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## Salvation

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"It has caused difficulties," observed Immaculate Heart of Mary Sister Nancy Hawkins, an assistant professor at St. Bernard's Institute.

"I think to myself, did those who put the document together realize there are very practical ramifications to putting out a document like this?"

The document definitely should encourage people to consider how they think about Jesus, she said. "At the same time, when you put a document out like this, when people read it the first thing they think off the top of their heads is, 'This is the end of ecumenical dialogue. How can we possibly dialogue with the Catholic Church if it believes we don't have any truth to speak?'"

Longtime ecumenical and interfaith proponents including Father Joe Brennan, a retired priest and adjunct professor at the University of Rochester, acknowledged what many describe as the document's negative tone and its effect on some dialogue partners. The fact that Cardinal Ratzinger has also said that other churches are not to be considered brothers and sisters — the very phrase Pope John Paul II used in *Ut Unum Sint*, "That All May Be One" — especially set them off, the priest noted.

Yet Father Brennan said, "It certainly raises problems but doesn't change my views or plans to continue working in this field at all. I can understand why people feel frustrated and angry, but I think you have to keep going."

The priest-professor belongs to a task force assigned this month by the diocesan Ecumenical Commission to write a response that parishes can use. He meets regularly with a group of rabbis and priests who will be discussing the declaration.

## What it said

Nowhere in its text did the declaration single out Asian or other regions as its primary subject. In a letter encouraging the presidents of bishops conferences to distribute the document, Cardinal Ratzinger stated there is a "growing presence of confused or erroneous ideas, and opinions both within the church generally and in certain theological circles" about church unity and the necessity of the Catholic Church for salvation. The document's "principal truths" require "irrevocable assent by the Catholic faithful," he wrote. "Particularly in the areas of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue and in Catholic universities and faculties of theology," the declaration must be a point of reference.

Frequently citing previous documents, the declaration makes the following key points:

- There is a difference between theological faith, which is adherence to the truth revealed by the one and true God, and belief in other religions, "which is religious experience still in search of the absolute truth and still lacking assent to God, who reveals himself."

- Only the Old and New Testaments are inspired texts. Sacred books of other religions receive from Christ the goodness and mercy they contain.

- Anyone who is saved, is saved through Christ. And, "Just as there is one Christ, so there exists a single body of Christ," which exists fully only in the Catholic Church.

- Separated churches and communities "suffer from defects" and "derive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church."

- Ecclesial communities that have not preserved the valid episcopate and "genuine and integral substance of the eucharistic mystery, are not churches in the proper sense. ... A valid episcopate implies bishops who have been ordained in an apostolic succession, going back to the days of the Apostles.

## In perspective

Msgr. William H. Shannon, professor emeritus of Nazareth College, is one of sev-

eral local observers who urged that the document be taken in perspective.

"This in no way reflects what I've seen to be the spirit of Pope John Paul II, in his writings and contacts with people of other religions," he said. "His attitude has been far more open and loving and working in terms in the sense of a sharing rather than a narrow view that restricts salvation to those who belong to the church ..."

"There's a narrowness that does not seem to reflect the very open spirit of Pope John Paul II. His ecumenical meetings with people have been wonderful. Not only would I say it does not represent the spirit of Pope John Paul II, but it seems to be in conflict with his 1995 encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*. He speaks about the rediscovery of brotherhood among Christians ... that they are no longer seen as strangers or enemies but as brothers and sisters," he continued.

In fact, some local speculation matches international speculation (both unattributed to individuals) reported by Catholic News Service as to how aware the pope was of the document's implications.

Because of its strict language and selective citations from Vatican II documents, Msgr. Shannon said, "One of the things I see in it is evidence of an almost desperate effort to rebuild walls, walls that Vatican II tore down between Catholics and other people. ... It's an indication of a very strong movement in the church to take Vatican II apart piece by piece. I think it's an unfortunate document."

He and other critics noted that the document makes no mention of progress of ecumenical and interfaith work over the past three or four decades.

Point by point, Msgr. Shannon compared *Dominus Iesus* with such documents as *Ut Unum Sint*. *Dominus Iesus* states, for example, "Certainly the various religious traditions contain and offer religious elements which come from God and which are part of what the Spirit brings about in human hearts and in the history of people ..."

But it goes on to say, "If it is true that the followers of other religions can receive divine grace, it is also certain that objectively speaking they are in a gravely deficient situation in comparison with those who, in the church, have the fullness of the means of salvation."

Here, Msgr. Shannon commented, "This is the picture of ecclesiastical smugness which would tend to decide how God can act. ... In other words, God can't do as much for them, in their situation."

"The Second Vatican Council said that to all people of good will, the grace of



Reuters/CNS

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, talks to journalists at the Vatican June 26, at a conference unrelated to the declaration, "Dominus Iesus: On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church," which he released Sept. 5.

## Regarding missions

In India, Archbishop Ivan Dias of Mumbai stated Oct. 10 that the only people upset over the new document are a few Catholic theologians and intolerant followers of other religions, Catholic News Service reported.

The majority of Catholics and others "accept the fact that this is our identity," he said. Yet it is widely believed among theologians in the Indian Catholic community that mediators other than Christ or other means of salvation exist, he said.

"There's no longer the attitude that if they have not received the Gospel they'll be lost," Msgr. Shannon said of missions in general. "Salvation is a gift of God. Salvation is really something that ultimately God does for us."

"Since the (Second Vatican) council, missionary people have changed their approach, they are more interested in entering into dialogue with people of other religions, but certainly open to receiving them into the church. But their goal, I don't think is primarily conversion. If some of them are interested when they hear about the Catholic Church, that's fine."

In June, Sister Hawkins will moderate a talk about the legitimacy of converting Hindus in India, which has become a big issue. The talk will be part of a meeting of the Catholic Theological Society of America, and the overall missions theme was chosen by an officer from Asia.

"It's a topic we all need to look at," she said, "to ask ourselves serious questions — what is my obligation to spread the word of Jesus and how do I do it — and at the same time remain respectful of someone not of my faith."

Often just the day-to-day contact with each other most influences others, she said. "I would love it if people would embrace what I know to be wonderful about Jesus. But it has to be their choice. ... I truly believe God is in charge of all of this."

"The idea of being saved is a Western term. Western theology is very linear; Eastern theology is very cyclical. The way to approach death and life is very different.

Paschal mystery is given to them."

And indeed, *Dominus Iesus* does state, "For those who are not formally and visibly members of the church, 'salvation in Christ is accessible by virtue of a grace which, while having a mysterious relationship to the church, does not make them formally part of the church but enlightens them in a way which is accommodated to their spiritual and material situation. This grace comes from Christ.'" The passage is quoted from the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*.

We're not able to talk till we find a common place." That common place appears to be prayer and mysticism, she added, saying "I don't think God deals with us differently in prayer depending on what religion you are: 'Oh, a Jew is talking to me. A Christian is talking to me. It's time to listen to a Protestant now.' God is God. No faith has a market on God because God is a mystery."

What is ironic about *Dominus Iesus*, she said, is that "a statement like that tends to push people away. I am a Catholic, I am going to die Catholic. For me, the Catholic Church is the truth."

But she would not take *Dominus Iesus* to others and use it to say they don't have the truth, she said. "Unfortunately when documents like this come out they tend to put you in a corner. It is very unfortunate. I do not wish to be put in a corner about my faith. I guess you could say I prefer to speak of these matters in more pastoral terms."

## Wildfire

For a document perhaps intended for Asian church leaders, *Dominus Iesus* is traveling far and wide, judging from published responses. By Oct. 1, the Rev. Womack was preaching on it at Covenant United Methodist Church, where he is co-pastor. Former president of the Greater Rochester Community of Churches, Rev. Womack has sent out on request numerous copies of his sermon, titled "A Protestant's Reply to the Cardinal."

"I am not convinced by reading it that my faith journey is deficient, that my church is deficient based on the standards declared in the Declaration, or that my Jewish and Islamic friends are any less 'saved' than my Roman Catholic brothers and sisters," the sermon states in part. "I at least must confess my deficiency in living out my faith; but, that deficiency comes from my failures as a moral human being, not because my church's essence is deficient."

Having heard Southern Baptists and members of such churches as the Southern-based Church of Christ make similar claims that their church or doctrine is absolutely essential for salvation, Rev. Womack stated, "it did occur to me one day that they all cannot be right. Somebody must be wrong. So, to make the claim that 'my way is the only way' divides the Christian witness and turns us Christian folk and our faith into an argumentative, contentious religion angrily maintaining the 'truth' of our particular perspective."

"Christian triumphalism," he said, often breeds skepticism and drives many away from the church.

Rev. Womack likewise took on the World Methodist Council for a statement he said he was not prepared to defend: that Christ is the one Savior of the world. He added that such a position, however, "does merit every Christian's reflection on the extent to which we deny the validity, truth, and merit of other faith traditions."

He said a statement like *Dominus Iesus* directs energy from social justice and the pursuit of justice and mercy. "It makes the case that what is important is not faith, but the form in which religion occurs."

## Word from the source

Cardinal Ratzinger himself responded to criticisms in an interview published Oct. 8 in the Vatican newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano*. He expressed "sadness and disappointment" that public reaction, for the most part, ignored the document's true theme. He said it was written because Pope John Paul II "wanted to offer the world a great and solemn recognition of Jesus Christ as Lord at the culminating moment of the Holy Year," according to a CNS account. He also said the declaration was not against ecumenism.

The cardinal restated the Vatican II conclusion that the church as Christ founded it "subsists" in the Catholic Church, as stated in the Vatican II document *Lumen Gentium*.

He said it made no sense to assert that "only ecclesial fragments exist and one must search for the best pieces" among the