COROLLARY

COSMIC REVELATION

Having taken the stand that different religious systems presuppose different perspectives and that they are all valid in the sense of helping man to face the problem of life and attain salvation, it would be useful to consider briefly the implications of this for a believer in any one particular religion. According to the above stand, no religion can claim to be the sole means of solving the problems of all men and helping all men to attain liberation. So also no religion can claim to be the only true religion or to have the whole deposit of Truth. Every religion, worth the name, has truth in it, and ways and means of realising the Truth. Thus, the fact of different religions may be interpreted by a believer in any particular religion as the different manifestations of Truth or God. Of late, among Christian theologians too this is recognised. In the Christian context this understanding is explained in terms of 'universal salvific will of God'. It is this manifestation of God in different religions that may be termed as 'Cosmic Revelation'.

There was a time when the Church held the view: 'Outside the Church no Salvation'. Later a very broad interpretation was given to this in such a way as to include all good people in its flock through 'the baptism of desire'. In recent times Church has clearly stated the universality of God's saving will and the possibility of salvation of men in their own religions and not necessarily through the Church.
The need for the reinterpretation and reformulation of the teachings of the Church is due to a mistake in its approach.

We know many millions have passed away without even having heard of Christ and His Church in the past. Today also billions are there outside the Church. Trillions will come to and go from the world, in the same way.² Does this mean, then, they will all be damned?

Our starting point should not be the Church or any particular religion, but God's will and plan for salvation. What lies outside the Church is difficult to answer. As to what lies outside God and His plan of salvation is not a real question at all. If we look at God's plan of salvation, then there is no 'outside', but only 'inside',³ for God desires all men to be saved ..." (I Tim. 2,4)

Sacred Scripture

That God is Saviour of all is clearly told in the creation account of Genesis in Gen. 3.15, even after the fall, we see God's plan of the universal salvation remaining unchanged. 'The faithfulness of God endures for ever' (Ps. 117), in spite of man's infidelity and backsliding, God has only one plan and providence and destiny for all men — those of salvation, the supernatural life with Himself. Moreover, God's call is necessarily dynamic and effective: it pursues each man, even the most obstinate rebel: cf. Gen. 4.6. This means that God reveals Himself to each man's conscience.

St. Paul in his epistle to the Romans (Ch. 1,20) says that what can be known about God is plain to all men ever
since the creation of the world, because God has revealed it to them in their hearts/consciences. If they obey this divine law of conscience, revealed to them through their personal experiences, then God who judges the secrets of men will justify them on the last day equally with those who have received the written law.

Secondly, God reveals Himself to each man through the essential stability and benignity of the phenomena of Nature. The unfailing alternation of 'seed-time' and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night', (Gen. 8.22; Acts. 14, 17) is God's own appeal to men for our recognition of His love and His offer of salvation. The dynamism of biblical thought excludes any real separation of the natural and the supernatural, the sacred and the profane. God means to cleanse what man calls profane (Acts. 10, 15).

In the letter to the Romans St. Paul categorically affirms that God's invisible nature can be perceived in the things that have been created. The belief in God as the unique absolute and universal Lord of all reality finds its highest expression in the belief in creation. Everything that exists is permeated by the wisdom and greatness of God.

Thirdly, God also sends prophets to teach different people 'life of righteousness' in their own respective lands and cultures. As in the case of Israel, we can see this phenomenon in every nations. We, Indians, believe that at the decadence of morality, God Himself incarnates to restore righteousness. In Hinduism, nine incarnations (avataras) are already come and the tenth one is awaited.

All these viz., different types of revelations...
mentioned above, show that God sees that the way of salvation is open to all, the lack of righteousness (sin) being the only serious obstacle to it. But it should be noted that, though salvation is available for all, it is a narrow path and not humanly attractive. It is the way of Christ’s cross; or of Buddha’s total renunciation, or of the Nishkamakarmayoga of Gita. This reinforces us to hold that God’s saving activity is cosmic/universal, and forbids us to speak of any religion as false.

The classical text for the USW of God is I Tim. 2: 1-6. We have also other passages where the USW of God is referred to: I Tim. 4:10; Jn. 1:29; 3:16; Mt. 26:28; Mk. 10:45; Rom. 11:32; Lk. 19:41 etc. Thus scriptures praise the mighty power and merciful will of God which comprises and transcends sin. It leaves man confronted with two possible final states of his history - in salvation or perdition. (Mt. 25:31-46)

The Magisterium

The Magisterium down through the centuries tried to affirm the USW of God following the Creeds, the teaching of the Fathers etc. The absolute universality of God’s salvific will in regard to all men (who come to the use of reason) has not yet been solemnly defined. But we cannot deny that universality. It has to be maintained all the more because of the recent developments. Vatican II envisages the possibility of salvation for non-Christians, and even for those who inculpably have not yet attained an explicit knowledge of God i.e. atheists and polytheists. "One is their (men's) final goal: God. His providence, His manifestations of goodness, and His saving designs extended to all men."

* USW = Universal Salvific Will
So what would be our conclusion?

Our God is not a God of condemnation or perdition, but a God of salvation, who earnestly desires the salvation and coming together of all men in spite of their different religion, in His kingdom of peace and joy, so that all may enjoy His vision.

A man is saved, whether he be a visible member of the Church or not, essentially by the saving and eternal will of God who initiates and completes this work through His interior grace created in the souls of those whom He saves with His universal salvific will. Then, the call to salvation comes from within man himself as he confronts the events of his daily existence. So the offer cannot be avoided by anyone. God wishes the salvation of all men; so it remains with man to decide for or against. The saving sanctification is available to men whenever, and wherever, they may experience their brief participation in human history. So the real possibility of accepting this grace is equally authentic for all. The fact that most men do not have this message of hope explicitly announced to them does not make it any less true in their regard.

The very grace through which inner conversion is made actual for Christians of good will is no less available to non-Christians of good will. On this point there is no difference. If there are degrees of holiness among the visible members of the Church, then these same degrees must be actual as well among those who, because of their historical situation, cannot have explicit faith in Christ.

Knowledge of Christ, and reference to Him, are not
required for a person's salutary response to the offer of grace in and for these decisive situation: "Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee?" "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me." Man's conscious reflection and explicit motivation are not mentioned here by the Lord, and they are clearly beside the point in these cases of ultimate judgement. If the life of each man is, thus, inundated with these grace-proffering events, then the occasions for loving God through our neighbour are not presented more frequently to Christians than to the rest of men.

Every religion in so far as it is concerned with ultimate and absolute strives from within after universality and catholicity. Consequently there is a dynamic convergence of all religions in which they seek to prevail historically. Every religion is, to that extent, true, and represents the one universal salvific will of God in so far as it is universal and catholic in this dynamic sense.

People are not outside of God; they are grasped by God on the level at which they can be grasped — in their experience of the Divine, in which they are educated, in which they have performed acts of faith and adoration and prayer and cult, even though the symbols in which the Holy is expressed may seem extremely primitive and idolatrous.

Can we call this obscure experience of a loving God revelation? Here we immediately come up against the question — in what exactly does revelation consist? We can list various elements, all of which must be acknowledged as part of the
revelatory process, even if one, or the other, of them has been, more or less, forgotten at different periods in Christian history. In the words of Kevin McNamara:

"Revelation is God speaking to man, calling him, wooing him, commanding him, teaching him, revealing to Himself to man, giving testimony to Himself, sharing with man His own thoughts and plans. Revelation is God giving Himself to man, communicating to him His inner life, entering into intimate fellowship with Him. Revelation is God acting in human history, setting in motion His own special design, taking hold of the courses of events and bending them to His purpose. And all the time this process, which has its origins outside of man is experienced by him as being in continuity with his own deepest aspirations, even if this be in paradoxical sense of a call to leave behind his own projects, his own desires, his own inclinations."

Revelation considered this way, we may rightly say, the knowledge of God derived from the physical universe, the knowledge of God derived from the testimony of conscience and the knowledge and experience of God acquired through contemplation by man of his own soul, are in some way the revelation of God.

To sum up, the God of grace and glory is the unique and only goal of man. Whatever man might be without this supernatural destiny, in the actual concrete order, we know that he is destined for the beatific vision. If we are to take the USW of God seriously, we must believe that He offers to every man a real possibility of responding to Him.
with saving faith, which is the indispensable condition for salvation. But man cannot take a step forward towards God by himself without prevenient grace. Rahner understands this "prevenient grace" not simply as divine help given now and then during life, but as a constant help of man's existential situation in the world. It is a grace which, prior to his acceptance or refusal, orients him towards God and provides him with the constant possibility of salvific faith. Thus, all men exist in a certain 'immediacy' to God. Because of God's salvific will, man's natural transcendence has been given a new inner dynamism, a new supernatural orientation and finality. This is made possible and easy also through the various religions helping man to reach God through a righteous life.
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REFERENCES


3. Ibid., p.46.


5. Romans 1:20; Ps.19:1-4.

6. Vat.II, "Ad Gentes" (On Missions), No.3.

7. Vat.II, Lumen Gentium, (On the Church), No.16.


10. Ibid., pp.46-47.


12. Mt.25:40.

