Catholicism's Two Faces
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INTERFAITH

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Howl's of protest - even from fellow Christians - follow Vatican declaration that there is "no salvation" outside their Church

A followup report: Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders,August, 2000

Pope John Paul II,"announced his Eminence Cardinal Francis Arinze from the United Nations podium, "gives personal example as a promoter of reconciliation and harmony between peoples of different religions. The promotion of peace is part and parcel of what it means to be a Catholic." The personable Arinze, 69, of Nigeria is president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. He addressed 2,000 world religious leaders gathered for the Millennium World Peace Summit August 29.

On September 5, with the blessings of the same Pope John Paul II, the Vatican released Dominus Jesus, a document (see following article) which does little to "promote reconciliation and harmony between peoples of different religions." It declares all non-Christian religions "gravely deficient." Even all non-Catholic Christian churches "are not Churches in the proper sense," but "suffer from defects."

The world press was merciless. "Vatican Rejects Equality of Religions," roared Associated Press. "Vatican Claims Monopoly on Salvation," declared the Washington Post headlines. "The Vatican's Sad Statement on Salvation," headlined Religion News Service. Their article said, "The pronouncement ... is so pathetic it seems cruel even to notice it. Better to let the belligerent words of Vatican conservatives pass unheard through the sands of reality."

The leader of the Anglican Church, Rev. George Carey, was miffed by "the idea that Anglican and other churches are not 'proper churches.'" Muzammil Siddiqi, president of the Islamic Society of North America, retorted, "Our position is the same thing--that the Catholic position is deficient." A Jewish leader asked, "Who spoke directly to God to know who's deficient?" Sat Maharaj, a leading Hindu of Trinidad, "took comfort in our knowledge that the Catholic Church holds no exclusive franchise to heaven."

On October 1, the Pope offered to clarify, "Our confession of Christ as the only Son isn't arrogance that deprecates other religions but an expression of joyous gratitude." He added that the document "clarified essential Christian elements" and "doesn't intend to express lack of consideration for the churches and ecclesiastic communities." His clarification neither refuted nor corrected any statement in the original text.

The document's timing was quite suspect. In theory, Arinze already knew of Dominus Jesus, which the Pope approved June 16. Then again, perhaps Arinze was being sabotaged by its

author, the conservative Cardinal Ratzinger. Both are on the short list to succeed the ailing John Paul. Or perhaps what we witnessed is simply the Vatican's two-faced policy: professed respect for other religions in a public forum and studied contempt among themselves. Dominus Jesus only reinforces the Pope's message--made clear when he last visited India--that the goal of the Catholic Church is conversion and that interreligious dialogue by Catholics is a strategic means to that end.

Our Way is the Only Way to God

Excerpts from "Dominus Jesus"

Catholic declarations such as Dominus Jesus are written for Catholic priests and theologians. They make difficult reading for the lay person, especially one neither familiar with the central concepts of the Catholic Church nor in possession of a copy of the unabridged Oxford English Dictionary. The Latin title, "Dominus Jesus" means "Lord Jesus," "Jesus is Lord," or even "Jesus Rules." Following are excerpts from the document which is available in full at www.cin.org/docs/dominus-iesus.html. Our own explanations of some terms and concepts are included in brackets.

"The Church's constant missionary proclamation is endangered today by relativistic theories which seek to justify religious pluralism. As a consequence, it is held that certain truths have been superseded; for example, 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 unicity and salvific universality of the mystery of Jesus Christ [that is, salvation is only possible through Jesus], the universal salvific mediation of the Church [that is, the salvation through Jesus is only provided by the Catholic Church].

"The roots of these problems are to be found [in] the eclecticism of those who, in theological research, uncritically absorb ideas from a variety of philosophical and theological contexts without regard for consistency, systematic connection, or compatibility with Christian truth.

"As a remedy for this relativistic mentality, which is becoming ever more common, it is necessary above all to reassert the definitive and complete character of the revelation of Jesus Christ.

"Therefore, the theory of the limited, incomplete, or imperfect character of the revelation of Jesus Christ, which would be complementary to that

found in other religions, is contrary to the Church's faith. Such a position is in radical contradiction with the foregoing statements of Catholic faith according to which the full and complete revelation of the salvific mystery of God is given in Jesus Christ.

"This distinction is not always borne in mind in current theological reflection. Thus, [Catholic] theological faith is often identified with belief in other religions, which is religious experience still in search of the absolute truth and still lacking assent to God who reveals himself.

"Those solutions that propose a salvific action of God beyond the unique mediation of Christ would be contrary to Christian and Catholic faith.

"The ecclesial communities which have not preserved the valid Episcopate and the genuine and integral substance of the Eucharistic mystery are not Churches in the proper sense [which includes the Anglicans, Presbyterians and all other Protestants]. ... They suffer from defects. [section

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"It would be contrary to the faith to consider the Church as one way of salvation alongside those constituted by the other religions, seen as complementary to the Church or substantially equivalent to her.

"Some prayers and rituals of the other religions may assume a role of preparation for the Gospel ... One cannot attribute to these, however, a divine origin.... Furthermore, it cannot be overlooked that other rituals, insofar as they depend on superstitions or other errors, constitute an obstacle to salvation.

"With the coming of the Saviour Jesus Christ, God has willed that the Church founded by him be the instrument for the salvation of all humanity. This truth of faith does not lessen the sincere respect which the Church has for the religions of the world, but at the same time, it rules out, in a radical way, that mentality of indifferentism characterized by a religious relativism which leads

to the belief that one religion is as good as another.

"Followers of other religions [are], objectively speaking, ... in a gravely deficient situation in comparison with those who, in the Church, have the fullness of the means of salvation.

"Inter-religious dialogue, therefore, as part of her evangelizing mission, is just one of the actions of the Church in her mission ad gentes [that is, the Church's efforts to convert all non-Christians]. Equality, which is a presupposition of inter-religious dialogue, refers to the equal personal dignity of the parties in dialogue, not to doctrinal content, nor even less to the position of Jesus Christ in relation to the founders of the other religions.

"The Sovereign Pontiff John Paul II, at the Audience of June 16, 2000, granted to the undersigned Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, with sure knowledge and by his apostolic authority, ratified and

confirmed this Declaration, adopted in Plenary Session and ordered its publication."