just like when it proposes « advances » made carefully with respect to traditional doctrine : it avoids saying that they are erroneous ways, unlike in the past preachers of the Gospels had always denounced them. Yet, it does not say they are parallel ways, having thus as such a supernatural existence able to procure salvation. Vatican II, as in other domains, seeks a middle ground : they are incompletely salvific, and in this way respectable. Because of that, the International Theological Commission was able to say : « *Whether the religions as such can have salvific value is a point that remains open* » (*Christianity and the world religions*, 1997, no.81).

The famous no. 2 of the Declaration states that « *the Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions.* » This evokes the classic doctrine of the « *preparation for the gospel* » (no. 3), « *seeds of the Word* » (no. 11), recalled by the decree *Ad gentes*. it is to be noted, though, that when the Church Fathers talked of *preparatio evangelica* and *semina verbi* (1), they saw that in Socrates, Plato, the stoicians, philosophers and moralists, but certainly not in pagan religions. To stay within an interpretation of the Council « *in the sense of tradition* », we can suppose that when it says « *what is true and holy in these religions* », it only designates what in them belongs to natural philosophy (adhering, by some, to a unique God, and to some principles of natural law).

The conciliar novelty is in this : « *She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless*

often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men » (*Nostra aetate*, no. 2). The sincere respect concerns not only « that is true », but particularly about « these doctrines ». At best, the Council adopts the thesis of Fr. Yves Congar, O.P., stating that only the other religions contain eventually seeds of the Word, but that as such, they are preparations for the gospel (2). Now, in regards to the evil aspect of non-christian religions (« For all the gods of the Gentiles are devils », Ps 95, 5, Vulgate), for they most certainly do push men in the abyss of error, nothing is mentioned.

The Council yet states that, nonetheless, the Church must not cease to teach Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life (Jn 14, 6), « in which men must find the plenitude of religious life. » Would there be then, outside the church, « religious lives » in Christ which would be partial, without reaching plenitude ? Certainly, no one doubts the possibility to be saved in a religion, but it is despite religions, and it concerns men of good faith, respecting the law of God inscribed in their heart and adhering invisibly to the Church, situation which is the secret of God (3). *Nostra aetate* says something very different, affirming the Church carries a « sincere respect » to the other religions, islam, Buddhism, etc.

### The wojtylan reinterpretation of the Council

On this subject, two major lines of interpretations have been proposed : one going in the sense of a rupture with the former magisterium, and the other, official, under John-Paul II, which what ever the « gestures » like Assise might have indicated, went, in this regard, as far as wanting to reinterpret Vatican II.

In this way, the encyclical *Redemptoris missio*, dated 7 December 1990, makes dialogue an element of the mission of the Church : « Inter-religious dialogue is a part of the Church's evangelising mission. Understood as a method and means of mutual knowledge and enrichment, dialogue is not in opposition to the mission *ad gentes* ; indeed, it has special links with that mission and is one of its expressions » (*Redemptoris missio*, no. 55). To the difference of *Nostra aetate*, this encyclical goes even as far as giving a sort of definition of the dialogue with a very classic finality : « Through dialogue, the Church seeks to uncover the “seeds of the Word”, a “ray of that truth which enlightens all men” ; these are found in individuals and in the religious traditions of mankind » (no. 56). When understood in this way, dialogue is nothing more than the discernment missionary used to make in the cultures and religions they encountered, when they underwent the evangelisation of pagans, looking for a bearing they could find in their beliefs to preach the Gospel. In fact, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, in 1992, talks of dialogue in the part devoted to the mission : « The missionary task implies a respectful dialogue with those who do not yet accept the Gospel » (no. 856). The respect here seems to target the persons, muslims and not Islam, etc.

As for the declaration to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, dated 6 August 2000, *Dominus Jesus*,

it affirms that the dialogue is only one of the works of the Church in Her mission *ad gentes* (no. 22) : « it is clear that it would be contrary to the faith to consider the Church as one way of salvation alongside those constituted by the other religions, seen as complementary to the Church or substantially equivalent to her, even if these are said to be converging with the Church toward the eschatological kingdom of God » (no. 21). This different rectifications operated during the wojtylan pontificate have had little consequences though and have been down played by the disastrous pastoral effect of the first day of the Assisi gathering which had preceded these rectifications, despite the explanations given, ill at ease, that the diverse religions had not prayed together but rather had gathered together to pray.

### The liberal theologies of religions

Except for the « gestures » which accompanied him (Assisi gathering of 27 October 1986 ; John Paul II kissing the Koran, an audience with an Iraki delegation of 14 May 1999 ; saint John the Baptiste promoted « protector of Islam », Jordania, 21 March 2000), we can consider the above mentioned documents as pertaining to a classic theology. The theologies concerning other religions are divided into « exclusivism theology » (no salvation outside the Church, visibly or invisibly, Karl Barth being the representative par excellence of exclusivism in the contemporary protestant theology), and « inclusivism » (which « integrate » the members of other religions into Christianity, considering those as unconscious christians) and finally pluralism (which brings together on the path of salvation irreducibly diverse religions). The « inclusivists » would include Yves Congar, aforementioned, Henri de Lubac (4) and, most of all, Karl Rahner, with his theory of « anonymous Christians » (5).

But, the post-conciliar line, that Benedict XVI calls Hermeneutic of rupture, goes further in moving out of pluralism theology. The reference work on the subject if the one of Jacques Dupuis, S.J., *Toward a Christian theology of religious pluralism* [6] (theologian implicitly targeted by *Dominus Jesus*, and directly criticised - for lack of an excommunication – a *Notification* dated 24 January 2001). J. Dupuis explains that the non-christian ways are « convergent » in a « mutual complementarity » : « Jesus-Christ is thus the “unique saviour”, not as the unique manifestation of the the Word of God, who is God himself, not even in the sense that, in Him, divine revelation is complete and exhaustive – which it is not and cannot be – but, in relation to the universal process of divine revelation which took place through concrete and limited manifestations » (p. 498-499). Jacques Dupuis defended his position until after his death in 2004 against *Dominus Jesus*, in : *Perché non sono eretico* (EMI, 2014). And, now that the time of Benedict XVI has passed, Alberto Melloni, from the School of Bologna, defended the jesuit's orthodoxy, saying *Dominus Jesus* was the « weakest document of whole of Wojtyla's pontificate » (*Corriere della Sera*, 4 January 2015). Fr. Claude Geffré, O.P., very much in agreement with

the ideas expressed by Jacques Dupuis, and additionally a dialectician very keen on the use of appositions of contradictory propositions, estimated that we could always consider as absolute certain truths (the unicity of the mediation of Christ, for example), still affirming as legitimate « *a principle of pluralism which would correspond to a mysterious will of God.* » (7)

Isn't this the idea found in the common Declaration of Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of al-Azhar, in Abu Dhabi : « *The pluralism and the diversity of religions, colour, sex, race and language are willed by God in His wisdom* » (4 February 2019). God can only will what is good, and in religious matter only what is salvific. In fact, in the Bergoglian thinking, the social rites of other religions become quasi sacraments : « *Due to the sacramental dimension of sanctifying grace, God's working in them tends to produce signs and rites, sacred expressions which in turn bring others to a communitarian experience of journeying towards God. While these lack the meaning and efficacy of the sacraments instituted by Christ, they can be channels which the Holy Spirit raises up in order to liberate non-Christians from atheistic immanentism or from purely individual religious experiences* » (*Evangelii gaudium*, 24 November 2013, no. 254).

## Post-liberal theology, going beyond

No matter how advanced these papal theological theses may seem, they are nonetheless relatively outdated to apprehend the religious as it appears in postmodernity : often individualised and deinstitutionalised, fragmented to the extreme within each religious group, and also, when integrated to western « culture », *globalised* in the sense that it has become a sort of a religious diffuse that everyone organises which ever way he wants, so much it could suit even atheists (8). So that according to post-liberal theologies, the theologians of religions have to consider, not only the irreducible character of religious diversities, but yet have to place in perspective, depending of this unsurpassable diversity, their own study process of other religions. Indeed, belonging to a defined religious ensemble, it can no longer introduce itself as it still does in pluralism theology, as a mere independent observer of religions.

The most heterodox theology meets again, in a certain way, with the most exclusivist traditional affirmations. Rémi Chéno, O.P., thus explains that, in the present post-liberal perspective of the theology of religions, the religious ensembles appear « *incommensurables* », in the sense that they all have their own unit of measurement (the word God, for example, can be difficult to identify from one religious world to another), and also appear « *unsurpassable* », meaning that the absolute « truth » of each is indeed absolute, according to Chéno, but in relation to these internal categories (9). Every religious system is *absolute relatively* in short. But then, is there possibility for dialogue ? To find a way out of this impasse, Rémi Chéno refers to John A. Di Noia, O.P. (present Under-secretary of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith), who considered, while Jacques

Dupuis was though developing his theories, that not only we had to go beyond liberalism but that we had to push neo-liberalism further, in order to find ever larger contexts, where the irreducible religious specificities could still talk between each other (10). In other words, the different religious expressions can have a dialogue, but it must concern other subjects than specifically religious ones.

The processes of inter religious dialogue are not for all that outdated, but they are only valid in their proper religious spheres. In « *Plea for a paradoxal inclusivism* » (11), the protestant theologian Marc Boss insisted on the fact that theologians of religions must admit the intra-religious character of their approach : they cannot speak about the others without applying the own theologic construction. One must admit that we religiously speak of others in secrecy and that we speak to others as we perceive them to be : it is the vicious circle of subjectivism.

This hard-line of post-liberal theology, or this extreme sincerity, presents the advantage to clarify what is left of naivety in liberal theology, notably in its bergoglian orientation (12), which itself represents part of its supporters. ◆

Father Claude Barthe

1. Clement of Alexandria (*Stromates*, II, 2, 4, 8) and Justin (*Apologetica* II, 8, 3), maybe Origen and Irenaeus.

2. *The Wide World my Parish*, Helicon Press re-edition 1961.

3. Apparently outside the Church, a man of good faith respecting the law of God inscribed and seek God with a sincere will be able to receive the supernatural mean to be united *in voto*, in desire, to the Church, outside of sacramental baptism (*Summa Theologica*, IIIa, q. 68, a. 2, *Mystici corporis*, Dz 3821 ; Letter of the Holy Office to the Archbishop of Boston, Dz 3871-3872 ; *Lumen gentium*, no. 16 ; *Redemptoris missio*, no. 10).

4. *Theology in History*, Part II : *The Theological Foundation of the Missions*, Ignatius Press, 1996.

5. « *Die anonymen Christen* », in *Schriften zur Theologie*, t. 6, Einsiedeln, Benziger, 1965.

6. Orbis books, 2002.

7. « *Le pluralisme religieux comme nouvel horizon de la théologie* » (Religious pluralism as a new horizon to theology), in *Le dialogue interreligieux. Le christianisme face aux autres traditions*, Edited by François Bousquet et Henri de La Hougue, Desclée de Brouwer publisher, 2009. Going further still in the assertion that religious pluralism is willed by God, in several instances, and notably in *De Babel à Pentecôte, Essais de théologie interreligieuse*, Cerf publisher, February 2006, Claude Geffré discussed a possible « *double religious affiliation* », « *in the sense of a real christian identity which would also be comfortable with the positive values of an other major religious tradition* » (p. 340). This idea allowed him to explain how Christianity had to must evangelise from the inside the other religions by bringing them the liberation of all dogmatic rigidity.

8. Cf. Jean-Claude Basset, « *Les chrétiens face à la diversité religieuse* » (Christians in the face of religious diversity), in *Les chrétiens et la diversité religieuse* (Christians and religious diversity) *op. cit.*

9. *Dieu au pluriel. Penser les religions*, Cerf, 2017.

10. *The diversity of religions : a Christian perspective*, Baltimore, The Catholic University of America Press, 1992.

11. In *Les chrétiens et la diversité religieuse. Les voies de l'ouverture et de la rencontre*, Edited by Jean-Claude Basset, Samuel Désiré Johnson, Karthala, 2011.

12. For instance : « *True Islam and an adequate interpretation of the Koran is opposed to all types of violence* » (*Evangelii gaudium*, no. 253).

# Paganism or relativism ?

Don Pio Pace

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On 4th of October last, in the gardens of the Vatican, took place, as we know, a ceremony which ridicule did not go unnoticed, except for the participants themselves. A pagan ceremony ? A folklorized paganism indeed. Certainly, the indigenous amazonian brought to Rome for the occasion seemed more authentic than the North American Indians, recruited by a travel agency, were during the gatherings of Assise to represent traditional religions. Yet, did the Amazonians reproduce ceremonies expressing a defined religiosity and supposed to enter in a prayer dialogue with Catholicism ?

It was about making a « *visible gesture of integral ecology* ». In front of the Pope surrounded with high-ranking prelates, a picnic tablecloth had been laid on the lawn on which were placed two small statuettes of fertility goddesses, one of which represented in a manner rather unfitting, and various symbolic objects. Prayers to saint Francis were said, songs and amazonian dances performed, words expressed by a few prelates, a program to which we should add prostrations by the twenty some Amazonian autochtones and the Franciscan religious alike who attended. A prostration meant to embrace “Mother Earth”, on the lawn, around the tablecloth. A green Oak from Assise was planted as a symbol with soil coming from the four corners of the world. When at the end of the ceremony, the Amazonians offered the wooden statuettes and their necklace to the Pope, by signing themselves, like by reflex, they seemed to forget they were acting as the last adepts of a local antic religion.

What religion was it, actually ? The Amazon is a conservatory of merely two hundred different Indian people living in an immense forest, essentially in the North and in the West, divided into about three hundred tribes, for a population of a little less than a million souls. All these different people were evangelised by the Portuguese and Spanish missionaries, but their beliefs, since the XVIth century, and especially since the XXth century, are very mixed, religious syncretism being one of the big characteristics of South America today, of Brazil in particular. Below a surface of Catholicism, or next to it, there are multiple elements of very diverse beliefs, which characteristic once analysed, is ultimately animism and some superstitions, namely to tie tyrannically human reason. They were mixed, revised, then mixed again ceaselessly, with African-american religiosity and imported Shamanism's, joined to the traditional use of hallucinogenic substances. The most important of these shamanist somewhat catholic cults is the Santo Daime

which appeared in the XXth century and uses as a « sacrament » the Ayahuasca beverage, an hallucinogenic made from a type of liana.

Actually, the thinkers of the Synod tried to present and thus to craft a global Amazonian religiosity. First, because they attribute a general representativity to few individuals who, by the fact itself they are what they are, that is members of specifically located tribes, only represent the tribes they belong to. It is in fact one of the major issue, since Vatican II, met by the authorities organisers of the religious dialogue : with what religious are we to dialogue ? and what is the representativity of those we are able to convince into participating ? These are valid questions especially with the tendency to apply to worlds totally heterogenous to catholicism the schemas of a hierarchical church with its dogmatic apparatus, highly sophisticated in comparison to these religions and religiosities, even the more advanced ones.

In this religiosity, gathered *in unum*, a sort of monotheism is injected, a way of a unique divine entity, « Mother Earth », like the western neo-pagans do, whom vague reference to vanished Indo-European pantheons is actually the coating of a simplistic pantheistic philosophy. Among other things, they have infused in this amazonian spirituality they dreamed of, a high dose of, as it happens, very modern environmentalism, as if the Amazonian religions and cultures were a sort of *environmental preparation*, giving way to join a Catholicism converted to integral ecology in a fertile dialogue for the safeguard of the planet.

But, most importantly, in order to enter in dialogue with them, they practice a sort of counter evangelisation by trying to reinvigorate a paganism which had been covered by a Catholicism but still had not been totally replaced. Their approach is even, *de facto*, more perverse yet, since this bricolage it represents, in the sense given to this expression by the sociologists of religion, is funded on a religious relativism, definitely modernist (there are elements of truth everywhere ; nothing is absolute truth). They propagate this relativism, though probably not in a very efficacious way for there are doubts their discourses will have any influence on the inhabitants of the forest, but yet they do in telling them what they are and what they believe. Not only our experts in Amazonian things refuse to rectify what catholicism might have been mixed with, but they tend to corrode the elements of natural philosophy which can exist in the minds of people not yet too harmed by the principles of modernity. ◆