

## The Possible Application of the Category of Fundamentalism to Some Attitudes and Practises of the Catholic Magistry\*

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### 1. *Preliminary remarks*

In the last twenty years the sociology of religion has regarded the secularization as a particular phenomenon that doesn't necessarily include the disappearance of the public aspect of religiousness; on the contrary religion is now involved in a series of processes that make it visible again, especially through the media (Huntington, 2000, p. 13; Kepel, 1991, p. 12). In this scenery each religion has to face the competition with other religions, and consequently the clash between different meanings of "god", "reality", "truth", "moral values" (Geertz, 1999, p. 14). In a globalized world these clashes play an increasingly leading role, which incline to forge the shape of modern religiousness; they oblige to revise and put into question concepts such as "absoluteness of a divine revelation", "mission", "ecumenism" (Kurtz, 1995, p. 230).

#### 1.1 *Definition of Fundamentalism*

The struggle for maintaining one's own religious identity in the world's arena is an important feature of what some sociologists define "fundamentalism". Even if there is not actually just one unique definition of "fundamentalism", I will try to define it as *the compliance of reason to a religious datum, that must be interpreted by a legitimate and thus qualified authority; the latter arrogates itself the right to understand "antagonistically" the mystery of God - this adjective is related to the stylistic form of fundamentalist texts and declarations, that does not permit any reply. Those who agree with the interpretation of this authority form the group of members in charge of healing, of reacting (and not destroying) a modernity that actually represents a menace for the religious ideals.*

I have tried to summarize a list of some recent definitions of fundamentalism, in particular those of Appleby, Marty and Lawrence (Appleby-Marty, 1995, vol. 1, p. ix; Lawrence, 1995, p.15).

#### 1.2 *Disadvantages in using this term*

There is not a general consent on the use of this term, even because it suffers the following disadvantages:

A. It is usually considered axiologically negative, usually associated with violence, terrorism and radicalism;

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\* This text is the summarizing of a more consistent work, that will soon be published as a book with the title: "La categoria di fondamentalismo alla prova: un caso cattolico".

B. It doesn't seem suitable to describe so different religious phenomena as *Al-fatah* and *Comunione e Liberazione*.

### 1.3 *Advantages in using this term*

Despite this, we could list two grounds that make this term quite useful:

A. It has the merit of furnishing an inclusive category by which we can analyse different contemporary religious phenomena which yet have a *trait d'union*, i.e. the will to defend and to affirm the religious identity in the modern world and through modern means.

B. It seems quite useful to define this present religious situation, for which previous terms such as "traditionalism", "antimodernism", "orthodoxy" appear fairly inadequate (Appleby-Marty, 1995, vol. 1, pp. viii-ix):

- (i) Comparing with "traditionalism" it doesn't represent a pure return to tradition, i.e. a denial of modernity; it rather has a symbiotic relationship with the latter, because it is a reaction to modernity which wants to get over it and not to delete it. "Fundamentalism" doesn't want to turn back the clock of history, but to live in the present in a way that is ethically welcome to God. We have clear evidence of this in the doubtless use of the modern means of communication, weapons etc. by all sort of fundamentalist movements. Fundamentalism is not traditionalism at all, even if it holds meaningful elements of traditionalism.
- (ii) With its rejection of the goals of modernity, and with its contemporary granting of modern means, fundamentalism appears more similar to Catholic antimodernism than to traditionalism (Appleby-Marty, 1995, vol. 1, p. 826). If we go over the antimodernistic document par excellence, the Syllabus of Pius IX and its interpretations, we can find a clear distinction between a hypothesis, that is the modern world with its actual depraved existence, and a thesis, that is the ideal Christian world ruled by the Pope. Although the structure of antimodernism could appear analogous to that of fundamentalism, yet there is an essential difference: antimodernism wants to come back to a *status quo* previous to the French Revolution or even to the Renaissance. In its canonical version, still present in some fringes of the Roman Catholic Church, antimodernism aims to the Middle Age and to the *corpus christianum* as a political and social ideal.
- (iii) Nor is fundamentalism a pure form of orthodoxy. Rather it is a form of orthopraxis, i.e. a philosophy of life, that inclines to permeate the entire existence of an individual. Here orthopraxis doesn't mean a mere fairness to ritual rules, but a specific way of considering one's own life, i.e. a faithful life, relating to an unfaithful one.

### 1.4 *Thesis of this lecture and main premises*

The category of fundamentalism has been usually applied to the so called "religious movements". These are small groups of people often headed by a charismatic leader, with a very fluid relationship with the outer world, i.e. they have a very adaptable structure. Given this variability, in defining the sense of the term "fundamentalism" we must always keep in mind that it is only a heuristic concept:

A. It must have a sociological meaning and not an axiological one;

B. It can assume different nuances relating to different religious phenomena.

It means that while we make a general statement about what fundamentalism is, we must assume that this definition can be moulded by the empiric analysis itself.

Following Appleby and Marty I will construct it like Wittgenstein's "family resemblances": these are *ostensive* concepts and not *defining* ones, i.e. they show their meaning throughout the analysis and not before it (Appleby-Marty, 1995, vol. 5, p. 5).

*The main question of this lecture is whether the above-mentioned category of fundamentalism is applicable to some recent statements of the Catholic Magistry, that is if the religious movements are the only target of this concept.*

These ground can suggest such an analysis:

A. This limitation would mean the exclusion of a large part of the contemporary religious phenomena from the analysis, as the "religious movements" represent essentially a little portion of the religions of the world.

B. Moreover, in some important cases, the category of fundamentalism is applied to fundamentalist religious movements that wholly belong to a wider and bureaucratized structure such as the Shiite hierarchy regarding some important terrorist movements, and the Catholic Magistry regarding *Communione e Liberazione* and *Opus Dei*. *There must be a link between these types of movements and the sacerdotal cadres which they belong to.* If the researchers define these movements as fundamentalist by a large (if not general) consent, what can we say about the sacerdotal cadres?

### 1.5 *The document*

As a particularly meaningful document for this analysis I have chosen a September 19 2000 dated declaration released by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, then headed by Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI. The title of the Declaration is *Dominus Jesus. On the uniqueness and saving universality of Jesus Christ and His Church*. (CDF, 2000) This text, for its concepts, stirred up a real hornets' nest among the ecumenical movements of the world; most scholars adopted the term "fundamentalist" for it. As far as this lecture is concerned, the analysis must be limited to few relevant issues.

## **2. Analysis of a disputed document**

### 2.1 . *Pertaining to the form*

#### 2.1.1 *Nature of the Document*

I would like to point out the very strong contrast between the literary genre of the document (a "Declaration") and the style of the text. The document is supposed to be quite informal, like an exhortation (*Dominus Jesus*, 4); instead we often find expressions like "It must be firmly believed" (nn. 1, 5; 2, 10; 3, 14 etc) or "This is opposed to the faith of the Catholic Church" (nn. 1, 6; 2, 31 etc) and so on.

#### 2.1.2 *Doctrinal and ecumenical questions*

As a "declaration" this document should usually belong to the ordinary activity of the Magistry, to which inerrancy does not pertain, unless questions of faith are dealt. This seems to be only partially the case; indeed here faith issues are put together with ecumenical ones, without a clear distinction: why?

A. An internal doctrinal document?

Ratzinger and the other members of his staff declared that *Dominus Jesus* is a purely internal document and not an ecumenical one; thus, concerning faith, it is unerring. The words at the end of the document confirm this statement: the Pope has approved the text *cum certa scientia et apostolica Sua auctoritate* (CDF, 2000).

#### B. An ecumenical document?

Even if this could be formally true (only the last paragraph is entitled to the relationship between the Catholic Church and other Religions), yet the document for the most part concerns ecumenical arguments rather than doctrinal ones; the first paragraph is fully dedicated to the criticism of the actual theology of the religious dialogue. Moreover, if we accept the argument of the “internal document”, some important openings towards the reality of the other religions would be lost. For instance, it is particularly noticeable that the nicean-constantinopolitan Creed is quoted without any reference to the “*filioque*”, and this doubtless represents a clear sign of reconciliation with the Orthodox Church (Brun, 2001, p. 63).

*Here, however, doctrinal questions seem to supersede the ecumenical ones; better still: here ecumenical issues seem to have become doctrinal.* This is a very important passage, because it means that the question of the relationship of the Catholic religion with the other faiths could be decided once and for all. This however states the matter of the religious identity within a pluralistic and globalized world, that is a world in which the different claims to absoluteness face each other. This is obviously a rich soil for the analysis of contemporary religious phenomena, and thus of fundamentalism.

#### 2.1.3 *Where does the Catholic Church subsist?*

There are some other important terminological questions which we must deal with, in particular those referring to some statements of the Second Vatican Council. The heritage of the Council is one of the most crucial aspects of the contemporary Catholic Church, as it states the matter of the relationship between Church and modern world. *Dominus Jesus* itself is conducive to this type of analysis, with its numerous references to the declarations of the Second Vatican Council. In particular the analysis of the expression *subsistit in* (subsists in) which is found in the Constitution *Lumen Gentium* on Church (number 8) is at the centre of the ecclesiological part of our document (*Dominus Jesus* n. 16).

There are two different possible interpretations of the term (von Tauffenbach, 2002):

- Church as people of God (*Ecclesia seu populus Dei*, LG 13)
- Church as mystic body of the Saviour (*corpus mysticus*, LG 7).

In the opinion of most scholars (Sartori, 1992) the word *subsistit in*, that replaced the previous verb *est*, means the fact that the Roman Church is always a historical institute, supported by the spirit of Christ, but never equal to this; thus there are other, though incomplete, manifestations of the Spirit of Christ. The Church is Catholic, and has to be Catholic (in the Greek meaning), in so far as it embraces the entire people of God, i. e. everybody who knows His word and trusts him all over the world: (*Lumen Gentium* n. 9)

At all times and in every race God has given welcome to whosoever fears Him and does what is right.

In Ratzinger’s opinion, instead, the verb “*subsistit in*” means that *only in the Roman Church is the Spirit of Christ, because only here real mystic body of the Lord takes place* (*Dominus Jesus*, footnote 56). The Church is Catholic in so far as it is Roman, because only the latter owns the sacraments, i.e. the healing means, which transmit the grace of God. Ratzinger alludes to *Lumen Gentium* 8:

This is the one Church of Christ which in the Creed is professed as one, holy, Catholic and apostolic, which our Saviour, after His Resurrection, commissioned Peter to shepherd, and him and the other apostles to extend and direct with authority.

To speak with Cardinal Ratzinger's words, on one hand the Church is organized *horizontally*, on the other it is organized *vertically* (Ratzinger, 2000). At issue, with this distinction, it is no less than the question of relativism, i.e. the relationship between the Catholic church and the other Christian churches.

## 2.2. *Pertaining to the contents*

### 2.2.1 *The concept of Logos*

Ratzinger, in a text supposed to be his official explanation of *Dominus Jesus*, tries to analyze the Greek concept of *Logos* (Ratzinger, 2002, p. 192). He states that the latter has two distinct meanings: first, it represents God himself, the Verb in the Gospel of John (*In the beginning was the Word*); secondly the human reason. As man is constitutionally “eligible for God” through a correct use of his reason, the two ways to arrive to God in the Christian religion, are practically complementary. Faith without reason is superstition; reason without faith is aimless. Nevertheless the question raises about what “correct use of reason” means. Accordingly with the Encyclical *Fides et Ratio* (Pöltner, 2000), often quoted in *Dominus Jesus*, Ratzinger states that only a reason guided by the Christian faith interpreted by the hierarchy is valid, otherwise it is blind and disruptive. Among all the world religions only Christianity is reasonable, because *Christianity is the true religion that satisfies the human reason by entailing cult and philosophy in the same concept of Logos*.

### 2.2.2 *Mission*

Mission represents a central subject in *Dominus Jesus*, with its numerous quotations from the Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (Various Authors, 2000). Moreover this is also a meaningful topic for my lecture, as mission is the par excellence field in which the question of religious identity finds its proper expression in a globalized world. How is mission characterized in our document?

A. *Since Christianity is the true religion, mission is firstly diffusion of truth and only in the second resort becomes dialogue.*

B. Moreover, in *Dominus Jesus* number 7 Ratzinger makes a clear distinction between the faith in the Catholic truth and the belief (credence) in the other religions. The latter comes from God, the former from men.

Given this distinction, the relationship between missionaries and natives is not equal; we can read in *Dominus Jesus* number 22:

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—who is God himself made man—in relation to the founders of the other religions.

Instead, we can read in *Ad Gentes* Decree (number 11) of the Second Vatican Council:

Let them be familiar with their national and religious traditions; let them gladly and reverently lay bare the seeds of the Word which lie hidden among their fellows.

### 2.2.3 *Differences from some statements of the Vatican Council II*

Obviously even the conciliar texts were not univocal on the question of the role of Christianity among the other world religions. However, at least we must say, according to most scholars, that one of the most important concerns of the fathers in Council Vatican II was to underline what is common to the entire human genre, and upon this basis to spread the Christian faith all over the world, because Christianity was strongly supposed to be what can extol human beings (Cozzi, 2002). Of course even then Christianity was the true revelation of God, but the other faiths were not perceived as a menace, as they seem to be now. On the contrary, they were, in spite of all the mistakes they could entail, a soil in which God has germinated His seeds of Truth and Holiness. Between the two directions possible after the Council, i.e. church as people of God and Church as the body of Christ, this Magistery, in a globalized and relativistic world, seems to have chosen the latter.

## 3. *Conclusions*

We must now come back to our starting point. After this brief analysis of some relevant topics of the Declaration *Dominus Jesus*, we can directly face the question whether the category of fundamentalism is suitable for these types of documents.

### 3.1 *Impossibility of a pure application of the category of fundamentalism*

In this case an unconditional use of this term seems impossible.

A. Many aspects of the fundamentalist religious movements are not present here: political involvement, activism, religious segregation, nationalism.

B. The situation of the Catholic Magistery is quite peculiar. The role of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith is essentially to defend the pillars of the Catholic faith, that is to preserve them from being altered or corrupted, and it is quite consequent that this task needs to be performed especially in a situation of confrontation between different claims to truth, holiness, revelation (D'Agostino, 1998, p. 44). We must always keep in mind that here we are running on a razor's edge, because we are in the middle between the search for the fundament and the assertion of a fundamentalism, the need to preserve the faith integral and the shift to integralism. By no means the Catholic Magistery, i.e. the congregation for the Doctrine, has both the right and the competence to affirm the basements of the Catholic faith; it is the bureaucratized structure in charge for it. Its work doesn't strictly depend on the conditions which the fundamentalism is reacting against, that is the globalized world, the clash of different religions, the rational humanism.

*Thus we cannot immediately apply the category of fundamentalism in its sociological meanings to these statements of the Catholic Magistery.*

### 3.2 *Possibility of a mediate application of the term "fundamentalism"*

Nevertheless the fact remains that some issues may be carefully pointed out by the light of some important features of fundamentalism.

A. Assuming that some statements of our Declaration are a patent reaction to modernity, they do not fit in with any of the previous categories listed above. Dominus Jesus is not traditionalist: Ratzinger always affirms that he aims to future and not to past. Neither is it antimodernistic: we can't find in the document any trace of a will of restoring the Medieval *corpus christianum*. For Ratzinger the actual Church is an *ecclesia peregrinans* and not an *ecclesia triumphans* (*Dominus Jesus* n. 19).

B. In the document these aspects are pre-eminent:

- the reaction to modernity going along with the desire to live in it
- the strong role of truth and authority
- the need to defend the Catholic identity

These aspects have some “family resemblances” with the main features of fundamentalism listed above:

A. “Fundamentalism” perceives the critical reason as a menace and wants to affirm a model of knowledge in which faith is necessary for reason, in contrast with the widespread model that put the faculty of reason in the foreground and affirms precisely that faith is not necessary for reason. In this view truth cannot exist outside the correct interpretation of faith, and we find the establishment of the so called regime of truth, with Enzo Pace's words (Pace, 1990; D'Agostino, 1998, p. 4).

We have seen that for Ratzinger reason must be submitted, “restored by reason” (Ratzinger, 1997, p. 56).

B. Fundamentalism wants to clearly distinguish itself from all the rest. Its concern is to identify its own believers from all the others; its concern is mostly to define the identity of its worshippers rather than to care about what worship is for (D'Agostino, 1998, p. 4).

Clearly the aim of *Dominus Jesus* is to defend some pillars of the Catholic faith, and this is a proper task for an institution like the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. However, involving the ecumenical problem, it raises the question of the identity of the Church of Rome in a globalized world. Is it necessary in such a doctrinal document? Or is it a patent reaction to the challenge set by the other religions? To answer this, I will briefly analyze a document of the Orthodox Church, *Basic Principles of the Attitude of the Russian Orthodox Church Toward the Other Christian Confessions* adopted by the Jubilee Bishops' Council, August 14, 2000. It is well known that *Dominus Jesus* was somehow an answer to the former. In particular I will compare the appendix of *Dominus Jesus*, the “Note on the Expression ‘Sister Churches’”, issued briefly after the main document, and supposed to be kept secret.

1) Many of the concerns that we have found in *Dominus Jesus* can also be found in the orthodox pronouncement: the relativistic danger, the role of truth in the mission, the uniqueness of the universal Catholic Church, the claim to be the sole real Church of Christ, the inerrancy. These are, as explained above, issues that cannot be disregarded in such a document, that belong to a bureaucratized religious structure.

2) Nevertheless we can measure the difference between the two documents with two small quotations. We can read in the appendix to *Dominus Jesus* (number 10), whose task is to suggest that the expression “Sister Church” must be avoided:

In fact, in the proper sense, *sister Churches* are exclusively particular Churches. It must always be clear, when the expression sister Churches is used in this proper sense, that the one, holy, Catholic and apostolic Universal Church is not sister but *mother* of all the particular Churches.

As it is obvious from the rest of the document, Ratzinger considers the Catholic Church equal to the Roman Church. So the Roman Church is the mother and the other Christian Churches are the children. We can instead read in the orthodox document (number 1.17):

By establishing various rites of reception, however, the Orthodox Church does not assess the extent to which grace-filled life has either been preserved intact or distorted in a non-Orthodox confession, considering this to be a mystery of God's providence and judgement.

The language adopted in *Dominus Jesus* is much more affirmative and much more “antagonistic” than the other one. This is probably due to the will of the Catholic Magistry in distinguishing itself from the other faiths in the context of a hostile world, and not to the ordinary way in which a bureaucratized religious structure *must* defend its creed.

All in all the category of fundamentalism in itself appears quite inappropriate for the Catholic case, but not completely. In fact we have pointed out that some peculiar elements are present in the Declaration. Even if the proper task of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith is to preserve the Catholic faith and tradition, we can also admit that different ways are possible for performing this duty, and some of these ways may constitute a peculiar reaction to the modernity; we could define them as a *theoretical-theological type of para-fundamentalism*, and they could have a sociological consequence in so far as they could represent an impulse to fundamentalism given the authority which they come from. As the Archbishop of Vienna König said: “The Declaration *Dominus Jesus* seems an expression of a great fear” (Interview to *Kleine Zeitung*, september 7th, 2000).

*Obviously we must always keep in mind that this type of theoretic-theological para-fundamentalism doesn't necessarily bring to a realized fundamentalism, i.e. to a fundamentalist movement. The actual link between a theoretical position of a sacerdotal leadership and a real fundamentalist movement has to be verified by a careful analysis on the spot.*

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