

## Half-hearted Inclusivism: The Theological Doctrine of Salvation in the Document of Lumen Gentium and the Fate of Others

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**Abstract:** This article examines the salvation concept in the Lumen Gentium document. The concept of salvation in the Christian tradition is based not only on the cross but also on the Lumen Gentium document, which guarantees safety for adherents of religions other than Christianity. This article aims to explain the doctrine of Christian Salvation through the Lumen Gentium document, analyze the debates and variations of views that exist in Christian theology regarding the fate of adherents of other religions, and look at the responses of Christian churches and theologians to these challenges and dilemmas about the fate of others. The approach used in writing this article is an analysis of the literature, which involves the study of theology, the study of ecclesiastical documents, and the study of the views of Christian theologians on soteriology. This article reveals that soteriology emphasizes the importance of explicit faith in Christ as the only way of Salvation stated in Christian teachings. However, there are debates and various views in Christian theology regarding the fate of those who embrace other religions. Some theologians try to embrace religious diversity by arguing that Salvation can be found in other religions through the grace of God working through Christ without explicit knowledge of Him. Meanwhile, some maintain the exclusive view that faith in Christ is the only way to Salvation. Soteriology shows that faith in Christ as the work of Salvation accomplished through His death on the Cross is the core of the Christian understanding of Salvation. But in the context of the fate of others, there are various views in Christian theology. Based on this fact, the inclusivism built by the Lumen Gentium document seems half-hearted. Therefore a healthy theological dialogue and more profound understanding are needed to respond to this complex challenge and to promote an inclusive experience and widespread love for all human beings.

**Keywords:** Inclusivism-soteriology; Theological Doctrine; Christian Salvation; Fate of Others

## A. Introduction

In Christian theology, one of the central and complex doctrines is the soteriology of the Cross, which is related to understanding human Salvation<sup>1</sup>. This doctrine involves deep questions about the fate of those who follow other religions and how Salvation can be found in Christ. This article will discuss the background and implications of the soteriology of the Cross, an essential doctrine in the Christian understanding of Salvation and the destiny of followers of other religions.

Soteriology of the Cross is a theological approach that emphasizes the importance of Jesus Christ's saving work through His death on the Cross<sup>2</sup>. This doctrine believes that Salvation can only be found through faith in Christ's saving work, as evidenced by His resurrection from the dead. According to the soteriological view of the Cross, humans are born in sin and separated from God<sup>3</sup>. However, Jesus Christ replaced human sin with His righteousness through His death on the Cross. Those who believe and accept His sacrifice as a way of Salvation will receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life with God.

However, problems arise when questions arise about the fate of those who follow other religions or have no knowledge of Christ. In the soteriology of the Cross, its proponents argue that faith in Christ is the only way of Salvation explicitly stated in the Bible<sup>4</sup>. Therefore, for those who do not know Christ, their destiny becomes a complex debate.

Some Christian theologians try to embrace religious diversity by arguing that through Christ's saving work, God can obtain Salvation for those who honestly follow their religious beliefs<sup>5</sup>. They say that Salvation can be found in other religions through God's grace, which works through the agency of Christ without

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<sup>1</sup> Khaled Anatolios, *Deification Through the Cross: An Eastern Christian Theology of Salvation* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> John Kimbell, *The Atonement in Lukan Theology* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Robert George Staines, 'The Soteriological Significance of the Cross of Jesus: Metaphor, Meaning and Salvation' (University of Glasgow, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Jan G Van der Watt, 'Salvation in the Gospel According to John', in *Salvation in the New Testament* (Brill, 2005), pp. 101–31.

<sup>5</sup> James Lee Fredericks, *Faith among Faiths: Christian Theology and Non-Christian Religions* (Paulist Press, 1999).

explicit knowledge of Him. However, the soteriology of the Cross still emphasizes the importance of evident faith in Christ as the only way of Salvation stated in Christian teachings. This view raises questions about the fate of those without the opportunity or knowledge to accept Christ as their Lord and Savior.

In this article, I will explore the background and implications of the soteriology of the Cross. I will explore the debates and the various views within Christian theology regarding the fate of those who follow other religions. In addition, I will look at how the church and Christian theologians respond to challenges and dilemmas related to questions about the Salvation and fate of followers of other religions within the framework of the soteriology of the Cross.

## **B. Soteriology: Meaning, Concept, and Doctrine**

The term 'soteriology' comes from the Greek language and is formed from two syllables, namely, *soter*, which means *saviour*<sup>6</sup> and *logos*, which means *word* ( word ), *matter* ( matter ), or *thing* (something). The same opinion states that 'soteriology' comes from two Greek words: *Soter*, which means *saviour*, *deliverer*, and *preserver* and *logos*, which in Greek means *statement* or *speech*. Thus, soteriology is interpreted as the biblical study of *Salvation*<sup>7</sup>. This opinion is not much different from the view that states that the term "soteriology" comes from two Greek words, namely *Soteria* (Salvation) and *logos* (doctrine or teaching), which, when combined, means' doctrine of Salvation. Hence, the word 'soteriology' in this study refers to the last mentioned meaning, which is more interpreted as "*theological doctrines on salvation*"<sup>8</sup>.

Doctrinally, this terminology in Christian systematic theology is used to refer to the study of Biblical doctrines of Salvation. The studies cover a wide range of topics, such as the nature and extent of redemption and the whole process of Salvation, which is understood as a divine plan that is eternal and designed to save erring and sinful people and bring them back into eternal fellowship with God.

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<sup>6</sup> D D Capucão, 'Chapter Five. Attitudes Toward Salvation', in *Religion and Ethnocentrism* (Brill, 2010), pp. 105–34.

<sup>7</sup> Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 985.

<sup>8</sup> Mohammad Hassan Khalil, 'Muslim Scholarly Discussions on Salvation and the Fate of Others', 2007, p. 2.

Soteriology is the central theme in the Scriptures, with the glory of God as its goal. It was written by George Cross, who stated that soteriology is the core of all theology. Expressively, George Cross wrote the following:

"The term "salvation" is the most significant in the language of religion. For the religion of every man is just his way of seeking Salvation. If theology is the religious man's theory of things in general and, at the same time his way of vindicating his loyalty to the religious life, then soteriology, or the theory of Salvation, is an attempt to vindicate the motive of the religious life by an intellectual construction of it. It is the effort of intelligence to establish the worth of the specifically religious experience of ascension from a worse state to a better state by showing that it has a normal place in the whole of our human experience and, in the end, an ordered place in the whole universe. The experience of moral betterment is the root of all soteriology, and soteriology is the point of view central to all theology. A theological system is simply organized soteriology"<sup>9</sup>.

From this quote, it can be understood that "*salvation*" is the most important term in the language of *religion*. Because every human being will only find a way to Salvation through what is called 'religion'. In all soteriology, there are two main issues: *first*, the end to be reached in what we call 'salvation', and this is fundamental, and second, *the way* to achieve it<sup>10</sup>. The latter, namely ideas *about* how safety can be achieved, can be divided into three essential categories, namely *the first* and the most primitive based on belief in the efficacy of ritual magic; initiation ceremonies, such as the ancient mystery religions; *secondly*, Salvation by *self-effort*, usually through the acquisition of esoteric knowledge, ascetic discipline, or heroic death, has been promised by many in certain religions, such as Orphism, Hinduism, and Islam; and *third*, *Salvation* by divine assistance, and usually requires the concept of a divine saviour that humans cannot do for themselves, as in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.

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<sup>9</sup> George Cross, 'The Modern Trend in Soteriology', *The American Journal of Theology*, 19.1 (1915), 32-44 (p. 32).

<sup>10</sup> Cross.

Therefore, theologically the doctrine of Salvation is a significant and fundamental main issue in the context of major religions, not only those belonging to the many Smitis religions, such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam, but also other major world religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism and even primitive religions. Of course, each religion has and teaches its concept of the doctrine of Salvation. It means that each religion has different characteristics and doctrines. Because there are significant differences between Islam and non-Muslim religions in the context of the doctrine of Salvation (*soteriology*), this problem will further have implications for the difficulty of finding common ground and mutual agreement between religions— and it seems impossible to bring together conceptually about the doctrine of the Salvation of beliefs in one "great vision" that is universal (*universal Salvation*).

As an illustration, in the Christian faith, the doctrine of Salvation is associated with the principle of atonement by Jesus. Salvation in this context is the divine forgiveness of sins, forgiveness to universal human participation in Adam's original sin, which is only made possible by the suffering and sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross. According to Christian doctrine, to share in the redemption given by Christ, one must personally place the Christian faith in the atonement of Protestantism or by the sacrament of *baptism* in Catholicism. In this context, Samuel GF Brandon's conclusion can provide us with an understanding of Christian soteriology, which he expressively writes as follows:

"Humanity deserves damnation by God for the original sin, which it inherits by descent from Adam; each human also deserves damnation for his actual sin. But because sin is regarded as also putting humans in the power of the Devil, Christ's work of Salvation has been interpreted along two different lines. Thus, his crucifixion may be considered a vicarious sacrifice to God as propitiation or atonement devil. These two ways of interpreting the death of Christ have provided the major themes of soteriological theory and speculation in Christian theology. Despite this fluidity of interpretation, belief in the saving power of Christ is fundamental to Christianity and finds expression in every aspect of its faith and practice".

The evolution of the Christian doctrine of Salvation is a complex process that is essentially related to the gradual definition of the belief in the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth. Therefore, in Christian theology, soteriology is an integral part of what is called Christology. While the divinity of Jesus Christ has been the subject of careful metaphysical definitions in the creeds, the exact nature and mode of Salvation through Christ have not been precisely defined. The Church has contentedly proclaimed in her belief that Christ was incarnate, crucified, died and rose again "for us humans and our salvation."

### **C. *Nostra Aetate*: Church Documents on Christian Attitudes towards Non-Christian Religions**

From the perspective of the Roman Catholic Church, the idea of Salvation *for* non-Christians, in general, and Muslims, in particular, can be seen in various documents of the Second Vatican Council. One of the essential documents in the Second Vatican Council is the document on the Church's attitude towards non-Christian religions, or what is known as *Nostra Aetate* (in the future: NA), which in quantity has no more than essays or papers written on it. We write for one particular theme. Nonetheless, this document has extraordinary *influence*. In this document, one can see the relationship and attitude of the Church towards non-Christian religions, which is explicitly described as follows:

"...the Church examines more closely her relationship to non-Christian religions. In her task of promoting unity and love among men, indeed among nations, she considers above all in this declaration what men have in common and what draws them to fellowship. One is the community of all peoples, one their origin, for God made the whole human race to live over the face of the earth. One also is their final goal, God. His providence, His manifestations of goodness, His saving design extends to all men until the elect will be united in the Holy City, the city ablaze with the glory of God, where the nations will walk in His light."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> E FRIZZELL LAWRENCE, 'Nostra Aetate: Celebrating 50 Years of the Catholic Church's Dialogue with Jews and Muslims' (JSTOR, 2018).

In the quote above, there is a vital phrase, namely, "*One also is their final goal, God. His providence, His manifestations of goodness, His saving design extends to all men*", which shows an inclusive-soteriological attitude towards non-Christian religions, that the Church recognizes the universality of Salvation. It means that safety in faith – based on the NA document – is not the domination of Christianity but also for everyone. The document also states that the Church recognizes other religions with their way of obtaining Salvation. Any religion's moral and religious aspects can be accepted as a means to achieve Salvation. It is as written in the NA document, which states as follows:

"The Catholic Church rejects nothing true and holy in these religions. She sincerely reveres those ways of conduct and life, those precepts and teachings which, although differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, still often reflects a ray of that truth which enlightens all men. Indeed, she proclaims, and ever must proclaim Christ "the way, the truth, and the life", in whom men may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself."<sup>12</sup>

This recognition and inclusive-soteriological attitude by the Catholic Church will undoubtedly be problematic when confronted with the traditional doctrine or axiom '*extra ecclesia nulla Salus* (in the future: EENS), which states, "Outside the Church, there is no salvation"<sup>13</sup>. This axiom has implications for the view that those outside the Catholic Church will enter the eternal fire ( *they will go into the eternal fire* ). In this context, the most powerful and explicit statements were made directly from the Council of *Florence*, as follows:

None of those outside the Catholic Church, not only pagans but also *Jews*, *heretics* and *schismatics*, will ever partake of eternal life; but they will enter into the eternal fire prepared for the devil ( *devil* ) and his angels unless before death they join Him; and what is so important is the unity of this

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<sup>12</sup> J Riberu, "Tonggak Sejarah Pedoman Arah", *Dokumen Konsili Vatikan II. Jakarta: Dokpen Mawi*, 1983.

<sup>13</sup> Gerald O'Collins and Edward G Farrugia, *A Concise Dictionary of Theology* (Paulist Press, 1991), p. 77.

ecclesiastical body which only remaining in this union can benefit from the Church's sacraments for Salvation, and they can receive eternal recompense for their fasting, their majesty, their other works of Christian piety and the duty of a Christian soldier. If the charity is that big, no one, even if he sheds his blood in the Name of Christ, can be saved unless he remains in the bosom and unity of the Catholic Church. Pope Eugene IV, Council of Florence, February 4, 1442." <sup>14</sup>

For centuries – before the idea of the Second Vatican Council emerged – this traditional EENS axiom had been developed and applied to non-Christians throughout the history of the Catholic Church, who then considered non-Christians as mission prospects for conversion to the religion. Christian. Historically-genealogically the emergence of the EENS axiom was offered for the first time by Ignatius, bishop of Antioch in Syria, who stated the following:

"Be not deceived, my brethren: if anyone follows a maker of schism, he does not inherit the Kingdom of God; if anyone walks in strange doctrine, he has no part in the passion". <sup>15</sup>

According to Sullivan, the above statement was made by Ignatius in the context of uniting the people of the Catholic Church while warning and fighting against schismatics *and heretics* of Christianity, and not in the context of condemning people from other religions. In the third century, Origen in the East formulated this statement by Origen as "*Let no man deceive himself; outside the Church, no one is saved*". Likewise by Cyprian in the West as "*if there was one who*

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<sup>14</sup> George T Dunn, *Roman Catholic Church Versus 2nd Vatican Council Reformation: Hoping to Save Souls* (Xlibris Corporation, 2011); Matthew Ramage, 'Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus and the Substance of Catholic Doctrine: Towards a Realization of Benedict XVI's " Hermeneutic of Reform"', *Nova et Vetera*, 14.1 (2016), 295–330; Curtis A Jahn, 'Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus (Outside the Church, No Salvation)', 2007.

<sup>15</sup> Francis A Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?: Tracing the History of the Catholic Response* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002); Casmir Chimezie Obi, *Dialogue as an Imperative to Ecumenical and Interreligious Problems in Nigeria* (Xlibris Corporation, 2015); Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions: Biblical, Historical & Contemporary Perspectives* (InterVarsity Press, 2009); Mahmut Aydin, *Modern Western Christian Theological Understandings of Muslims since the Second Vatican Council* (CRVP, 2002), XIII.



*outside the ark of Noah could escape, then also one who is outside the Church may be saved*" - if there was one who was outside the ark of Noah could escape, then one who outside the Church can be saved. The statements of Origen and Cyprian, which appear to be exclusive, are again not directed at those from other religions outside of Christianity but rather as resistance to contemporary schismatics and Christian heretics.

Still, according to Sullivan<sup>16</sup> that when the early Church Fathers talked about those who did not get Salvation because they were outside the Catholic Church, then the context of this statement was directed to Christians who were considered guilty of committing grave sins of heretics and schismatics because there is no indication that these axioms were intended for anyone other than Christians when Christians were persecuted as a minority. From this historical fact, it can be understood that in the first three centuries, the axiom 'EENS' was again applied only to heretics and schismatics to maintain the unity of the Church, and this axiom did not apply to those of other religions (*non-Christians*). The question then is, since when did this axiom use to those not members of the Church?

As Sullivan wrote, the EENS axiom began to be expanded, not only to schismatics and Christians who commit heretics but also to those who come from religions other than Christianity. This expansion of the meaning of the EENS dogma occurred at the end of the fourth century when Christianity became the Roman Empire's official religion. Augustine influences the Church's exclusivist attitude towards those from other religions by quoting the statement of Mark 16: 15-16, which states that faith and baptism together *are necessary for Salvation*. Thus, according to Augustine, those who have heard the message of the Gospel but do not become Christians are considered guilty. It is more due to their rejection of the Bible's notice, so their Salvation can only be found through the Church.

It means that none of those outside the Catholic Church, whether infidels (*pagans*), Jews (*Jews*), heretics (*heretics*), schismatics (*schismatic*), and also Muslims, will ever take part in eternal life. Still, they will all enter the eternal fire, no matter how much alms they have given, even if they shed blood for the name

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<sup>16</sup> (Sullivan, 2002, p. 23)

of Christ, as long as they do not enter into the bosom and unity of the Catholic Church). *Church*, then it will not be saved. In short, there is no longer any hope of Salvation *for* anyone who does not accept Christ and join the Church after hearing about him<sup>17</sup>. Before Augustine, this EENS axiom actually only applied to those who had broken the unity of the Church by separating themselves from it. However, in Augustine's hands, this axiom began to be used not only for those who opposed the Church but also those who, having heard of Christ, did not want to become part of the Catholic Church.

Over time, the influence of the EENS axioms within the exclusivism of the Catholic Church expanded during the medieval period, when knowledge of the wider world was limited, and no one questioned the implications of the EENS dogma. But after the discovery of the Americas in 1492 and Vasco da Gama's voyage around *the Cape of Good Hope* to India in 1497, the eyes of Western Christians began to be opened to see more and more the fact that many people have never had the opportunity to hear and respond to the message of Jesus Christ. This fact then prompted the Church to rethink the Church's exclusivism attitude towards non-Christian religions and restore the meaning of EENS in its original form in a way that is unique to Roman Catholicism by staying true to this axiom that the Church is the only way of Salvation. Whoever does not enter it, he will perish. It is an exception for people unaware of the true religion and doesn't know about Jesus Christ, so in God's eyes, he is innocent and deserves Salvation. It is as stated by Pope Pius IX in *Allocution Singulari Quadam* (1854) as follows:

"It must, of course, be held as of faith that no one can be saved outside the apostolic Roman Church, that the Church is the only arch of Salvation, and that whoever does not enter it will perish in the flood. Yet, on the other hand, it must likewise be held as sure that those who are ignorant of true religion, if this ignorance is invincible, are not subject to any guilt in this matter before the eyes of the Lord."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> (Sullivan & Sullivan, 1988, p. 113)

<sup>18</sup> Josef Neuner and Jacques Dupuis, *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church* (Theological Publ. in India, 2001), p. 386.

The idea that can be understood from this quote is that according to the Catholic Church, Salvation can only be obtained as long as they enter the Church community, while those outside the Church will perish (*perish in flood*). But those who do not have invincible knowledge about the true religion can be saved. It means that belonging to the Church is not essential for those who do not know the Christian faith. This idea is a positive development from the Church in addressing other religions besides Christianity. There is another terminology commonly used by Roman Catholics to address the implications of a literal interpretation of this EENS axiom, namely '*implicit faith*' and '*baptism of desire*'. That is, Salvation (Salvation) is likely to be obtained by someone when he has an unconscious desire (*unconscious desire*) to join the Church (*join the Church*) related to the mystical body of Christ. Or in other words that faith and baptism are implied, implicitly enough to achieve Salvation (*implicit faith and baptism of desire can be enough to reach Salvation*). This kind of inclusive attitude can be considered a bridge where the Church can go beyond its exclusive attitude towards people of other religions.

#### **D. *Lumen Gentium*: The Church's Recognition of Non-Catholic Salvation**

After the Second Vatican Council – with several reforms in the Catholic Church – there were several studies conducted to explain the consequences of the Conciliar document, one of which has the book *La Fine della Chiesa come to Societa Perfetta* [*The End of the Church as a Perfect Society*]. This work consists of 13 articles written with a progressive perspective on how the Catholic Church relates to the modern world. One of the crucial issues that must be reformed and reformulated is the ancient EENS dogma and or axiom which, according to Joseph Ratzinger<sup>19</sup> – one of the progressive theologians – doctrine does not make sense when compared to the discoveries of modern geography which "prove" that the world has millions of people. According to him, it cannot be true that all the people who lived during these millions of years were not saved. For Ratzinger, it is obsolete to defend the Catholic dogma.

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<sup>19</sup> (Ratzinger, 2004)

In this context, the Vatican II document attempts to reformulate the ancient dogma of the EENS from a more soteriological-inclusive perspective. It addresses the possibility of Salvation for non-Christians. The main document of Vatican II, the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (1964), in Chapter II on *On the People of God*, the Council opened with the statement, "At all times and in every race God has given a welcome to whosoever fears Him and does what is right" that in every age and every nation, God has welcomed anyone who fears Him and does what is right. In this phrase, it can be understood that right and just actions are sufficient to be accepted by God and become a means to achieve Salvation. In chapter 16, the Council talks about non-Christians' Salvation, such as Jews, Muslims, and even atheists. Here I quote section 16 of the *Lumen Gentium docs*, as follows:

"Finally, those who have not accepted the Gospel are directed to God's people for various reasons. In the first place is the nation to whom the covenants and promises have been given, and from whom Christ appeared according to the flesh (cf. Rom. 9:4-5). Given his involvement, this nation is very much loved, because of the nation's fathers; it is known that God's grace and calling are never regretful (cf. Rom 11:28-29). But the plan of Salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator; among them there are mainly Muslims, who claim that they hold to the faith of Abraham, and together we bow down to worship the one and only omnipotent God, who will judge humanity on the Day of Resurrection. Even from other peoples, who seek a God unknown to them in shadows and images, God is not far away, because He gives all life and breath and everything (cf. Acts 17:25-28), and as the Savior desires the Salvation of all people (cf. 1 Tim 2:4). Because those who are innocent do not know the Gospel of Christ and His Church, but with a sincere heart seek God, and thanks to the influence of grace trying to carry out His will which they know through conscience with real deeds, can obtain eternal Salvation. Divine Providence also does not refuse to provide the necessary assistance for Salvation to those who, without guilt, have not come to a clear knowledge of God, but, through divine grace, are trying to live a righteous life. For whatever is good and true, which is in them, the Church is seen as a preparation for the Gospel, and as a gift of Him, who enlightens everyone, so that they may have life in the end. But often people, being

deceived by the Evil One, fall into deluded thoughts, which turn the truth of God into a lie, serving the creation rather than the Creator (cf. Rom. 1:21 and 25). Or they live and die without God in this world and are in grave danger of despair. Therefore, keeping in mind the Lord's commandment: "Preach the Gospel to all creation" (Mk 16: 15), the Church earnestly seeks to support missions, to advance the glory of God and the Salvation of all people.<sup>20</sup>

From the very long quote above, some important ideas can be understood. According to the Catholic Church, non-Catholics can achieve Salvation as long as they acknowledge the Creator. The Council in the document also made special mention of Salvation for Muslims, stating that they are a people who adhere to the faith of Abraham, and together we prostrate to worship the one and only omnipotent God, who will judge humanity on the Day of Resurrection. The same statement seems to be found in NA, stating that:

"The Church also respects the Muslim community, who worship the only God, who is living and sovereign, merciful and almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to humanity. The Muslims try to submit themselves with all their hearts to God's decrees which are also confidential, as before Abraham - the Islamic faith voluntarily referred to him - had surrendered to God. Indeed they do not recognize Jesus as God but respect Him as a Prophet. They also venerate His Mother Mary, who remains a virgin, and at certain times solemnly cry out to her".<sup>21</sup>

The ideas in the quotation above clearly show that the Church has a positive attitude towards Muslims. It can be seen in the statement that the Church considers Muslims as people who believe in and worship God and who hold the faith of Abraham. Again, this acknowledgement is a positive development, where in the middle ages, Muslims were often stigmatized as worshipers of Muhammad or other Gods and even considered idol worshipers. That the Church includes Muslims in God's plan of Salvation can be regarded as one of the Council's

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<sup>20</sup> Riberu, pp. 83-84.

<sup>21</sup> (Kristen-Muslim & Borrman, nd)

essential contributions to developing the Catholic Church's relationship with Muslims.

### **E. Christian Soteriological-Inclusivism: Half-hearted Salvation for Non-Christians**

As explained above, it seems that the Church's inclusive-soteriological acknowledgement has not fully acknowledged it and seems to be half-hearted. That is, there is a kind of ambiguity in this attitude because, on the one hand, the Church recognizes the possibility of Salvation for other religions without being a member of the Church. However, on the other hand, it still regards itself as an essential element for Salvation and that only through the Catholic Church is the full means of Salvation. It can be found. In his analysis of the Catholic Church's stance, Aydin's words can be used to assess the ambiguity of the Catholic Church's view. Aydin writes as follows:

"Our examination of the conciliar statements about non-Christian religions show that the Council acknowledged the possibility of Salvation of non-Christians by implicitly implying that non-Christian religions are independent ways of Salvation for their followers. Although, on the one hand, he admits that "grace and truth" are available in those religions, on the other hand he argues that they are made available to them despite the mediatorship of Jesus Christ. This seems to be a negative implication of the Council's teaching, but within the broader theological context of the conciliar statements, it would be more appropriate to interpret the silence of the Council positively instead of negatively in order to appreciate its contribution on this issue."<sup>22</sup>

From this quote, it can be seen that the Council's statement on non-Christian religions shows that, on the one hand, the Council recognizes the possibility of saving non-Christians using independent Salvation for their followers and recognizes that "grace and truth" is available in these religions. However, on the other hand, the Council also believes they will get Salvation implicitly if they make

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<sup>22</sup> Aydin, XIII, p. 36.

Jesus Christ the mediator. It can be seen from the Council's statement, which stated, "*Preach the Gospel to all creatures, the Church earnestly seeks to support missions, to advance the glory of God and the Salvation of all people*". Ideas like this seem to have negative implications of Council teaching. Still, in a broader theological context, council statements should be appreciated as an effort to understand their contribution to this problem.

## **F. Conclusion**

The Catholic Church, through the Second Vatican Council, takes a positive attitude towards non-Christians and recognizes that they are part of God's plan of Salvation. This attitude is a positive development in the relationship between the Catholic Church and non-Christians, given the history of stigmatization and negative perceptions in the Middle Ages. This recognition can be considered an essential contribution of the Second Vatican Council in developing relations between the Catholic Church and non-Christian people.

However, the Catholic Church's soteriologically inclusive attitude still has ambiguity. The Church recognizes the possibility of Salvation for other religions independently. Still, it considers itself an essential element in Salvation and that the fullness of the means of Salvation can only be found through the Catholic Church. Aydin's statement revealed that the Vatican II Council recognized the possibility of Salvation for non-Christians, but stressed that such Salvation only occurs through the mediation of Jesus Christ. Despite the negatives of the Council's teaching, it is necessary to appreciate its contribution in a wider theological context. []

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