

01. August 2020

“Looking at the people outside the Holy Church”

The father speaks to his children, Part 33

After the ever stronger growing together of peoples the question becomes important for the church how it should deal with the non-Christian religions. It has increasingly chosen the path of dialogue with other religions. In the texts of the Second Vatican Council - which understood itself as a so-called pastoral council and therefore did not put the emphasis on the doctrinal statements - those sides of other religions were emphasized which one evaluates as positive.

Critics saw in the consequence that the meetings with other religions too little also took into account the dark sides, imperfections and errors, and therefore attitude towards them seemed to be too optimistic. This could easily lead to the fact that a balance in the discernment of other religions was lost and the unique importance of the Catholic faith faded into the background. In the most extreme case it even came to the treatment of all religions as equal, but with that one has already left the ground of Catholic teaching.

These daily reflections are not the place to discuss all this extensively. Without doubt, such a clarification is important, because there has been confusion among the faithful as to how the other religions are to be seen from a Catholic point of view.

The question arises for us whether the Message of the Father has given us any assistance in this matter.

So it is said:

“You, my children, who are outside the Catholic Church, you should know that my fatherly love does not exclude you. I address you with my tender call, because you too are my children. Even if to this day you have succumbed to the charms with which the devil lured you, recognize that he has deceived you; come to me, your Father, and I will receive you with joy and love.”

First of all, let us remember that the love of our Heavenly Father is addressed to all people who are included in His love. All are called to return home and the Father waits for them with joy.

The text continues:

“You too, who know no other religion than the one you have been taught since your birth and which is not the true religion, open your eyes and recognize: Here is your Father, who created you and who wants to redeem you. I come to you to bring you the truth and with it salvation. I see that you misunderstand me and that you do not know my only wish: I want you to acknowledge me as Father, as Creator and also as Redeemer. Because you do not understand this, you cannot love me; so you should know that I am not so far from you as you believe.”

It is clear that our Father draws a distinction between the Catholic religion and other religions. The latter are not the true religion. The Father therefore wants to bring them the truth and salvation which they obviously do not yet know, because they still misunderstand God and therefore cannot yet love him.

These unambiguous statements are connected with the loving invitation to open the eyes and to recognize him as creator and father and with the promise of his love. If we take this text as an orientation, which is completely in agreement with the teaching of the Church, then it becomes clear how we have to meet the representatives of other religions.

In the awareness of having received from God the grace of being at home in the true religion, we are at the service of our Father to call people home. There should be no relativization or confusion. An openness to what God has already worked in the other religions (seeds of the Word) is important, as is respect for the religious efforts of other believers, who may even be exemplary.

At the same time, however, there is a need for a clear recognition of what is still missing in these religions, what is still mistaken, etc. This certainly does not have to be brought up immediately in the first meetings, because the searching love of the Father belongs to the forefront and is the primary theme. But one can by no means look at the other religions as equal ways of salvation and deal with them in this way. This would be a painful misunderstanding of Christ's missionary mandate (*cf. Mt 28,19-20*), and we would keep the seeking people in these religions away from truth and salvation.