



Is Not Christ the Only Saviour?

Rt Rev Bishop Thomas Dabre

Bishop of Poona

Abstract: In this article, the author, Bishop of Poona, holds that the significant pronouncements of the Christian faith emphatically enunciated in Dominus Iesus are compatible with a courageously positive and constructive approach to other Christians and other religions. He asks the fundamental question: Is Jesus the only Saviour? This leads to committed dialogue with other religions and traditions. Then he presents some important task for the theologians

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1. We Hold Some Truths as Being Essentials of the Christian Faith

The fundamental affirmations of the Christian faith emphatically enunciated in Dominus Iesus (DI) are compatible with a courageously positive and constructive approach to other Christians and other religions. In this article I want to outline some of the salient challenges that Dominus Iesus poses to the Indian theologians.

The Catholic Church teaches that she alone is the unique Church of Christ, and that all other religions, whether Christian or non-Christian, are sects. Pope Pius XII teaches in his encyclical *Mystici Corporis*: “For in one spirit, says the Apostle, ‘were we all baptized into one Body, whether Jews or Gen-

tiles, whether bond or free.’ As therefore in the true Christian community there is only one Body, one Spirit, one Lord, and one Baptism, so there can be only one faith.”

Dominus Iesus states emphatically. “The definitive and complete character of the revelation of Jesus Christ, the nature of Christian faith 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 unicity 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.” (DI 4). Knowing the definitive character of revelation we understand that, “Christ, is at the same time the mediator and the fullness of all revelation” (DI 5). Therefore any limited, incomplete, or imperfect character of the revelation of Jesus Christ is contrary to the Church’s faith (DI 6).

The Church had taught that there was no salvation outside the Catholic Church. It is our faith that the divinity is in all its fullness in Jesus and this fullness is given to the Church, the Body of Christ. However, this does not mean that in our grasp of the faith and in living it out we cannot learn anything from these sources of the other religions. Certainly we can be enriched by them and particularly we Indians can be helped immensely in the process of the inculturation of the faith-life.

Vatican II admits, fundamentally, that non-Catholic Christians are members of the Mystical Body and not merely ordered to it. And so we need to understand that Christ 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, “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” (DI 8). It acknowledges the work of Jesus and the Holy Spirit in the work of salvation. “In contemporary theological reflection there often emerges an approach to Jesus of Nazareth that considers him a particular, finite, historical figure, who reveals the divine not in an exclusive way, but in a way complementary with other revelatory and salvific figures. The Infinite, the Absolute, the Ultimate Mystery of God would thus manifest itself to humanity in many ways and in many historical figures: Jesus of Nazareth would be one of these. More concretely, for some, Jesus would be one of the many faces which the Logos has assumed in the course of time to communicate with humanity in a salvific way.” (DI 9).

According to the Christian faith the divinity and unicity of the mediatory role of Christ are non-negotiables. However, this does not mean that we cannot be enriched by the other religions and their founders. We should be the first to recognize all that is good in them. “...an economy of the eternal Word that is valid also outside the Church and is unrelated to her, in addition to an economy of the incarnate Word. The first would have a greater universal value than the second, which is limited to Christians...” (DI 9).

2. Tasks Before Indian Theologians

The theologians are called to listen to Dominus Iesus. In the practice of dialogue between the Christian faith and other religious traditions, as well as in seeking to understand its theoretical basis more deeply, new questions arise that need to be addressed through pursuing new paths of research, advancing proposals, and suggesting ways of acting that call for attentive discernment. Without exaggeration we can say that religious pluralism is a great challenge facing the Church today in our country. We cannot deny the fact that Christianity

originated as minority movement and the early church is the classical example of it. Keeping this point in mind it is clear that the document, however, clearly admits that other religions can cooperate with the one universal mediation of Christ for salvation and thus they can participate in this one mediation of Christ (DI 14). In this sense *Gaudium et Spes* holds: "... theology today, in its reflection on the existence of other religious experiences and on their meaning in God's salvific plan, 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" (GS 22). The second important point in connection with religious pluralism is the operative presence of the Holy Spirit in cultures and religions and God's saving grace in view of his universal salvific will and participated mediation in the process of salvation.

This is the task for Indian theologians since we in India are surrounded by people of other religions and cultures. The Indian Theologians have carried on their thinking on interreligious dialogue, inculturation and the value of Indian religions and people.

1. A lived experience of the Christian community as a miniscule minority encountering religious fervour and the sincerity and genuine goodness of the people have a healthy influence on Indian theological pursuit. 2. The message from all these experiences, however, is that with regard to the religions of the others, we have to guard against an overtly negative description because people are too sensitive and defensive.

I think it is the task of Indian theologians to ensure a more acceptable and less provocative communication of the Christocentric ecclesial faith. Such a mode of communication is the greater burden and challenge laid upon us in the light of *Dominus Iesu*. As we keep the memory of Jesus alive, we keep his ongoing presence. Jesus always thought of the Father and his needy brothers and sisters. He is inviting us to go beyond us to give priority to the other.