

NOTES FOR CARDINALS / 5

Jesus is the only Saviour, hence the mission of the Church

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*In view of the forthcoming conclave, we are publishing a series of in-depth articles inspired by the document signed by **Demos II** (an anonymous cardinal), which sets out the priorities for the next conclave in order to remedy the confusion and crisis created by Francis' pontificate.*

The victim of this "pastoral shift" has been none other than the Church's mission to proclaim Jesus Christ as the only Saviour of humanity and to establish his kingdom of grace in accordance with the Lord's explicit command: Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising 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 28:19-20). The command - not advice, not an option - is literally to 'make disciples' of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Blessed Trinity and establishing a life in accordance with the Lord's teaching.

This pontificate accelerated the process of exhausting the Church's missionary impulse, in particular by placing excessive emphasis on the condemnation of so-called 'proselytism'. The problem with this insistence on censorship lies precisely in the fact that the meaning of the proselytism to be condemned is not specified at all; thus, any action of the Church that goes beyond "witnessing to the good life" could end up in this category.

On closer examination, however, the word "proselyte" etymologically means "one who approaches", i.e. a "newcomer". And in this sense, proselytising means precisely the 'making of disciples' commanded by Christ. Proselytism understood in this way is fully in line with the mission of the Church, whose greatest joy is to increase the number of her children. There is certainly a negative meaning of the term: a kind of ideological indoctrination, unclear strategies aimed at seducing someone, summary actions simply aimed at increasing the number of members of the Church understood as a religious association or sect, or even acts characterised by psychological, verbal or even physical violence. There is no doubt that this last meaning is a distortion of the Church's mission.

Now, however, the repeated disapproval of generic proselytism has in fact led to the condemnation of what is properly part of the Church's mission, which draws its strength from, but is not limited to, witness, as Paul VI explained in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 22: "Even the most finest witness will prove ineffective in the long run if it is not explained, justified - what Peter called giving "the reason for the hope you have" - and made explicit by a clear and unequivocal proclamation of the Lord Jesus. The Good News proclaimed by the witness of life sooner or later has to be proclaimed by the word of life. ... There is no true evangelisation if the name, the

teaching, the life, the promises, and the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, are not proclaimed”.

The witness of life not only does not exclude the witness of the word of truth, but demands it: the Church is called to proclaim Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only Saviour, to whom she seeks to bear witness in her life, avoiding the counterproductive contradiction between word and life. Obviously, the virtue of prudence and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit will show in every circumstance how this can be done; sometimes there may be situations limited in time and space in which it would be imprudent to go beyond the witness of life, but this cannot mean that the Church as such must cease to proclaim the truth that saves, as well as the condemnation of evil and error.

The second serious problem lies in the fact that statements have been made which seem to contradict the dogmas of Jesus Christ, the only Saviour of humanity, and of the Catholic Church, the only Church willed by the Lord Jesus, outside of which there is no salvation. The Declaration *Dominus Iesus* wisely clarified these two fundamental points of Revelation in order to avoid interpreting them in a rigidly exclusivist manner with regard to members of other Christian Churches and communities, as well as those belonging to other non-Christian religions. However, the same statement warned against certain alleged "inclusivist openings" that undermine the core of the faith.

A statement such as the one signed by Pope Francis in Abu Dhabi on 4 February 2019, according to which "pluralism and diversity of religion, colour, sex, race and language are a wise divine will with which God created human beings", in its ambiguity (positive divine will or permission?), offends the evangelical faith, in its ambiguity, humiliates the evangelising activity of the Church, which recognises that God does not favour a single religion, because there is only one, the Word made flesh, in whom we can be saved: "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).

Even more problematic is another statement made by Francis in Singapore in September 2024: "All religions are a way to God. They are - I make a comparison - like different languages, different idioms, to get there. This statement has nothing to do with a healthy inter-religious dialogue, but is the end of the meaning of Christianity and the Catholic Church, which are not about the many human ways to God, but about the only way opened by God Himself in His only begotten Son, "the way, the truth and the life" (Jn 14:6). No one comes to the Father except through Him (cf. *ibid.*); no one knows the Father except Him and those to whom He reveals Him (cf. Mt 11:27); no one can enter

the Kingdom of Heaven unless he is born "of water and the Spirit" (Jn 3:5).

The presence of elements of goodness and truth in cultures and religions does not allow for such a levelling down that any religion can be considered a path leading to God. Lumen gentium does not teach that all religions lead to God, but that "whatever is good and true" to be found in non-Christians "is considered by the Church to be a preparation for the reception of the Gospel", without concealing the fact that "very often people, deceived by evil, have erred in their reasoning and exchanged the truth of God for a lie". For this reason, "the Church, mindful of the Lord's command: 'Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature' (Mk 16:15), takes care to encourage and support missions" (LG, 16).

Mission is this impulse of the Church, driven by the love of Christ, who wants "all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth", that saving truth which the Apostle sums up as follows There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 2:4-5). This proclamation is anything but a simple approach to other ways, considering them as valid alternatives for salvation and allowing everyone to follow them in peace. This false and irenic view has nothing to do with the incredible missionary zeal that the Church has had for centuries and that has led countless missionaries to give their lives so that other brothers and sisters might encounter the light of the Gospel and become heirs of the Kingdom. Our Pastors seem to have lost this dimension, which is essential not only to their identity but also to the meaning of the redemptive incarnation of the Word, who came to "shine on those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death" (Lk 1:79).