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AN ECUMENICAL HANDBOOK

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- 25 Charles Anthony Ryerson III, "Meaning and Modernization in Tamil India: Primordial Sentiments and Sanskritization" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1979), 21.
- 26 Guder says "Barth, in effect, is proposing that the church return to its New Testament beginnings to discover its vocation today." *Risking Beginnings*, (Inaugural Address) 13.
- 27 I referring to the patristic phrase "risking Christ for Christ's sake" which was used by M.M. Thomas to entitle his book *Risking Christ for Christ's Sake* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1987).
- 28 Justo González has written a provocative article entitled "Hanging on an Empty Cross: The Hispanic Mainline Experience" in *Protestantes/Protestants* edited by David Maldonado Jr. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 293-303.
- 29 Carlos F. Cardoza-Orlandi, "Nos llamaron: mulatos, fiesteros, pero redimibles: Antropología misionera y protestantismo en Puerto Rico," *Apuntes* 14.4 (Winter 1994): 109.
- 30 Angel M. Mergal, *Puerto Rico: Enigma y Promesa* (San Juan: Editorial Club de la Prensa, 1960), p. 115; y José Luis González, *El país de cuatro pisos* (Río Piedras: Ediciones Huracán, 1983), pp. 20-23, 28.
- 31 Daniel Ramirez, "Flor y Canto Apostólico: Preliminary Inquiries into Latino Pentecostal Hymnody," (Paper delivered to the Society of the Scientific Study of Religión/PARAL-CUNY, Nashville, TN, Nov. 9, 1996).
- 32 This hymn was translated by Melanie Mitchell and myself.
- 33 James E. Loder and W. Jim Neidhardt, *The Knight's Move* (Colorado: Helmers and Howard, 1992) 35-59.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 35.

Comment

AN ECUMENICAL HANDBOOK

José Maria Vigil
Translated by Paul Burns

An Ecumenical Handbook

Recent press reports say that the «Pontifical council for the Unity of Christians, of which cardinal Walter Kasper is President, is preparing an ecumenical handbook, intended as a guide for dioceses and parishes in inter-confessional activities». I am fully in accord with the timing and the need for a handbook, not only for inter-confessional and even inter-religious activities, but also for ordinary activities within a single confession. Ecumenism is not just for dialogue with others; it is also dialogue with ourselves. Inter-religious dialogue will be useful only if it is preceded by an «intra-dialogue», for a possible handbook to which I put forward the following minimal principles.

- Never more to speak of «the» true religion. They are all true. Phenomenologists of religion have long considered as obsolete the

distinction between revealed and natural religions. The best theologians view all religions as «revealed».

- Not to hold that the Christian religion has the fullness of truth... it too has limitations of which it ought to take stock, blind points that it should try to make up for, and an institutional framework universally recognized as obsolete, which it should de-idolize and relativize.

- It is imperative to abandon the inclusivism and accept the pluralism of the means to salvation. Just as it was possible to move beyond the exclusivism («outside the Church there is no salvation») professed by Christianity for more than a millennium and a half, so it is possible to abandon its new version, the currently official inclusivism («outside Christ there is no salvation»). The institutional Church is hostage to its own dogmatic pronouncements and will not be able to change until a new theoretical revolution takes place in it. Meanwhile, only the firm position of lucid and liberated Christians will do true service to the updating of Christianity.

- It is urgent to abandon the myth that God wanted one single religion and that all others are human errors. Every religion is a spark of God's infinite Light placed in human beings, more or less well perceived. Religious pluralism is good and there is no reason to reduce it. A single world religion is neither likely nor even desirable as an end point for humankind.

- «The» chosen people does not exist. The Jewish people were not it and neither are Christians. All primitive peoples have believed themselves «the» chosen. But God is not unjust, and God chooses all.

- Jesus' ecumenical, dialoguing, open tolerant, optimistic... approaches are still the best model Christianity can offer and adopt in regard to ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue.

- We need to reconsider the christological dogma of Nicaea-Chalcedon, which acts as an «enclave of fundamentalism» within Christianity. We must not limit ourselves to reinterpreting it, leaving its

basic affirmation intact, but confront its roots as well. How does it arise, where does it come from, with what authority, what validity or meaning does it have? We cannot make the essence of Christianity consist in canonizing the reflections of certain primitive communities, unduly considered to be the complete word of God and so irreformable. This belittles God, Jesus, and Christianity.

- We must accept once and for all that no one is in «a gravely defective situation of salvation» on account of the religion or Church into which they have been born. We cannot believe in an unjust God.

- The time of classical missions is over. Proselytism has to be abandoned. Mission is justified only if it is going to listen as much as proclaim, to learn as much as to share. The mission of mission is none other than the spreading of love, of inter-religious dialogue, and of seeking forgiveness.

- A sincere ethic of freedom, which would renounce inherited coercive means (conquests, inquisition, confessional States, colonialisms, lack of religious freedom...) and even those still practised (infant baptism) will reduce Christians in numbers, but increase them in truth. So the crisis of falling numbers may be a crisis of growth in quality and in truth, and should be hailed with optimism if it is put to sincere use.

Adopting the Golden Rule («Do to others as you would have them do to you», present in all the great religions of the world as almost literally identical expressions) as the practical agenda for inter-religious dialogue. The best thing religions can do is to join together in service of life and of peace in the world, based on the option for the poor. This is the way to the unity (not unification) we all desire.