

all the more interesting and all the more respectful of one's dialogue partners. I find the best Buddhist dialogue partners, for example, to be those who are sure of what they believe, equally sure that it is true, and not shy about sharing it and arguing for it. The idea that one needs to check one's truth claims at the door in order responsibly to engage in dialogue is a confused and pernicious one: *DI* rebuts it with clarity and dispatch.

In too-brief summary: *DI* is a powerful and thoughtful restatement of orthodoxy with respect to the necessarily trinitarian shape of the divine economy, and with respect to how Christians ought think about non-Christian religious traditions from the heart of that orthodoxy. The document offers nothing new on these matters, which is no criticism since that was not its purpose. It does offer a necessary corrective to views about these matters that abandon the grammar of the faith; and while I could wish that its critique of complementarity views had been more sensitive to the distinction between ontological and epistemological claims, it is nonetheless on the whole a document good to think with, a much-needed reminder of how to think theologically about these matters, and of the virtue of having a magisterium to think with.

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COMMENTS OF FRANCIS X. CLOONEY

While much has been said and written about *Dominus Iesus* in the months since the document's release, it raises important issues which continue to demand our attention, and I am honored to be part of this panel. Given the shortness of time, these brief reflections must remain provisional and open to qualification and correction in our discussions. (For a more developed presentation of my ideas, I refer you to my article on the topic in *America*, October 28, 2000, "*Dominus Iesus* and the New Millennium.")

I begin with an observation intended to govern all that follows: *Dominus Iesus* is our document, an articulation by our own Catholic community of issues which concern all of us. Like its authors, we too confess the full and sufficient centrality of Jesus to our lives as Christians. We too believe that our discipleship overflows into distinctive ways of faith, that Christ's Spirit inspires our sacred texts in a special way, and that rites and sacraments of the Church powerfully mediate God's gracious presence to us. We too believe that Christ fills our horizon and in a sense creates the world for us. There is no world "outside of Christ," beyond his presence and work. We should be grateful to the declaration's authors for spelling out in important ways what we believe. If in the following paragraphs I will be somewhat critical, my remarks are to be taken as a contribution to our community's own reflection and self-criticism, and not as

a criticism of "them" by "us." It is only in the context of this opening remark that I wish to make three comments of a critical nature which highlight how the declaration's authors must inevitably shared some of the challenges faced in the theological community. Each can be presented only briefly, and I hope my listeners will be patient with the lack of nuance in what is stated so briefly here.

First, it seems that the authors' legitimate claim that terms like "faith" and "inspiration" have specifically Christian meanings cannot be perfectly translated into the stipulation that those words are to be strictly reserved for their Christian usage—so that, for example, non-Christians have belief but not faith, scriptures which are sacred but not inspired, rituals which help them toward God but are not sacramental, etc. Here I make this point simply on linguistic grounds: we do not own our language—English or Italian or Latin—and cannot successfully limit how words are used, grow and change in meaning. This is obviously the case in popular usage, but it is also true in specifically theological contexts, since scholars and leaders in other faith traditions too will continue to use the same words—"faith," "inspiration," "sacrament," etc.—in ways they find appropriate, influenced by but distinct from our usage, and their interpretations will in turn influence ours. Claims about the right meanings and uses of words will be at best approximate, new uses cannot be entirely excluded, and extended meanings—our faith, their faith; God's work in inspiring many scriptures; our sacred rites, their sacred rites—ought not to be ruled out too quickly, simply for the sake of linguistic neatness. The arguments must go deeper.

Second, and by extension, after nine months of global discussion and argument about it, *Dominus Iesus* appears to have become a stellar example of the dialogical nature of theological reflection today. Even if the declaration was aimed primarily at a Catholic and theological audience, its publication in numerous languages, posting at several websites, and the accompanying press conferences have all contributed from the start to the convocation of a wider Catholic and Christian, religious and even secular discussion of the document. From whatever position we begin reading it, our understanding of it is shaped and reshaped in this wider context as we learn from and argue with other interpreters and readers, inside and outside the Catholic community. I suggest furthermore that this complex wider conversation is indicative not just of factors extrinsic to the declaration, but also of a key aspect of the quest to understand our faith as this quest will occur from now on: theological reflection even on central issues of the Catholic faith will be deeply influenced by the reflections and reactions of a wider community; the meaning of the truths we proclaim will always be determined in part by those reactions; this will for the most part be a good phenomenon, not one to be lamented. Specifically, our confession that Jesus is Lord—a confession we cannot weaken or explain away in the 21st century—is a truth the meaning of which will be determined in part by how non-Christians understand and interpret it and, in a sense, return it to us with richer and purer meanings than we might discover simply by talking to ourselves about it.

Third, when we rightly and necessarily proclaim an integral truth about the Lord Jesus and the wholeness of a world of faith constituted by that truth, we must be very careful about how we translate that truth into claims about other religious traditions, particularly if we are making claims that should be at least partly accessible to all reasoning persons, and not simply abrupt confessions of our faith as true. Let us suppose for a moment, as the authors of the declaration seem to, that the truth of the Christian faith entails the falsity of other traditions' claims. Insofar as theological propositions are entailed, this could well be the case, since conflicting claims cannot all be affirmed simultaneously. But if this is so, it is imperative that we be able to specify what exactly is incorrect or untrue in the claims made by others, not merely abstractly or general terms, but in specific detail.

For instance, in paragraph 21 the declaration states that "it cannot be overlooked that other rituals, insofar as they depend on superstitions or other errors (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:20-21), constitute an obstacle to salvation" (n. 89). If this is true, and we ought not to dismiss the idea out of hand, it should be possible to state by way of example some of those superstitions and errors. It is not sufficient to say that all Islamic or all Hindu rites are "in essence" superstitious, simply because they are Hindu or Muslim. Such a claim would be tautologous, merely repeating in new words the original Christian faith claim, without supporting reasons that thoughtful persons might find acceptable. Nor would it be sufficient to point to superstitious or erroneous elements in this or that particular ritual performance, since even Roman Catholic rituals on occasion are marred by superstition or error.

The declaration gives two hints as to how one might think of the errors of other traditions. First, footnote 89 refers us to *Redemptoris Missio* n. 55, in which John Paul II in turn cites a statement made by Paul VI to the Council on September 29, 1963: "The Catholic Church, unquestionably, and to its regret, perceives gaps, insufficiencies and errors in many religious expressions as those indicated, yet she cannot fail to turn her thoughts to them as well, to remind them that the Catholic religion holds in just regard all that which in them is true, good and human." This reference, which is in an important way intelligent and generous, is nonetheless used in *Dominus Iesus* merely to indicate that "superstitions or other errors" come in the form of "gaps, insufficiencies and errors." No examples are given by Paul VI, John Paul II, or by the authors of *Dominus Iesus*. Until examples are given, we do not know how then to think usefully about other traditions' rituals: What are the "gaps" in a traditional Hindu fire rituals? What "insufficiencies" ought we to notice in Hindu temple worship? Which "errors" mar Friday worship in a mosque? Is it inherently "superstitious" to travel on pilgrimage to Mecca? If no such examples are ever given, this will be a departure from the apologetic tradition of the Church, which was often quite specific, and it will be a development of great importance.

The other indication of how to think about error in other traditions' ritual practices is given by the reference to 1 Corinthians 10:20-21: "[W]hat pagans

sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be partners with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons" (NRSV). This passage has rarely (or never?) been cited in postconciliar dialogue documents, and I am puzzled by its inclusion here, since it seems to indicate not merely errors or superstitions in other traditions' practices, but a wholesale condemnation and exclusion of them. The text does not shed any light on what kinds of specific errors we might find in other traditions' ritual practices. It is difficult to imagine what the authors meant for us to understand in citing it here, and it is imperative that at some point they explain the point of the citation.

I have studied Hindu ritual practices for twenty years, and I do not think it is at all easy to discover decisive flaws in the Hindu traditions, although I am not willing to deny that this might be possible. But if, in the short run, and as the declaration seems to suggest, our confession of the truth of our faith should carry over into claims about the untruth of other traditions, it is imperative that the authors instruct us on how to go about making specific claims which demonstrate to listeners why the declaration's positions are reasonable. Until good and plausible examples are given, we ought to be bold in our confession of the Christian faith, but a great deal more tentative in making claims about the errors supposedly found in other traditions.

This leads to my concluding remark. *Dominus Iesus* boldly states essential elements of what we Catholics believe in this new millennium, and as such it is a timely antidote to any weariness or laxity that might have crept into our personal and communal faith and theology. Yet too, and perhaps in a way unanticipated by its authors, it also exemplifies the very new context in which ecclesial and theological claims are to be pondered. *Dominus Iesus* proclaims its truths in a global context where many people of different traditions are listening and determined to participate, where we entirely control neither the vocabulary nor the interpretation of what we say, and where even the most authoritative Catholic teachers must provide publicly accessible evidence for the claims they make, if they wish to be taken seriously. This wider theological conversation about the truth of the lordship of Jesus requires a more nuanced teaching process than has previously been customary; to teach the truth of our faith in the new millennium we must teach differently, in dialogue and receptive to the suggestions and critiques of persons inside and outside the Church. Perhaps, though, this is not an entirely new situation; good teachers have always been those willing to listen and learn, even from those with whom they disagree.

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