

Responses to objections to the Mission

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Pilgrim friends,

You have no doubt noticed, on leaving Paris, the looks of people who saw

pass the column. [[Link to the 2020 poster](#)] Many of them are unaware of the gospel message, many are living far from God. What can we do for them? The answer is simple: **to make sure that they encounter Christ. It's a question of salvation!** As St. Peter reminds us in a famous speech: " *There is no salvation in any other [than Jesus]; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved.*¹ »

Yes, Jesus is the only Saviour of men, the only door to true happiness. The doctrine of the Church is very clear and was recalled in an important text by Cardinal Ratzinger, the future Benedict XVI, *Dominus Iesus* (2000): " *It is necessary to firmly believe, as a permanent element of the Church's faith, the truth about Jesus Christ, Son of God, **Lord and only Saviour**, who by his incarnation, death and resurrection fulfilled the history of salvation, of which he is the fullness and the center.* »

In other words, for a man to be saved, he must be united to Christ. This, then, is the purpose of the mission: to enable men to meet Jesus, to be united to Him, and to walk, sustained by the grace of God, towards Heaven.

Usually, this union with Christ takes place through baptism, which gives us the grace of faith, makes us children of God and members of the visible Church.

But immediately the question arises: **what about people who do not have access to the message of the Gospel, or who belong to the**



The Dispute of the Philosophers, José de Ribera

1. Acts 4:11-12.

other religious denominations? Can they be saved? And if so, is the mission so necessary? For if, as Polnareff sang, "*we will all go to Paradise*", or if all religions are paths to heaven, then proclaiming Christ to those who ignore or reject him is of little use!

I therefore propose to you, in this meditation, to "twist the neck" of certain ideas that are current today, and which are so many objections to the necessity of the mission.

1. Can people who are not Catholics be saved?

Answer: Yes, but with greater difficulty than those who obviously belong to the Catholic Church. To understand this, let us listen to what St. Paul tells us in the First Epistle to Timothy: "*God wills that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.*" This means that God offers **to all men** who have reached the age of reason, at least at some point in their lives, **the graces sufficient to be saved.**³

For all that, the Catholic Church, and she alone, possesses the fullness of the truth that saves. Those who are not Catholics are therefore in a situation of "*grave poverty in relation to those in the Church who have the fullness of the means of salvation*"⁴. It is only in the Church, in fact, that we find **all the supernatural truths** that God has revealed to us, **the sacraments** that communicate grace to us, and **pastors** (popes, bishops and priests) who guide us on the way to heaven. It is therefore much easier to save oneself by being in full communion with the Catholic Church.

2. If one can be saved without being a Catholic, how can we understand the principle "*Outside the Church there is no salvation*"?

Let us first recall that this adage, "*outside the Church, no salvation*", is part of Catholic doctrine, and is present in full in the

2.1 Tim 2:4.

3. This is what the Second Vatican Council teaches: "Since Christ died for all and man's last vocation is truly unique, that is, divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all, in a way that God knows, the possibility of being associated with the Paschal Mystery." (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 22).

4. *Dominus Jesus* 22.

*Catechism of the Catholic Church*⁵. Why is it impossible to be saved outside the Church? because Jesus is the only Saviour, and the Church, in the words of Bossuet, " *is Jesus Christ spread and communicated* ." Or, as Joan of Arc said: " *I am of the opinion that Jesus Christ and the Church are one*. Christ is the vine, we are the branches. If the branch separates from the vine, it withers and dies.⁶ This truth implies two things:

- 1- " *Those who refuse either to enter the Catholic Church or to persevere in it, when they know it to be founded of God through Jesus Christ as necessary, such can not be saved* " ⁷;
- 2- People who are saved without being Catholic can only be saved because they belong, in a certain way, to Christ and therefore to the Church.

3. But then, how can one belong to Christ without being Catholic?

Here a distinction must be made between two types of belonging to the Church, the belonging of the body (visible) and the belonging of the heart (invisible).

- 1- **To belong to the visible Church**, three conditions are required:
 - To profess the Catholic faith in its entirety;
 - To be able to receive the sacraments;
 - Recognize the ecclesiastical hierarchy and obey the legitimate orders of its pastors.

These three conditions overlap with the three powers of the Church, which are also her three main missions, which she has received from Christ himself: **the power to teach** (which is opposed by heretics), **the power to sanctify** (which is opposed by the excommunicated), **and the power to govern** (which is opposed by schismatics). **Thus schismatics**, like the Orthodox, separated by the refusal to recognize the authority of the Pope, **and heretics**, like the testators, separated by the refusal of one or more dogmatic truths, are excluded from the visible Church. But be careful! the fact of visibly belonging to the Church does not guarantee salvation

5. CCC 846.

6. Cf. Jn 15:5-6.

7. *Lumen Gentium* 14.

however, a Catholic person who does not persevere in charity (committing a mortal sin) remains " *in body* " in the Church, but not " *in heart* " (cf. CCC 837).

- 2- There is also **a sense of belonging that we call *invisible***. It is valid for people who, through no fault of their own, do not know Christ and his Church, but who, by the grace of God and the action of the Holy Spirit, have the desire, at least implicit, more or less conscious, to belong to him. This desire is the fruit of charity, which God, in his mercy and by means known only to him, has placed in the hearts of these people. They can therefore be saved, but only because Christ is already working in them. We thus find this central truth: **Christ is indeed the only Saviour, even for people who do not visibly belong to the Catholic Church.**

4. Under what conditions can people who do not visibly belong to the Church be saved?

It is sometimes heard that it is enough for these people to follow their conscience and live according to the requirements of the natural law to be saved. **This is not true.** Following the requirements of the natural law (not killing, not lying, not harming one's neighbor, etc.) is a necessary but not sufficient condition for salvation. What for? Simply because salvation is **supernatural**, while the natural law is only... natural. In other words, to be saved, one must have received sanctifying grace. This is what the Church, and in particular Pius IX, teaches:

*"Those who are invincibly ignorant of our holy religion, but who carefully observe the natural law and its precepts, engraved by God in the hearts of all, who are disposed to obey the Lord, and who lead an honorable and righteous life, can, **with the help of divine light and grace**, acquire eternal life."*⁸

Let us summarize. A person who consciously refuses to belong to the Church, or separates himself from it, when he knows that he is necessary for salvation could not be saved. But a person who **through invincible ignorance** (that is, ignorance that is not his fault, that is not guilty) does not know the Church and Christ can be saved,

8. Pius IX, *Quanto Conficiamur*, 1863; cf. also *Lumen Gentium* 16; CEC 847.

provided that she has the desire, at least implicit, to be united to Christ. This implicit desire implies a good disposition of the soul, which includes wanting to submit its will to God's. It is difficult to specify the exact content of this desire. Theologians rely on this sentence from the Epistle to the Hebrews: "*Without faith it is impossible to please God; for he who draws near to God must believe that God exists, and that he is the rewarder of those who seek him.*" In any case, one must be convinced that if a person seeks the truth with a sincere heart, he will get answers. But most of the time, these answers will be given only by the explicit proclamation of the Christian faith. **Hence the decisive importance of the mission:** if Catholics are silent, and put the light under a bushel, **it is quite possible that these people in search will stop on the way.**

Because it must be repeated: it is much easier to save oneself when one belongs totally to the Catholic Church.

5. And what about people who belong to other religions?

One of the most serious errors of our time, which is unfortunately very widespread, is to believe that all religions are equal, and that they are authentic paths to salvation. Some even go so far as to affirm that the different religions are complementary, each possessing a part of truth that must be shared in interreligious dialogue. This is what is called false ecumenism, which is one of the most serious consequences of modernism, and therefore one of the causes of the traditional reaction, because it is an insult to the one true God.

Pius XI already refuted this error in the encyclical *Mortalium animos* :
"*Now, the partisans of this theory are in the greatest error; They seem to be pursuing the most noble purpose of promoting charity among all Christians; but how can charity turn to the detriment of faith? [...] Therefore, since charity is founded on an honest and sincere faith, unity of faith is the principal bond that must unite Christ's disciples. [...] For it is not permissible to bring about the union of Christians otherwise than by favoring the return of the dissenters to the one true Church of Christ, from which they once unfortunately distanced themselves.* »

9. Heb 11:6.

The aim of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue is therefore not for Catholics to come and enrich themselves with the elements present in other religions, but, in a climate of charity and freedom, **to proclaim the truth of the Catholic faith to those who do not recognize it, or not completely.** The Catholic Church, to use an image dear to the Fathers of the Church, is like Noah's ark: only those who have climbed into it escape death.

Does this mean that everything is false in other religions and that none of those who live there can be saved? Of course not. The Church recognizes that some elements present in non-Catholic religions are good, but mixed with many errors, which disfigure the divine truth. God can use these good elements to constitute an evangelical preparation, which disposes hearts to receive the truth. But if these people are saved, it is rather because of **their belonging to this false religion than because of it.** And of course, some religions are closer to Christianity than others: it is objectively easier for an Orthodox, who recognizes Christ and can benefit from valid sacraments, to be saved than for a Muslim or a Buddhist.

6. Is missionary zeal opposed to freedom of conscience?

This is an objection that is sometimes heard: by displaying your religion in this way, you are proselytizing, you are forcing people! The answer was given by the apologist Saint Justin as early as the second century: " *Nothing is more contrary to religion than coercion*"¹⁰. The mission is anything but manipulation, or a set of techniques to convince the weak: for faith must be a free choice: this is the heart of Christianity. But how can we make this free choice to believe, if no one speaks to us about Christ? This is the question of Saint Paul: " *How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard ? And how will they hear about him, if no one announces it ? [...] Thus faith comes from what one hears.*"¹¹ This is why Christ came to speak to the world: "To bear witness to the truth. Whoever is of the truth hears my voice."¹² To be a missionary is therefore not an act of constraint, it is on the contrary an act of love, that of sharing a treasure, that of the Truth: free to the person

10. *Apology* I, 2.

11. Rom 10:14-17.

12. Jn 18:37.

to accept it, or to refuse it. As Saint Bernadette said: "I am not responsible for making you believe it, I am responsible for telling you."

7. Finally, does the Christian possess the truth?

Christ said: "*I am the truth.*"¹³ The Catholic who is united to Christ is united to the truth. He does not possess it as one possesses a material good, of course, but as a light that he is called to communicate to others. How? Through the explicit proclamation of the faith, sustained by the witness of a life in all things in conformity with the radicality of the Gospel. We carry this treasure of truth in a vessel of clay,¹⁴ but it remains a treasure that all men and women must enjoy: urged by the love of Christ,¹⁵ let us **go and seek out those who seek to proclaim to them the truth that saves, Jesus Christ.**

" Quotes

What death could be more fatal to souls than freedom from error?
St. Augustine, Ep. 166

We know it, and you know it, those who are invincibly ignorant of our holy religion, who carefully observe the natural law and its precepts, engraved by God in the hearts of all, who are disposed to obey the Lord, and who lead an honorable and just life, can with the help of the light and divine grace, to acquire eternal life; for God sees perfectly [...] and in his supreme goodness, in his infinite clemency, he does not allow us to suffer eternal punishments without being guilty of some voluntary fault. But we are also perfectly familiar with this Catholic dogma: that outside the Church one cannot be saved, that it is impossible to obtain eternal salvation by showing oneself to be rebellious against the authority and decisions of this Church [...].

Pius IX, *Quanto Conficiamur*, 1863

We must maintain that the way to salvation always passes through Christ, and that the task therefore falls to the Church and her missionaries to make him known and loved in every time, in every place and in every culture. Outside of Christ, there is no salvation.

John Paul II, General Audience, 31 May 1995

13. Jn 14:6.

14. 2 Cor 4:7.

15. 2 Cor 5:14.