

Solidarity in Grace: The Salvation of Non-Christians

Susan K. Wood

This presentation has developed a bit like an onion, from a small inside kernel of an idea in a response to Bob Doran's paper last year, to a brief presentation on the communion of saints and the salvation of non-Christians for a panel in the ecclesiology seminar of the CTSA last summer, to this plenary paper at this conference. I feel a bit like Anne Tyler's accidental tourist in all this, since I never set out to think about this topic or intentionally include it in my research, but each step of development has been in response to an invitation.

When Bob Doran asked me to give this presentation, he had my response to his paper last year in hand. He said, "Develop these two paragraphs." Thus I will start with them. In my response last year I remarked that,

It seems to me that the extrinsic or external bonds of communion can be seen as signs of an even deeper, more intrinsic communion. Christians and non-Christians do not just share common values and action born of love, which is the fruit of our common giftedness by and in the Spirit. More deeply, the bond we share makes us brothers and sisters to one another because of our common Father, this paternity being testified to by the Spirit. The community we share is only potential because this common paternity and our relationship as brothers and sisters have yet to be fully acknowledged.

Even if we begin from below with a manifold manifestation of the Spirit on the part of a multiplicity of religions, we must arrive at a unity of relationship expressed in the unicity of familial relationships. Human relationships become analogous to the Trinitarian missions: caused by them and reflecting them. Doran assumes the doctrine of the Trinity, and in a sense starts there. By stressing our relationship to the Trinity as beginning and being grounded in the Spirit universally poured out on all humankind, he stresses that which unites us rather than what divides us at the same time maintaining the inherent directionality of the ascending movement of participation in Christ so that we may all be reconciled with the Father.

So, to continue the conversation a year later, today I will develop the theme of an intrinsic communion between Christians and non-Christians based on our common divine filiation as sons and daughters of one Father, the source and destination of all creation. The Father is also the source of the new creation, the source of all grace through Christ in the power of the Spirit. I will argue that the salvation of non-Christians is related to our solidarity in grace, powerfully signified in the communion of saints, and will develop this position through a series of theses.

Thesis 1: The human race should be considered as a unity before it is considered as a collection of individuals.

Henri de Lubac writes on the first page of his foundational masterpiece, *Catholicism*, "...the unity of the Mystical Body of Christ, a supernatural unity, supposes a previous natural unity, the unity of the human race. So the Fathers of the Church, in their treatment of grace and salvation, kept constantly before them this Body of Christ, and in dealing with the creation were not content only to mention the formation of individuals, the first man and the first woman, but delighted to contemplate God creating humanity as a whole."¹

The Church Fathers identified the divine image as the principle of the unity of human nature, since the same image is in all people. The same participation in God through this image effects the unity of all who share that image. Furthermore, the prayer taught to us by Christ, the "Our Father," implies that monotheism postulates the brotherhood of all human beings.² De Lubac cites writers such as Irenaeus, who explains, "There is but one salvation as there is but one God."³

Within this framework, all infidelity to this divine image, every sin against God, is also a disruption of human unity. For example, Maximus the Confessor considered "original sin to be a separation, a breaking up, an individualization."⁴ Correspondingly, within this framework, redemption is the recovery of lost unity—the recovery of the supernatural unity of human beings with God, but equally of the natural unity of human beings among themselves.⁵

This, of course, sounds very much like a Platonic worldview wherein the Fall effects the disintegration of the one into multiplicity. De Lubac would situate this idea philosophically less in the Platonic doctrine of essential being than in the Stoic conception of universal being.⁶ However, he asserts that the Fathers were less conditioned by Platonist or Stoic influences than by Christian concepts. For example, the writer of the epistle to the Ephesians speaks of God's plan for the fullness of time to gather up all things in Christ (Eph. 1:10). Paul described the unity in diversity of all in the image and reality of the body of Christ. John spoke of the vine and the branches. Typologically, the creation of humanity, represented in the creation of Adam,⁷ is paired with the last Adam, Christ, in Romans 5:12-17, as well as in

¹ Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 25. Original: *Catholicisme: les aspects sociaux du dogme* (Paris: Cerf, 1947).

² *Ibid.*, 31

³ *Ibid.* 32, Citing *Adv Haereses*, 4, 6, 7 (PG 7, 990); 4, 9, 3; 5 in fine (1224).

⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁷ *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 4, comments that gender distinction is not mentioned in the second creation account

1 Corinthians 15:45, which cites Genesis 2:7: "So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit."

Gaudium et Spes comments on this relationship by first reflecting on Christ as the new human being, stating that "...it is only in the mystery of the Word incarnate that light is shed on the mystery of humankind. For Adam, the first human being, was a representation of the future, namely, of Christ the Lord. It is Christ, the last Adam, who fully discloses humankind to itself and unfolds its noble calling by revealing the mystery of the Father and the Father's love" (GS 22). This section explains that Christ, the second Adam, restored to the offspring of the first Adam the divine likeness which had been deformed through the first sin. All of human nature was assumed in Christ, for "by his incarnation the Son of God united himself in some sense with every human being" (GS 22). Conformed to the image of the Son, Christians receive "the first fruits of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:23) which enable them to fulfill Christ's new law of love. The text then asserts, "This applies not only to Christians but to all people of good will in whose hearts grace is secretly at work. Since Christ died for everyone, and since the ultimate calling of each of us comes from God and is therefore a universal one, we are obliged to hold that the Holy Spirit offers everyone the possibility of sharing in this paschal mystery in a manner known to God" (GS 22).

Fifteen years later, in *Redemptor hominis*, John Paul II refers to this passage, commenting,

This applies to every man, since everyone is included in the mystery of Redemption, and by the grace of this mystery Christ has joined himself with everyone for all time...Every individual, from his very conception, participates in this mystery (n.13). Every man without exception was redeemed by Christ, since Christ is somehow joined to every man, with no exception, even though the person may not be conscious of it (n.14).

This view of humankind's common relationship to Christ was also explicitly espoused in the *Decree on Non-Christian Religions*, which declares that "all nations are one community and have one origin because God caused the whole human race to dwell on the whole face of the earth. They also have one final end, God, whose providence, manifestation of goodness and plans for salvation are extended to all, until the elect be gathered together in the holy city..." (NA, 1).

If we fast-forward once again, this time to the inter-religious gathering at Assisi in 1986, we notice that John Paul II applied these principles to the situation of religious pluralism:

People can often not be conscious of their radical unity of origin, destiny and

until Gen 2:21-25 where a different word is used to distinguish man ("ish") from woman ("ishah").

place in God's plan, and while they profess different and incompatible religions they can think that their divisions are insurmountable. But in spite of that, they are included in the great and single design of God, in Jesus Christ, who "in some way is united with everyone" (GS, 22), even if they are not conscious of it.

Thesis 2: While each of us is potentially and actually saved personally and individually, we are also saved potentially and actually as a people.

A great deal of the theology regarding salvation and justification has been primarily focused on the salvation of an individual rather than on communities of salvation or salvation *as* communion. The eschatological meaning of baptism, as that of the eucharist, points to salvation as a social reality. The second sentence in Chapter II of *Lumen gentium* makes the remarkable claim: "He (God) has, however, willed to make women and men holy and to save them, not as individuals without any bond between them, but rather to make them into a people who might acknowledge him and serve him in holiness."⁸ According to Chapter II, this people is comprised of those elected by Christ's covenant. This new people of God, called together from Jew and Gentiles, is reborn of water and the Spirit, a reference to baptism (John 3:5-6). Its destiny is the kingdom of God which will be brought to perfection at the end of time but is already present among us, most explicitly and clearly through word and sacrament, but also present in a hidden way wherever and whenever the Spirit is at work. This messianic people who constitute the Kingdom of God, even if such a community does not include everyone at the present time, is "a most certain seed of unity, hope and salvation for the whole human race."⁹ This people, compared to a "seed" because of its limited, yet promising scope, is "the instrument for the salvation of all" (LG 9). This people of God is also called the church of Christ, identified in *Lumen gentium* 10 as "the visible sacrament of this saving unity."¹⁰

Thesis 3: The history of salvation is not limited to a chosen people but extends to all humankind and all of human history.

Lumen gentium clearly taught the possibility of salvation for non-Christians: "Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience—these too may attain eternal salvation."¹¹ Various attempts to account for the salvation of non-Christians generally focus on some variation of baptism by desire and the implicit act of faith contained in a righteous act of good conscience.

⁸ *Lumen gentium*, §9.

⁹ *Lumen gentium*, §9.

¹⁰ *Lumen gentium*, §10.

¹¹ *Lumen gentium*, §16.

In the second chapter of *Lumen gentium*, even though covenant and election are the identifiers of the community, salvation is not limited to the people of the covenant but extends potentially to the whole human race.¹² The messianic people, described as a tiny flock, although it does not include everybody, nevertheless truly does constitute “for the whole human race a most firm seed of unity, hope, and salvation.”¹³ In fact, not only the whole human race, but all creation is destined for eschatological renewal and will participate in the final freedom of the glory of the sons and daughters of God (Rom 8:21). The larger question is not the salvation of the few, those included in the covenant, or even those who profess explicit faith and are baptized. The issue is how non-Christians and even all of creation are related to the seed community which represents explicit, visible profession of faith, conversion of life, and participation in baptism.

Twenty years ago John Paul II in *Redemptoris missio* spoke of the salvation of non-Christians in the following terms:

Universality of salvation does not mean that it is given only to those who believe explicitly in Christ and join the Church. If salvation is meant for all, it must be offered concretely to all...The salvation of Christ is available to them through a grace which, though relating them mysteriously with the Church, does not bring them into it formally but enlightens them in a way adapted to their state of spirit and life situation (n. 10).

Thesis 4: Salvation is not possible apart from faith, but the tradition has been consistent in affirming that this may be an implicit faith manifested in sincere commitment to God or to a righteous moral conscience.

All humankind is called to salvation and thus to faith. This is particularly evident in Deutero-Isaiah (Is 42:6, 10-12, 49:6). The earliest biblical tradition and the Fathers of the Church have affirmed the existence of such faith even before the time of Christ. The Letter to the Hebrews attests to the possibility of saving faith outside the Jewish dispensation and even before it. This faith is described as an implicit belief in God’s existence and goodness: “For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” (Heb 11:6).

The Scriptures attest to the existence of saints even before the explicit revelation of God given to the people of Israel.¹⁴ Significantly, these figures are identified as holy people not only in the Old Testament, but also in the Letter to the Hebrews. Thus such saints are identified as holy people from the perspective of the

¹² See LG §16 for how those who have not accepted the Gospel are yet related to the people of God in various ways.

¹³ *Lumen gentium*, §9.

¹⁴ See Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997) chapter one; Jean Daniélou, *Les saints ‘païens’ de l’Ancien Testament* (Paris: Seuil, 1956) (ET: *Holy Pagans in the Old Testament* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1957)).

new covenant ushered in by Christ. Jean Daniélou identifies Abel as the first pagan saint—that is, the first of the elect, chosen by God, at the beginning of history.¹⁵ In the Letter to the Hebrews we read, “By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he received approval as righteous” (Heb 11:4). The Letter to the Hebrews also attributes saving faith to Enoch: “By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death. Now because he was taken he was attested as having pleased God. And without faith it is impossible to please him” (Heb 11:5-6). In turn, it was by faith that Noah, warned by God of events as yet unseen, constructed an ark to save his household and thus became an heir of the righteousness which comes from faith (Heb 11:7).

Daniélou describes these saints of the Old Testament as holy people of the “order of cosmic religion”:

Holiness in the order of cosmic religion consists in responding to God’s call through conscience. It is true holiness. For the Bible there exists no profane morality...Only the will of a person who deserves absolute homage can make absolute claims. To obey the moral law is to recognize God’s infinitely loving will; it is to love God. Moral life is already worship. This is why conscience is a revelation of God and there exists no a-religious morality.¹⁶

Abel, Enoch, and Noah are described in the Letter to the Hebrews as models of the faith “without [which] it is impossible to please [God]” (Heb 11:6), for they responded to God’s call in true righteousness and true worship, manifesting their chosenness by God in the holiness of their lives.

Likewise, in the New Testament, saving faith is operative among pagans and foreigners. Here we can cite the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:7-15), the “good Samaritan” whom Jesus holds up as an example to the Jews (Lk 10:37), and the Samaritan leper cleansed by Jesus (Lk 17:11-16). In the apostolic church, we have the examples of the Gentile Cornelius at Caesarea who is responsive to Peter’s preaching (Acts 10:1-49), as well as the people of Athens (Acts 17:22-31), whose prayer to the unknown God Paul identifies as being addressed to the God he proclaims, all the while affirming God’s proximity to each people (Acts 17:27).

The recognition of non-Christian saints in the traditional category of communion of saints points to this unity of all peoples on the path to ultimate restoration in Christ at the eschaton.

The dogmatic tradition has also affirmed the possibility of an implicit faith on the part of non-Christians. St. Thomas Aquinas discusses the possibility of salvation for those who never heard of Christ when he asks if explicit faith in Christ’s Incarnation, Passion, and Resurrection is necessary for salvation. He answers yes, but goes on to say that those who have had no revelation of the mystery of Christ

¹⁵ Daniélou, *Les saints ‘païens’ de l’Ancien Testament*, 47-48.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 166.

can be saved by an implicit faith when they believe in the providence of God who saves people in ways that he sees best.¹⁷

Much more recently, *Lumen gentium* clearly teaches that the salvation of all does not necessarily demand that all people have *explicit* faith in Christ, affirming that “all human beings are called to the new people of God”(LG 13), even “...those who without any fault do not know anything about Christ or his church yet who search for God with a sincere heart and, under the influence of grace try to put into effect the will of God as known to them through the dictate of conscience: these too can obtain eternal salvation” (LG 16).

Thesis 5: Non-Christians are graced by salvific grace.

The various covenants that God made with his people, even those before the covenant in Jesus’ death, are all part of salvation history—that is, God’s interventions in the natural order for a supernatural end. From the perspective of God and God’s purpose, all of these interventions are supernatural. The nature and grace problematic in theology has most often been viewed from the perspective of the human person, as in whether knowledge of God is natural or supernatural, whether human happiness or virtue is natural or supernatural, etc. If we consider nature as the condition of possibility for God to give God’s self to that which is not God (to use Rahner’s language), this does not collapse the supernatural into the natural, but becomes the *a priori* for God’s Self-gift. The fact that the cosmic covenant was already oriented to its ultimate consummation from its very beginnings is evidence that the state of pure nature never existed, but is a remainder concept that posits the possibility of redemption. The supernatural has no need of redemption or adoption in Christ. As the Epistle to the Romans states,

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now, and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies (Rom. 8:19-23).

¹⁷ *SUMMA THEOLOGIAE*, II-II, Q. 2, art. 7, ad 3: “If, however, some were saved without receiving any revelation, they were not saved without faith in a Mediator, for, though they did not believe in Him explicitly, they did, nevertheless, have implicit faith through believing in Divine providence, since they believed that God would deliver mankind in whatever way was pleasing to Him, and according to the revelation of the Spirit to those who knew the truth, as stated in Job 35:11: “Who teacheth us more than the beasts of the earth.”

The very possibility of redemption is an argument that nature and grace are distinct. Nevertheless, this does not preclude that foreordaining grace is present in creation from the first instant of its emergence *ex nihilo* by the ordaining will of God.

As a case in point, consider Irenaeus' identification of four covenants: prior to deluge under Adam, after the deluge under Noah, the giving of the Law under Moses, and the Gospel.¹⁸ For Irenaeus, the covenant with Adam in creation is not simply or exclusively natural, but creation itself and all humankind are part of salvation history. The latter involves not just a natural knowledge of God, but the intervention of God in history. As Irenaeus comments, "The cosmic covenant is already a supernatural covenant. It does not belong to a different order than does the mosaic covenant or the Christic covenant."¹⁹ The cosmic covenant with Noah is a covenant of God's fidelity with the whole of humankind and with the cosmos itself (Gen 9:9-10).

With respect to the four covenants identified by Irenaeus, the first two covenants, with Adam and with Noah, are unambiguously universal, while the covenant with Abraham and the Gospel seem more particular, although there was explicit universal outreach to the Gentiles (see second Isaiah) and to the non-Christians to embrace the faith of the God of Abraham and the Gospel of Jesus Christ, respectively. The covenant of Adam is related to the covenant of Christ insofar as the covenant with Adam encompasses all of humankind, and Christ as the New Adam recapitulates and re-creates the original unity of the human race. With the two covenants we have both protological unity and eschatological unity.

Thesis 5: The Church is a sign and instrument of this salvation of non-Christians.

An anthropology of the inherent unity of the human race, together with an understanding of eschatology as the final reconciliation of restored unity, gives us a framework for considering the relationship between the church and the salvation of non-Christians. The church, then, as a visible sacrament of this saving unity, has a role in signifying and effecting the saving unity that potentially encompasses everyone. As a sort of sacrament, the church signifies both the intimate union between God and humanity as well as the unity of all of humanity.²⁰ It is also an instrument facilitating this unity. Now, the suggestions in *Lumen gentium* of ways in which the church may effect this unity²¹ may be clear enough insofar as the unity of the church itself is concerned, or insofar as the church itself becomes more extensive through evangelization and the addition of new members. However, these suggestions remain somewhat unsatisfactory as an explanation of how those

¹⁸ Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, III, 11, 8.

¹⁹ Daniélou, *Les saints 'païens' de l'Ancien Testament*,

²⁰ *Lumen gentium*, 1. Note that the church is "a sort of" (*veluti*) sacrament. Thus it is a sacrament not analogously, not the same way Christ or baptism and the eucharist are sacraments.

²¹ *Lumen gentium*, §9.

peoples who explicitly do not want to be Christians can possibly be considered to be associated with the church in some way.

The document issued in 2000 by the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, “*Dominus Iesus: On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church*,” interprets this possibility of salvation for non-Christians in relation to Christ and the church as follows:

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; it is the result of his sacrifice and is communicated by the Holy Spirit; it has a relationship with the Church, which ‘according to the plan of the Father, has her origin in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit.’”²²

The precise manner in which the non-Christian is related to Christ and the church remains mysterious. However, any position that would consider the church as one way of salvation alongside those constituted by the other religions, seen as complementary or substantially equivalent to the church, even if converging with the church toward the eschatological kingdom of God, is expressly rejected in the document.²³ At the same time, it acknowledges that “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 peoples, in cultures, and religions.’”²⁴ Thus I believe that the document’s insistence on the unicity and salvific universality of Jesus Christ and the Church is on target and consistent with the theses in this presentation on the unity of the human race and salvation and redemption as the restoration of that unity.

We must ask to which aspect of the Church is the non-Christian related. Obviously, this does not refer to explicit membership in the institutional church, but some affiliation to the church as the mystical body of Christ in which all are members of his body as he recapitulates and restores communion with our common Father. This is not necessarily a visible or explicit or even intended relationship to the church in its social dimension, but rather a hidden affiliation through the work of the Spirit.

This communion of saints represents the eschatological unity of which the church is a sign and instrument. Salvation is communion with God through Christ in the Spirit. Eschatological reconciliation has a universal dimension, not in the sense

²² Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, “*Dominus Iesus’: On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church*,” August 6, 2000, §20. Text available in *Origins* 30/14 (September 14, 2000) 209, 211-219.

²³ *Ibid.*, §21.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

that all will necessarily be saved, but that all receive the offer of salvation that must then be accepted in freedom. Although Christians have the first fruits of the Spirit, all of creation, including presumably those who do not know Christ, is groaning to be set free from its bondage to decay, in other words, from the sentence of death, in order to obtain the glory of the children of God, in other words, life eternal (Rom 8:21). If this salvation is to occur beyond the frontiers of those baptized in water or blood, it will be through the power of the Spirit (Rom 8:14), and because they, too, are called, predestined, and justified and thus members in some way in the family of Christ (Rom 8:29-30).

Even though theologians have not been able to explain the manner of salvation of non-Christians in a completely satisfactory way, either to Christians or especially to non-Christians, the fact of this possibility of salvation, the relationship of this salvation to the God whom Christians confess as Father, Son, and Spirit, and the necessary relationship to the church as the body of Christ and the sacrament of the unity of God and humankind are all profoundly related to the idea of unicity and universality. Salvation reflects our unity as members of the one human race, the recapitulation of that race in Christ, the new Adam, and our interconnectedness with one another and with Christ through the bonds established by the Spirit expressed in various images of the church such as the mystical body of Christ, people of God, or temple of the Spirit. The very fact that each is not saved merely as an individual but personally, *and* saved as a member of a people, implies that the salvation of non-Christians is because of a relationship to the Church, even when there appears to be no connection institutionally and thus non-Christians are not a formal part of the Church.

The “elements that come from God” and the work of the Spirit are found positively in human hearts, history, and cultures that sincerely seek and desire God through righteous decisions of conscience and search for the divine result in what has traditionally been termed “a desire for baptism,” even though it is not a conscious desire for the sacramental water bath in the Triune name. Christians have identified that longing as a desire for baptism, but when this is not an explicit desire, this “desire for baptism” becomes a shorthand way of expressing the universal human desire for that holy, good, ultimately transcendent personal presence which gives meaning to our living and dying, our loving and failed relationships, our struggles, hopes, and joys, even in the face of immense personal and global tragedies. Christians know this to be the paschal mystery of Christ’s death and rising, the Christ who was sent to reconcile all with the Father in the power of the Spirit. Baptism is insertion into this Triune life and mystery, into the interrelationship of Father, Son, and Spirit, and into the process of dying and rising in the company of all so initiated. Nevertheless, the church has never required that non-Christians be able to identify the transcendent object of that holy longing *explicitly* in order that we might rightly understand such a desire to be an authentic “desire for baptism,” to use the traditional phrase.

Implications

We can draw several important implications from the church's doctrine on the salvation of non-Christians, especially when this doctrine is understood within the framework of an anthropology that emphasizes the inherent unity of humanity and an eschatology that does the same, particularly when such a framework includes the communion of saints as a sign of this unity. A first implication is the truth that no human being escapes the universal salvific will of God or lives outside God's providential will and intervention in history for God's salvific purpose, although God gives all the freedom to reject his divine love. Unity is not something we achieve through our own efforts, but something we are given in creation and redemption. The dynamic of grace, however, is dialogical. For salvation to be effected, all people must respond to the invitation of grace by implicit or explicit faith.

Moreover, salvation should be understood as the form of the restored unity of the human race in communion with God and with each other. This restored communion is Trinitarian not only in terms of the terminus of the restoration, which is life in communion with the Trinitarian communion, but also in terms of the dynamic of this restoration. Salvation is the eternal plan of the Father to send the Son in eternal mission to send the Spirit to inspire all people to respond in grace to the invitation to explicit or implicit faith and thus be joined in the mystical body of the Son in his self-offering to the Father to restore all things to the Father in the communion of the Son and the Spirit, and through the Son's self-offering to partake in the communion of saints. The Spirit testifies to our common filiation as daughters and sons of one and the same gracious Father, and so to the universal and universally loving paternity of the Father. This universal paternity necessarily implies a universal divine filiation, making us brothers and sisters with all peoples. Precisely because Christ is our savior as the Son of God, he is also, and just as importantly, our brother on the journey back to the Father, the path to union with the Trinity that Christ's sacrifice has empowered all of us to walk, and to walk together.

Another implication is that there is only one savior, Jesus Christ, who recapitulates the human race in himself through his incarnation and achieves its redemption by his death and resurrection. The Holy Spirit is the divine love that seals the bond of the communion within the church as well as the divine person who inspires all people of good will to live according to right conscience and thus implicitly as well as explicitly to believe in God's existence and his salvific design and loving will. The Spirit, who is the Spirit of the Son, never works apart from the Son. Thus the salvation of non-Christians is not achieved in the Spirit alone in a manner unrelated to the Son. The Father sends the Son to give the Spirit. The missioning of the Son is for the recapitulation of all creation in him, in order to achieve reconciliation with the Father. In turn, the missioning of the Spirit is to testify to the work of the Son. The dynamic of salvation is the ascending inversion of this descending pattern. Through the inspiration and testimony of the Spirit, human

beings are empowered to profess explicit faith in Jesus Christ and to live lives of conscience in accord with that faith. In the absence of explicit faith, all people of good will partake in salvation insofar as they “search for God with a sincere heart and, under the influence of grace try to put into effect the will of God as known to them through the dictate of conscience”(LG 16). Thus the missions of the Son and the Spirit constitute a descending movement, an *exitus*, from the Father to accomplish his universal salvific will. The process of redemption is a *reditus*, an ascending movement of the restoration of lost unity among human beings and reconciliation with the Father in unity with the Son through the power and witness of the Holy Spirit.

Since the Church is “a sacrament or instrumental sign of intimate union with God and of the unity of all humanity” (LG 1), Christians have an obligation to be visible signs of that communion, as well as humble workers who lovingly bring that unity to greater fullness and actuality. To be this sign and instrument of communion is also the mission of the church. The church’s mission is to make implicit faith explicit, to articulate the Trinitarian form of salvation, to be that community of salvation. As sign of eschatological unity and reconciliation, the church witnesses to the ultimate destiny of all humankind, a truth powerfully signified by the doctrine of the communion of the saints. As the mystical body of Christ, the church embodies that which it signs. In its sacramental life it unites Christians to Christ. In its preaching it announces God’s plan for salvation, the Good News in Jesus Christ. Most of all, the church signs and embodies the mystery of Trinitarian love in its very identity as the people of God the Father, as the body of Christ, and as the temple of the Spirit.