

## Can Non-Christians Be Saved?

To be honest, there have been voices on both sides (*Yes* and *No*) within the Catholic Church on this issue. In the creation of man, God complicated the answer. Humans are created in God's image and likeness; they have free will. This is seen in the choice made by Adam and Eve. This is a guarantee from God. It is essential to keep in mind that God did not turn away from His creation and still desired the salvation of all His people. "Before His visible advent in the flesh, the Logos [*i.e.*, Word] of God dwelled among the patriarchs and prophets in a spiritual manner, prefiguring the mysteries of his advent." By offering the promise of salvation, we are assured that God's plan remains immutable with respect to our growth in God-likeness, divine adoption, and divinization. The power of God's promise is stronger than the weakness of human sin: "[We] have gained still. The fact that the magi—representatives of all humanity—worship Christ, points to the universal character of salvation. In the Son of God, God the Father offers salvation to all the nations of the earth. (*Christ—Our Pascha*)

For You did not utterly turn away from your creature, O Good One, nor did you forget the work of your hands, but you visited us in diverse ways through your compassionate mercy. You sent Prophets; you performed deeds of power through your saints, who have been well-pleasing to you in every generation; You spoke to us through the mouths of your servants, the Prophets, announcing to us beforehand the salvation that was to come; you gave the law as a help; you appointed angels as guardians. (Anaphora of the Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great)

In spite of this, Saint Augustine taught at times *massa damnata*, most of humanity is lost. Now in this time, if you listen at a funeral and hear people say "now they are in a better place" it assumes that most of humanity will be in heaven.

The scriptural injunction about being "born again in water and the spirit" damns those who are not. Shepherd of Hermas dealt with that when he wrote: "These apostles and the teachers who preached the name of the Son of God, when they fell asleep in the power and faith of the Son of God, preached also to those who had fallen asleep earlier, and they gave them the seal of the preaching. They therefore went down into the water with them, and came up again." So there was the possibility of baptism after death for salvation. Even St. Augustine wrote, "God is not unjust, so as to deprive the just of the reward of justice, if the sacrament of the divinity and humanity of Christ was not announced to them" as Pope St. Clement had written to the people of Corinth *ca.* 94. A.D.

Let us go through all generations, and learn that from generation to generation the Master has given a place of repentance to those willing to turn to Him. Noah preached repentance, and

those who heard him were saved. Jonah preached repentance to the Ninivites; those who repented for their sins appeased God in praying and received salvation, even though the ways of God were foreign, or alien, to them.

St. Clement of Alexandria writes, "He who does not enter through the door . . . is a thief and a robber. Therefore, it is necessary for them to learn the truth through Christ and to be saved, even if they happen on philosophy."

Philosophy can be a path to salvation. In Justin's *First Apology*, he says he will answer in advance the claim that those who lived before Christ could not be saved: "Christ is the Logos [Divine Word] of whom the whole race of men partake. Those who lived according to Logos are Christians, even if they were considered atheists, such as, among the Greeks, Socrates and Heraclitus." Explaining what Justin means by this comes in his *Second Apology* 10:8: "Christ . . . was and is the Logos who is in everyone, and foretold through the prophets the things that were to come, and taught these things in person after becoming like to us in feeling." Similarly, in *Second Apology*, after speaking of Plato, the Stoics, and others: "For each of them, through part of the Divine Logos, seeing what was cognate to it to it, spoke well." Basically, if they followed the laws of nature which were revealed in creation, they were Christians because it was from Christ that all of these laws came to be. They were Christians but did not know it was called that.

This follows from Jesus' teaching in Matthew 8: 10-13 (the healing of the centurion's servant): "When Jesus heard this, He 'as amazed and said to those following Him, 'Amen, I say to you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. I say to you, many will come from the east and the west and will recline with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the banquet in the kingdom of heaven, but the children of the kingdom will be driven out into the outer darkness, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.' And Jesus said to the centurion, 'You may go; as you have believed, let it be done for you.' And at that very hour [his] servant was healed.'"

The people from the different directions were the non-Jews and, therefore, pagans. Pagans were admitted to the heavenly banquet before some of the Jews. Instead of being offended by this, we should be like St. Luke, expressing his praise at the marvels of Christ in the Acts of the Apostle, where stress is on the actions of the Holy Spirit, especially for the pagans of Pisidia who: "were glad and glorified the Word of God."

This should be kept in mind by Catholics today that being Catholic or Orthodox is no guarantee of participation in the heavenly banquet.

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