



## **The Declaration *Dominus Iesus***

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The proclamation of the Gospel to the world (Matthew 28:19) was the missionary mandate given by Christ to the Church as He ascended to Heaven. While significant strides had been made in the past, the Church humbly admits that her universal mission is still far from completion.

In the twentieth century, in her continuing effort to evangelize, the Church saw the need to address her relation to the world, particularly to other Christian denominations and the various non-Christian faiths. Through the Second Vatican Council, the Church's dialogue with them resulted in a more open environment. Conversely though, some theologians like Jacques Dupuis construed this openness in a relativist pluralism approach to accommodate the need for a “balanced” view of dialogue between faiths.

The Declaration *Dominus Iesus*, written in the Jubilee Year 2000, was intended to address Christians regarding this increasing tendency of moving away from their central and fundamental faith in Jesus Christ, with whom they are celebrating the year for.

This article presents a descriptive and historical overview of the Declaration and its contents, particularly mentioning those theories or positions, which were held erroneous and subsequently countered by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

**Keywords:** *Relativist Pluralism, Exclusivism, Fullness of Revelation, Eternal Word, Incarnate Logos, Economy of the Holy Spirit, Economy of the Incarnate Word, Unicity and Universality of Salvific Mystery of Christ*

In what should be seen as a further development of “theology of religious pluralism”<sup>1</sup> which may lead to a better understanding of inter-religious dialogue, the Vatican seemed to be concerned with the proposals made by some theologians, causing “doctrinal confusion”<sup>2</sup> in their dialogue.

When the Declaration *Dominus Iesus* was published, a number of theologians, with the likes of Paul Knitter, John Hick and Roger Haight were perceived to be the targets or the main adversaries of the Declaration. Hick and Knitter were criticized and probably investigated but not officially censured. Haight, unfortunately, was barred from teaching at Boston’s Weston School of Theology while the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) made an inquiry into his book, *Jesus the Symbol of God*.<sup>3</sup>

*The Tablet* published an article in September 2007<sup>4</sup> stating that the Vatican and the US bishops conducted an investigation on the writings of Fr. Peter Phan, a Vietnamese professor of Catholic social thought at Georgetown University, particularly mentioning religious pluralism and interfaith dialogue in his 2005 book *Being Religious Interreligiously*. Three months later,<sup>5</sup> the same magazine wrote an article regarding the publication of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) of the result of the investigation. The result lashed criticisms of his book, concluding that it contained “pervading ambiguities and equivocations that could easily confuse or mislead Catholics.” The CDF claimed that the book, “unless properly clarified,” was “not in accord with Catholic teaching.” The book took note that it “could leave readers in considerable confusion as to the proper understanding of the uniqueness of Christ,” as the book claimed that terms such as “unique,” “absolute” and “universal” in reference to Christ, “had outlived their usefulness and should be jettisoned and replaced by other theologically more adequate equivalents.”

Years earlier, a similar but more interesting case was that of Jacques Dupuis, a theology professor of the Gregorian University in Rome. One of his books, *Towards Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, written originally in English, was considered a pioneering achievement in the new and complex issues of religious pluralism in the autumn of 1997 and has been translated into several languages and had numerous reprints.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Theology which seeks the meaning, in the light of Christian faith, in God’s design for man of the plurality of living faiths and religious traditions. It seeks the significance of plurality of religious tradition in the God’s plan – the unfolding of the history of God’s dealings with man which we call the history of salvation (Jacques Dupuis. *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, New York: Orbis Books, 1997, 10; 13).

<sup>2</sup> Tomko, Josef. “Proclaiming Christ the World’s Only Savior,” *L’Osservatore Romano* (5 April 1991): 4 as quoted by Edmund Chia, “Towards a Theology of Dialogue...,” 40.

<sup>3</sup> Chia, Edmund. “Towards a Theology of Dialogue,” 41.

<sup>4</sup> Lavin, Timothy. “Vatican investigates ‘pluralist theologian,’” *The Tablet* (22 September 2007), [<http://www.thetablet.co.uk/article/10384>].

<sup>5</sup> Mickens, Robert. “Misleading theologian condemned,” *The Tablet*, 15 December 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Konig, Cardinal Franz. “Let the Spirit Breathe,” *The Tablet*, 7 April 2001.

Three years after the publication of the book, the CDF published the Declaration *Dominus Iesus* in 2000 giving particular attention to the difficulties which religious pluralism may have caused for the missionary proclamation of the Christian message. In fact, there is an account<sup>7</sup> wherein Dupuis was summoned a day before the news conference of the Declaration. He was asked to react on the latter's contents, seemingly citing errors in his work on religious pluralism, but he refused to comment.

More specifically directed to the book of Dupuis, the CDF published a *Notification*<sup>8</sup> in which the congregation saw "notable ambiguities and difficulties on important doctrinal points"<sup>9</sup> which for them "could lead a reader to erroneous or harmful opinions,"<sup>10</sup> if not a danger to the faith.

A careful reader can easily notice that the themes in Dupuis' *Notification* are the very same themes on which the *Dominus Iesus* develops.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, this observation is clearly expressed in the footnote<sup>12</sup> of the *Notification*, of which the *Dominus Iesus* is used to evaluate the book.

The following table attempts to show the parallel structure in the issues discussed between the two:

<b><i>Notification on the book of Jacques Dupuis</i></b>	<b><i>Declaration Dominus Iesus</i></b>
<b>1.</b> The Interpretation of the Sole and Universal Salvific Mediation of Christ	• The Unicity and Universality of the Salvific Mystery of Jesus Christ
<b>2.</b> The Unicity and Completeness of Christ's revelation	• The Fullness and Definitiveness of the Revelation of Jesus Christ
<b>3.</b> The Universal Salvific Action of the Holy Spirit	• The Incarnate Logos and the Holy Spirit in the Work of Salvation
<b>4.</b> The Orientation of All People to the Church	• Unicity and Unity of the Church • The Church: Kingdom of God and Kingdom of Christ
<b>5.</b> The Value and Significance of the Salvific Function of other Religions	• The Church and the other Religions in Relation to Salvation

<sup>7</sup> Allen, John Jr., "Exclusive Claim," *National Catholic Reporter*, 15 September 2000.

<sup>8</sup> Konig, Cardinal Franz. "Let the Spirit Breathe," *The Tablet* (April 7, 2001), [<http://www.thetablet.co.uk/article/5304>]. Cardinal Konig explains that there were actually three versions of the Notifications to the book. The first textual version was given to the Dupuis on 1 September 2000, four days before the publication of the Declaration *Dominus Iesus*. It was signed by Pope John Paul II, but was not published. The second one was drafted on December 6, 2000, again signed by same Pope, but not published. It was only the third version that was finally signed by the Pope on January 19, 2001.

<sup>9</sup> *Notification on the book Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Orbis Books: Maryknoll, New York 1997) by Father Jacques Dupuis, S.J. (Vatican City, 24 January 2001), [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20010124\\_dupuis\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20010124_dupuis_en.html)

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Edmund Chia. "Towards a Theology of Dialogue," 51.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. Footnote 1. "The *Notification* draws from the principles expressed in *Dominus Iesus* in its evaluation of Father Dupuis' book."

Based on the above observations, it is suggested that Dupuis' book indirectly gave rise to the writing of *Dominus Iesus*, and its *Notification*, a sequel to it. Intimately related hence, Dupuis' proposed Trinitarian-Christological paradigm of doing dialogue with other faiths, along with paradigms that seemed to be in consonance with Dupuis' thoughts, cannot be discussed in isolation without its reference to the *Dominus Iesus*.

This article will discuss: A. An overview of the Declaration *Dominus Iesus*, and B. Its contents, particularly the Christological – Soteriological doctrinal points, namely: 1. The Fullness and Definitiveness of the Revelation of Jesus Christ; 2. The Incarnate Logos and the Holy Spirit in the Work of Salvation; 3. Unicity and Universality of the Salvific Mystery of Jesus Christ, with references to the scriptures, some Fathers of the Church and Papal encyclicals.

### **Overview of *Dominus Iesus***

Subtitled, “On the Unicity and Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church,” the Declaration *Dominus Iesus*<sup>13</sup> (Latin for “The Lord Jesus”) is an official document of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, bearing the signatures of then Prefect, Cardinal Joseph Alois Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI) and of then Secretary, Archbishop Tarcisio Bertone, S.D.B. Although dated August 6, 2000, it was officially mentioned in a press conference on September 5, 2000. It was earlier ratified and confirmed by the late Pope John Paul II on June 16, 2000.

Not counting the introduction and conclusion, the Declaration *Dominus Iesus* is aptly divided into six chapters and further subdivided into twenty-three articles. The first three chapters dealt with the Christological issues of the Fullness and Definitiveness of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Logos and the Holy Spirit in the work of Salvation and the Unicity and Universality of the Salvific Mystery of Jesus Christ. The final three chapters address the Ecclesiological issues of the Unicity and Unity of the Church, its relation to the Kingdom of God and of Christ, and its relation with other religions and their role in salvation.

According to then Cardinal Ratzinger, in his interview responding to the numerous objections raised against the Declaration, he said that the Declaration was a brief formula of faith, which summarized the essence of Christianity: Jesus is Lord (*Dominus Iesus*).<sup>14</sup> He said that with this Declaration, “the Pope wanted to offer the

<sup>13</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. *Declaration Dominus Iesus: On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church*, 6 August 2000.

<sup>14</sup> Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, “Answers to Main Objections Against *Dominus Iesus*,” interview by the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (September 22, 2000). Italian Version. [<http://www.ewtn.com/library/theology/obdomihs.htm>].

world a great and solemn recognition of Jesus Christ as Lord at the height of the Holy Year, bringing what is essential firmly to the center of this occasion which is always prone to externalism.”<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, he said that the main intention in writing this document was to invite all Christians to open themselves anew to the recognition of Jesus Christ as Lord, giving a profound meaning to the Holy Year (the Great Jubilee Year of 2000).<sup>16</sup>

In its introduction, the Declaration presents the attitude of the Church towards her missionary work in proclaiming Christ to the world, springing from the final command of her Lord:

Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature... (Mk 16:15). Go therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. (Mt 28:18-20; cf. Lk 24:46-48; Jn 17:18,20,21); Acts 1:8).<sup>17</sup>

Still, in spite of the Church’s continuing proclamation and witnessing of the Gospel to the world, at the end of the second millennium, the mission is still far from its completion.<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, in her effort to evangelize all peoples, the Church has encountered various cultures and faiths, in which she gave particular attention in Vatican II, “with an open and positive approach.”<sup>19</sup> Quoting the encyclical *Nostra Aetate*,

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 the teachings, which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, in her proclamation of the Gospel, the Church uses the practice of inter-religious dialogue, which “does not replace, but rather accompanies the *missio ad gentes* [of the Church].”<sup>21</sup>

However, in this renewed sense of evangelization, questions never dealt before arose, opinions abound, while theologians were also handing in their proposals. According to Bishop Bruno Forte, the President of the International Association of Catholic Theologians, two extreme positions are provided: relativist pluralism and exclusivism.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. *Declaration Dominus Iesus*. Introduction.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. (as quoted from Second Vatican Council, Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, 2)

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 2.

On the one hand, there are those who, wanting to promote the various world religions, speak of a kind of relativist pluralism, by virtue of which Christ would not be the Father's only full revelation, but one of the ways for reaching the Mystery of God. On the other, there are those who, firmly declaring that Christ alone is the Way to the Truth and the Life, say that the only way to reach the Mystery of God is through Christ himself.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, the Declaration was written, although primarily to recognize Jesus as Lord at the height of the Jubilee Year, to warn the Catholic faithful against these present dangers of two extreme positions as mentioned, in dialogue with other religions. Specifically mentioned in the Declaration are these "relativistic theories which seek to justify religious pluralism, not only *de facto*, but also *de iure* (or in principle)."<sup>23</sup> Such that "certain theological proposals are developed in which Christian revelation and the mystery of Jesus Christ and the Church lose their character of absolute truth and salvific universality, or at least shadows of doubt and uncertainty are cast upon them."<sup>24</sup> These positions, as misguided dialogue among faiths, have lead missionary theologians to neglect the urgency of proclaiming the Gospel for the sake of respecting the Seed of Truth found in other religions.<sup>25</sup>

The Declaration, far from conceiving it as a new set of doctrines, merely uses an expository language to achieve its purpose of proclaiming Christ to the world. It sets forth again the doctrine of the Catholic faith, points some fundamental questions that remain open to further development and refutes specific positions that are erroneous or ambiguous.<sup>26</sup> With due reference to what has been taught in the previous Magisterial documents, the Declaration is said to be merely a reiteration of certain truths which have been a part of the Church's faith<sup>27</sup> from the very start.

In this renewed thrust of the Church towards evangelization, the Declaration then "seeks to recall to Bishops, theologians and all the Catholic faithful, certain indispensable elements of Christian doctrine, which may help theological reflection in developing solutions consistent with the contents of the faith and responsive to the pressing needs of contemporary culture."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Forte, Msgr. Bruno. "Declaration *Dominus Iesus* (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith)," *Interview*. Omnis Terra, 311 (2000).

<sup>23</sup> *Dominus*, 3.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>25</sup> Forte, Msgr. Bruno. "Declaration *Dominus Iesus...*," *Interview*.

<sup>26</sup> *Dominus*, 3.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*.

## Christological – Soteriological Issues

In his address<sup>29</sup> during the meeting of the CDF with the presidents of the Doctrinal Commissions of the Bishops' Conferences of Latin America in Mexico in 1996, Cardinal Ratzinger, the then Prefect of the CDF, pointed out that the central problem for the faith in the present time is relativism. This prevailing philosophy of relativism, according to the Cardinal, presents only with its "aspects of resignation before the immensity of truth." Absolute Truth is elusive. Knowledge is only achieved through dialogue, freedom and tolerance. Dialogue to attain truth is best exercised through a relative democracy. Cardinal Ratzinger states,

Relativism appears to be the philosophical foundation of democracy. Democracy in fact is supposedly built on the basis that no one can presume to know the true way, and it is enriched by the fact that all roads are mutually recognized as fragments of the effort toward which is better. Therefore all roads seek something common in dialogue, and they also compete regarding knowledge that cannot be compatible in one common form.<sup>30</sup>

The Cardinal admitted that pluralist theology of religions has been in constant development since the middle of the twentieth century and it is only now that it has come to the center of the Christian conscience. He added that the theology of liberation, in its radical form, has done a great deal of influence for its development.<sup>31</sup>

As one of its founders and eminent representative, the Cardinal identifies John Hick for his philosophical inquiry found in the Kantian distinction between *phenomenon* and *noumenon*.<sup>32</sup> Man can never grasp the ultimate truth in itself, but only its appearance in our way of perceiving through different "lenses." Thus, pertaining to God, the Absolute cannot come into history. The identification of one historical person, Jesus of Nazareth, with what is "real," the living God, is now relegated to the status of myth. Thus, Jesus is relativized as one religious leader among others.<sup>33</sup>

Conscious of this prevailing relativist theory among theologians engaged in dialogue with religions, endangering the Church's constant missionary proclamation of Christ, the CDF "sets forth again the doctrine of the Catholic faith, pointing out some fundamental questions that remain open to further development while

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<sup>29</sup> Ratzinger, Cardinal Joseph. "Relativism: The Central Problem for Faith Today," address given during the meeting of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith with the presidents of the Doctrinal Commissions of the Bishops' Conferences of Latin America. Guadalajara, Mexico (May 1996), [<http://www.acu-adsum.org/ratzrel.pdf>].

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> An object or power transcending experience whose existence is theoretically problematic but must postulated by practical reason. *Dictionary of Philosophy*. [<http://www.ditext.com/runes/n.html>]

<sup>33</sup> Ratzinger, "Relativism: The Central Problem of Faith Today."

refuting specific positions that are erroneous or ambiguous.”<sup>34</sup> Far from treating in a systematic manner the question of the unicity and salvific universality of the mystery of Jesus Christ and the Church and proposing solutions to questions that are matters of free theological debate, the Declaration “takes up what has been taught in previous Magisterial documents, in order to reiterate certain truths that are part of the Church’s faith.”<sup>35</sup>

### *1. The Fullness and Definiteness of the Revelation of Jesus Christ*

In what seemed as recognition of the roles of various religious traditions in God’s universal plan, certain theologians propose that these religions be seen as authentic witnesses of God’s manifestation in history, parallel to that of Christ. They intend to look at God’s revelation in Christ, due to his human consciousness, as one which is limited, incomplete, or imperfect, subject to be complemented by other religions.<sup>36</sup>

The above “relativistic tendency,” the Declaration says, is contrary to the Church’s faith<sup>37</sup> and is based on the notion that God cannot be grasped and revealed in its fullness and completeness by any faith in history, even by Christianity or Jesus Christ.<sup>38</sup>

In answer to this “relativistic” mentality and attitude, the Declaration seeks “to reassert the definitive and complete character of the revelation of Jesus Christ... [in whom] the full revelation of divine truth is given.”<sup>39</sup> In Christ, God has finally, completely and uniquely revealed and manifested himself.

The Declaration gives several Scriptural passages as bases for this assertion:

No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him (Mt 11:27); No one has ever seen God; God the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, has revealed him (Jn 1:18); For in Christ the whole fullness of divinity dwells in bodily form (Col 2:9-10).

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<sup>34</sup> *Dominus*, 3

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.



The above passages indicate the absolute, unique and unsurpassed revelation of God the Father to Christ in his unique status and being, the Son of the God. Quoting the encyclical *Dei Verbum*,

By this revelation then, the deepest truth about God and the salvation of man shines forth in Christ, who is at the same time the mediator and the fullness of all revelation.<sup>40</sup>

Jesus Christ, therefore, the Word made flesh, sent 'as a man to men', 'speaks the words of God' (Jn 3:34), and completes the work of salvation which his Father gave him to do (cf. Jn 5:36; 17:4). To see Jesus is to see the Father (cf. Jn 14:9). For this reason, Jesus perfected revelation by fulfilling it through his whole work of making himself present and manifesting himself: through his words and deeds, his signs and wonders, but especially through his death and glorious resurrection from the dead and finally with the sending of the Spirit of truth, he completed and perfected revelation and confirmed it with divine testimony..<sup>41</sup>

Thus, Jesus' revelation of God is not only true in a qualified sense of the word, i.e. parallel to other manifestations of God in history, but, as the Word made flesh, the Son of God, Jesus has the unique distinction as the fullness of revelation, completed and perfected revelation through his words and works particularly seen in the Paschal Mystery of his death and resurrection. Hence, no public revelation from God is expected until the second coming of Christ himself (cf. 1 Tim 6:14 and Tit 2:13).<sup>42</sup>

Quoting the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, the Declaration states that it is the task of the Church to proclaim Christ, the fullness of truth, to the world as God has made himself known in the fullest possible way, revealing to man who he is.<sup>43</sup> "This definitive self-revelation of God is the fundamental reason why the Church is missionary by her very nature."<sup>44</sup>

In answer to the "relativistic proposal" of certain missionary theologians citing Christ's human consciousness as point of

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid (as quoted from *Dei Verbum*, 5).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid (as quoted from *Dei Verbum*, 4).

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

limitation of God's revelation in him, the Declaration asserts that "the words, deeds and entire historical event of Jesus, though limited as human realities, have nevertheless the divine Person of the Incarnate Word, "true God and true man" as their subject. For this reason, they possess in themselves the definitiveness and completeness of the revelation of God's salvific ways, even if the depth of the divine mystery in itself remains transcendent and inexhaustible."<sup>45</sup>

Although spoken in human language, in Jesus' words, the whole truth about God is not abolished or reduced; rather, because the one who speaks and acts is the Incarnate Son of God, the whole truth is uniquely, fully, and completely revealed.<sup>46</sup>

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

In their purpose to be "more responsive and considerate" to the sensibilities of other religions in dialogue, theologians propose to reconsider the identity of Christ, as one which is "particular, finite, historical figure... in a way complementary with other revelatory and salvific figures..."<sup>47</sup> In this sense, God has revealed himself not particularly in Christ, but to many other historical figures found in various religious traditions. For these theologians, the Infinite, the Absolute, the Ultimate Mystery of God manifests himself to humanity in many ways and in many historical figures; Jesus of Nazareth is one of these.<sup>48</sup> Jesus is placed up to par with these figures in history, revealing God in their limitations. Jesus is just one of the many faces in which the Logos has assumed in the course of time to communicate with man in a salvific way.<sup>49</sup> Thus, in acknowledging each faith's own revelatory and salvific figures, theologians hope to see mutual respect and understanding between religions at the end of the dialogue.

Moreover, to unify and justify the understanding of universality of Christian salvation and religious pluralism, theologians propose to have two economies of salvation: that of the economy of the Eternal Word and the economy of the Incarnate Word.<sup>50</sup> The former is considered "valid outside of the Church and

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

unrelated to her,”<sup>51</sup> while the latter implies relation to the Church. Though God’s presence is seen more fully in the latter, it is still limited to the Church, thus to Christians, while the former, because it is not particularized in history, is universal.<sup>52</sup> In other words, while it is still the economy of the Incarnate word which gives the quality of a fuller revelation of God in Christ, albeit limited to Christians, it is the economy of the Eternal Word which makes possible the one God’s manifold revelation in other religions.

Accordingly, it is in these above “relativistic tendencies” that the Declaration wants to warn the Christians about, because they are in profound conflict with the Christian faith.<sup>53</sup> Thus, the Declaration puts forth the article of faith that must be firmly believed: “Jesus of Nazareth, son of Mary, and He alone, is the Son and the Word of the Father.”<sup>54</sup>

The Declaration proves this doctrine by citing several passages from the scriptures:

The Word, which ‘was in the beginning with God’ (Jn 1:2) is the same as he who ‘became flesh’ (Jn 1:14). In Jesus, ‘the Christ, the Son of the living God’ (Mt 16:16), ‘the whole fullness of divinity dwells in bodily form’ (Col 2:9). He is the ‘only begotten Son of the Father, who is in the bosom of the Father’ (Jn 1:18), his ‘beloved Son, in whom we have redemption... In him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him, God was pleased to reconcile all things to himself, on earth and in the heavens, making peace by the blood of his Cross’ (Col 1:13-14; 19-20).<sup>55</sup>

Stating its fidelity to the Scriptures in refuting erroneous interpretations of Christ, the Declaration quotes the solemn definition of the *First Council of Nicaea*:

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only begotten generated from the Father, that is, from the being of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, one in being with the Father, through whom all things were made, those in heaven and those on earth. For us men and for our salvation,

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

he came down and became incarnate, was made man, suffered, and rose again on the third day. He ascended to the heavens and shall come again on to judge the living and the dead.<sup>56</sup>

Following the Fathers of the Church, the *Council of Chalcedon* is quoted:

The one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity, the same truly God and truly man..., one in being with the Father according to the divinity and one in being with us according to the humanity..., begotten of the Father before the ages according to the divinity and, in these last days, for us and for our salvation, of Mary, the Virgin Mother of God, according to the humanity.<sup>57</sup>

Moreover, looking at the original state of man as the image and likeness of God, now disfigured by sin, the Declaration, quoting *Gaudium et Spes*, speaks of Christ as “the new Adam... ‘image of the invisible God’ (Col 1:15), himself the perfect man who has restored that likeness to God.”<sup>58</sup>

With the above quotations from the scriptures, the Fathers of the Church, the Ecumenical and Vatican councils, the Declaration thus repudiates the notion of having two economies of salvation: that of the Eternal Word and the Incarnate Word. Rather, it affirms the unity of the two natures in the Person of Christ. Quoting the encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio*,

To introduce any sort of separation between the Word and Jesus Christ is contrary to the Christian faith... Jesus is the Incarnate Word – a single and indivisible person... Christ is none other than Jesus of Nazareth; he is the Word of God made man for the salvation of all...<sup>59</sup>

In other words, the Eternal Word that existed before the creation of the world and the Incarnate Word, the Word-made-flesh in history, are one and the same in Jesus. To propose their separation is contrary to the Catholic faith.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid (as quoted from the First Council of Nicaea, *Symbolum Nicaenum*: DS 125).

<sup>57</sup> Ibid (as quoted from the Council of Chalcedon, *Symbolum Chalcedonense*: DS 301).

<sup>58</sup> Ibid (as quoted from the Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 22).

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, (as quoted from John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, 6).

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 10.

Quoting St. Leo the Great, the Declaration explains that with God becoming flesh in Christ, all the actions of the Word of God with regard to salvation are always done in unity with the human nature he has assumed for the salvation of all. Though operating in two natures, the subject is still the single person of the Word.<sup>61</sup>

Accordingly, the Declaration again affirms the unity of this one economy of salvation, in the most intimate unity of Persons in the Trinity, as the one “willed by the One and Triune;”<sup>62</sup> and in it, we find the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word at the source and the center.<sup>63</sup> Quoting the encyclical *Gaudium et Spes*,

The Word of God, through whom all things were made, was made flesh, so that as perfect man, he could save all men and sum up all things in himself.<sup>64</sup>

Following the unity of the Persons in the Holy Trinity is the intrinsic unity found in the mystery of Christ, extending from the eternal choice in God to the Second Coming.<sup>65</sup> The Declaration quotes several Scripture passages as bases for this assertion:

He [the Father] chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love (Eph 1:4); In Christ, we are heirs, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will (Eph 1:11); For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers; those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those he justified he also glorified (Rom 8:29-30).<sup>66</sup>

In other words, the one who provides salvation for all peoples, regardless of religion, is not only the Eternal Word, separated from the Incarnate Word; nor should the Incarnate Word be attributed only with a quality of “fullness of salvation” but not universality. Rather, there is only one economy of salvation and the subject and

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid (as quoted from St. Leo the Great, *Tomus ad Flavianum*: DS 294).

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid (as quoted from *Gaudium et Spes*, 45; cf. also Council of Trent, *Decretum de peccato originali*, 3: DS 1513).

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

center of which is the Person of Jesus Christ, “the mediator and the universal redeemer.”<sup>67</sup>

Missionary theologians, as expressed by Jacques Dupuis, propose a distinction between the economy of the Holy Spirit and the economy of the Incarnated Word: the former having a “more universal breath”<sup>68</sup> than the latter. So that, while acknowledging the latter’s Paschal Mystery as culminating point of salvation history for Christians, it is the former’s role to provide salvific efficacy to the various religious figures.

Accordingly, it is also the above “relativistic theory” of separating the one economy of salvation into two - that of the Holy Spirit and the Incarnate Word, that the Declaration repudiated and stated as contrary to the Catholic faith.<sup>69</sup>

Affirming the inseparability of the two, the Declaration states that the salvific incarnation of the Word is a Trinitarian event.<sup>70</sup> Citing several New Testament passages, it considers the mystery of Jesus, the Incarnate Word, constituting 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; 1 Cor 15:45), but also to his coming in history (cf. 1 Cor 10:4; 1 Pet 1:10-12).<sup>71</sup>

Moreover, the Declaration states that Vatican Council II closely links the mystery of Christ from its very beginnings with that of the Spirit, of which the work of building the Church through the centuries is also seen as action of Christ in communion with his Spirit.<sup>72</sup>

This relation of the mystery of Christ and the Spirit opens the way for the salvation of all extending beyond the visible boundaries of the Church.<sup>73</sup> Thus, the exclusive notion of salvation as limited only to Christians is not in consonance with the Catholic teaching. In fact, in the Pascal Mystery of Christ, salvation is made available to all, regardless of one’s religion. Quoting the encyclical *Gaudium et Spes*,

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid (as quoted from *Lumen Gentium*, 3-4)

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 12.

For since Christ died for all, and since all men are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery.<sup>74</sup>

The Declaration affirms the connection of Christ and the Spirit, stating that it is the latter Who actualizes the salvific efficacy of Christ in the lives of all people, called by God to a single destiny, both those who historically preceded Christ and those who live after his coming in history.<sup>75</sup> Connecting Christ and the Spirit and placing them into a single divine economy, the Declaration confirms their intrinsic role in the lives of all peoples, regardless of religions. Citing the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*,

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 the Spirit'... Again, it is the Spirit who sows the 'seeds of the word' present in various customs and cultures, preparing them for full maturity in Christ.<sup>76</sup>

It affirms the role of the Spirit in the life of Christ, working all throughout his life and is at work in his Church. Intimately connected thus, the Holy Spirit should not be seen outside of Christ's life and work. It appeals to *Redemptoris Missio*:

This is the same Spirit who was at work in the incarnation and in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and who is at work in the Church. He is therefore not an alternative to Christ nor does he fill a sort of void which sometimes suggested as existing between Christ and the Logos.<sup>77</sup>

Moreover, with regard to the role of the Spirit in the various religions, the Declaration states that it is the Spirit who prepares the hearts of peoples of all faiths for the Gospel, understood in reference to Christ. Quoting *Redemptoris Missio*:

Whatever the Spirit brings about in human hearts and in the history of peoples, in cultures and religions, serves as

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid (as quoted from *Gaudium et Spes*, 22).

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid (as quoted from *Redemptoris Missio*, 28. For the "seeds of the Word" cf also St. Justin Martyr, Second Apology 8, 1-2; 10, 1-3; 13: ed. E.J. Goodspeed, 84; 85; 88-89.)

<sup>77</sup> Ibid (as quoted from *Redemptoris Missio*, 29).

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.'<sup>78</sup>

In the above affirmation of the unity and connection between the action of Spirit and that of Christ, the Declaration asserts that the action of the Spirit is never outside nor parallel to the action of Christ, upholding the one salvific economy of the One and Triune God.

This is fulfilled and realized in the mystery of the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus, actualized with the cooperation of the Holy Spirit and extended in its salvific value to all men and to the entire universe.<sup>79</sup>

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

Some theologians propose to consider salvation, not as one exclusively brought by Christ's death on the cross, but as multi-faceted, i.e. salvation in God can be attained in various religions in the practice of their own faith. Salvation means sharing in God's universal saving mystery. Salvation is one, not in Christ, but only in God. This proposal would mean, according to them, more encouragement to participate in dialogue, tolerance and respect for other religions.

However, the Declaration warns that the consequence of such proposal is the denial of the unicity and salvific universality of the mystery of Jesus Christ.<sup>80</sup> Stating that there is no biblical foundation for this proposal, the Declaration continues to affirm that Christ, through the Paschal Mystery, has fulfilled and perfected salvation. He is the fullness and center of salvation history. It states,

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.<sup>81</sup>

The Declaration attests to this article of faith, citing several New Testament texts:

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.



The Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world (1 Jn 4:14); Behold the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world (Jn 1:29); There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12); [Jesus is] Lord of all, judge of the living and the dead, whoever believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name (Acts 10:36,42,43); “Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth – as in fact there are many gods and many lords – yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist (1 Cor 8:5-6); For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish, but may have eternal life. God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him (Jn 3:16-17); [God] desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of truth. For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ, who gave himself as a ransom for all (1 Tim 2:4-6).

The Declaration also mentions the experience of the first Christians, who, in awareness of this one universal gift of salvation offered by the Father through Jesus Christ in the Spirit (cf. Eph 1:3-14) encountered the Jewish people, presenting to them the fulfillment of their long expected salvation in Christ and confronted the pagans faced with a plurality of saviors, offering them Jesus as the sole Messiah.<sup>82</sup> In other words, the first followers of Christ, in confrontation with other religions, have not tried to reconsider nor abandon His identity as the Son of God, the Messiah, so as to “adjust” to their sensibilities and ideas, but proclaimed the salvific mystery of God in Christ. Quoting *Gaudium et Spes*,

The Church believes that Christ, who died and was raised for the sake of all (cf. 2 Cor 5:15) can, through his Spirit, give man the light and the strength to be able to respond to his highest calling, nor is there other name under heaven given among men by which they are to be saved (cf. Acts 4:12). The Church likewise believes that the key, the center, and the purpose of the whole of man’s history is to be found in its Lord and Master.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid (as quoted from *Gaudium et Spes*, 10).

Thus, the Declaration affirms the truth of the Catholic faith that must be firmly believed: “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.”<sup>84</sup>

In affirming the one economy of salvation accomplished in Christ, it does not mean that the Church has excluded the religious experiences of people and their role and meaning in God’s universal plan. Further, the Declaration states that theology today 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.<sup>85</sup> In other words, the unique mediation of Christ should not be seen as isolated salvation offered to Christians alone, but that it ‘gives rise to a manifold cooperation which is but a participation in this one source.’<sup>86</sup>

Accordingly, in this manifold cooperation of the various religious traditions, the Church invites all peoples engaged in inter-faith dialogue to explore this more deeply, looking at their own role and meaning in the one and universal plan of God. However, the Declaration also cautions people to be consistent with the principle of Christ’s unique mediation,<sup>87</sup> i.e. Christ is the only mediator between God and man. Mediations done by religious traditions are but a participation in this one mediation of Christ. They cannot be placed up to par or complementary to Him. Quoting *Redemptoris Missio*,

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.<sup>88</sup>

From this unique and absolute salvific mediation of Christ, proposals to have various forms of mediation outside the unique mediation of Christ are contrary to the articles of Catholic faith<sup>89</sup> and thus to be repudiated and abandoned.

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid (as quoted from *Lumen Gentium*, 62).

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid (as quoted from *Redemptoris Missio*, 5).

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 14.

Again, so as to provide equality and respect to all religions in dialogue, theologians propose to refrain the use of terms like ‘unicity,’ ‘universality,’ ‘absoluteness,’ giving the impression of an excessive emphasis on the significance and value of the salvific event of Jesus Christ in relation to other religions.<sup>90</sup>

In response to the above proposal, the Declaration says that such language is “simply being faithful to revelation.”<sup>91</sup> Quoting the Scriptures, this revelation of the mystery of Christ comes as a development of sources of faith. It was the first community of believers “who recognized in Jesus a salvific value such that he alone, as Son of God made man, crucified and risen, by the mission received from the Father and in the power of the Holy Spirit, bestows revelation (cf. Mt 11:27) and divine life (cf. Jn 1:12; 5:25-26; 17:2) to all humanity and to every person.”<sup>92</sup>

That recognition by the first believers continues in the consciousness of faith of the Church, affirming the significance and value of Christ for man and his history, unique and singular, proper to him alone, exclusive, universal and absolute.<sup>93</sup> Quoting *Gaudium et Spes*,

The Word of God, through whom all things were made, was made flesh, so that as perfect man, he could save all men and sum up all things in himself. The Lord is the goal of human history, the focal point of the desires of history and civilization, the center of mankind, the joy of all hearts, and the fulfillment of all aspirations. It is he whom the Father raised from the dead, exalted and placed at his right hand, constituting him judge of the living and the dead.<sup>94</sup>

Moreover, quoting the encyclical *Redemptoris missio*,

It is precisely this uniqueness of Christ which gives him an absolute and universal significance whereby, while belonging to history, he remains history’s center and goal: I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end (Rev 22:13).<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid (as quoted from *Gaudium et Spes*, 45).

<sup>95</sup> Ibid (as quoted from *Redemptoris Missio*, 6).

In other words, terms such as “unicity, universality, absolute” as well as “exclusive and universal,” when applied to Jesus Christ, are firmly grounded on revelation, Scriptures and Tradition. These terms are attested and kept by the early Christians and the Church down the centuries as an article of faith to be observed by an “obedience of faith.”<sup>96</sup>

## Summary

The Great Jubilee of 2000 saw the writing of the Declaration *Dominus Iesus*, a document purposely done to recognize Jesus Christ with great solemnity that year. Likewise, it was a reaction to the ongoing problem of relativism which sought to undermine the identity of Christ, as traditionally understood by the Church, especially by theologians pursuing dialogue with other faiths.

Stating the Church’s faithfulness to Christ’s mission of proclaiming the Gospel to the world, the Declaration re-affirms that Jesus is the: 1. fullness and definitive revelation of God, thereby rejecting the notion of a limited, incomplete, or imperfect revelation, subject to be complemented by other religions in him; 2. only Son and Word of the Father, thereby rejecting the notion of having two separate economies of salvation: that of the Eternal Word and Incarnate Word; 3. one who brought salvation to fulfillment, through the event of his incarnation, death and resurrection, thereby rejecting the notion that salvation in God is multi-faceted and this salvation can be attained in various religions, apart from Christ, in the practice of their own faith.

In the writing of the *Declaration*, future proposals of doing interreligious dialogue will have to be grounded and guided along these teachings in reference to Christ. ■



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<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 7.