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The Dialogue of religions

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1. The dialogue of religions did not arise out of the profound dynamic of theology but was rather forced by circumstances. The danger then is to make accommodations without revising the theological assumptions: generally *new proposals* are made on the basis of *old* (or are not adequately reconsidered) *presuppositions*.

2. This is what is happening with the *fundamental concept of revelation*. Vatican II speaks only of “elements of truth” in other religions, but not of “revelation,” and the current Pope is even more reserved.

In the theological unconscious the idea of revelation as a “special intervention” of God through “inspired” persons is still installed. Revelation is seen as a psychological “miracle” that necessarily makes it something exclusive, that only happens in the revealer and in his/her religion. Others have to accept only “by authority.” (Bonhoffer speaks of “the positivism of revelation,” in his criticism of Barth: “eat, little bird, or die.”)

3. Based on the *unity of creation-salvation*, we need to see that God is *always* trying to be known to *everyone*.

For God, there is no reservation or choice: “*maximum possible revelation*.”

When someone “wakes up to the fact” and discovers something of what God is trying to make manifest, *revelation in the strict sense* happens. For that reason we have to ground ourselves in the principle that *all religions are revealed*, each in their own way and measure.

But the *human reception*, with its limitations and/or resistances, inevitably gives rise to limits and differences. And so there follows the second principle that, if all are revealed, no religion is equal to another, nor does it achieve the same depth or purity. To deny this would be to deny history.

4. Based on this, then, both the truth of *pluralism* —since revelation is real and immediate in all religion— as also the inevitable *differences* in understanding and in the configuration of what is revealed are evident. There can be differences in simple perspective, but there can be also those that imply an inequality in depth or purity. (See the renewal movements in each religion and the differences between distinct religions: between “great” and small and also among the “great.”)

5. Two things follow from this: a) Given that all reception is finite, no religion is “perfect” in its historical realization and they all have some-

thing that the rest don't have so that they can both give and receive. b) It is possible to compare among them and it is legitimate to choose the one that is judged, "on the whole": to be most adequate; and for that reason we ordinarily choose a specific religion. There exists an "*asymmetric pluralism*."

6. From this it follows that *dialogue* has two important characteristics: 1) Everyone has to recognize real revelation in all the others: not only he/she *can* but also *must* learn from the rest. 2) It is never licit to cancel out a religion, but only to offer enrichment and/or a correction, if that religion itself recognizes and accepts it. Also, we need to allow ourselves to be enriched and/or corrected. (Paul speaks of "grafting.") For that reason "*inreligionation*" must be a complement to "inculturation," in order to avoid the danger of respecting the *culture* but substituting the *religion*.

7. Finally, we need to renew *the more delicate and difficult topics*. Revelation appears as a process of *growth* and opens up the possibility of definitive culmination. The New Testament believes that, *in fact*, this happened in Christ

1) *Culmination* is possible because definitive truths are sometimes reached in history. (See, for example, the indignity of slavery and the equality of women.) This happened in the revelation of God as *Abba* of infinite love and unconditional forgiveness, calling to love and to service. In history, this truth can become more concrete but cannot be surpassed: "*Jesuanic theocentrism*."

2) This implies a *denial of all exclusivism*, since it confirms and brings to perfection all that is truly achieved in the other religions. In fact, the Bible is already the fruit of dialogue and it is unthinkable without all that it received from other religions. Even today, the other religions help understand and bring about more fully in history the culmination achieved in Christ.

8. In reality, this encourages an "ecumenism in act" (in many aspects more real and effective than the theoretical). In the spiritual experience and in real praxis a growing process of "mutual inreligionation" is taking place among religions. For that reason no one has to "go back" or "return to the fold," but rather everyone advances in their own religion. In that way we become more alike and we are increasingly united because, when we welcome and incorporate the many and disparate elements of revelation, we all converge toward the common mystery (as those who are climbing the same mountain by different paths, are ever nearer to the one peak and so more united to one another).

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