

Today it is too often forgotten that the fully lived Christian life – i.e., the sacramental life – ennobles our actions and virtuous habits such that they are supernatural (are divinizing; they make us like God) and therefore perfective of our character, a perfection that participates in the uncreated perfection of God. This is evidenced by the occurrence of when we witness our faith to others, we sometimes encounter the statement that is to the effect of: ‘I don’t have to do church, I’m a good enough person’; or, ‘Why church? I’m not a bad person.’ The primary position is that one can get to Heaven on one’s own without the help that God has instituted. Such a view is absurd. It would be infinitely less absurd to say that a mole could teach itself to paint such that it would rival any fresco of Michelangelo; or, even better, that a rock can teach itself metaphysics. This is the heresy of Pelagianism. It also sadly shows a lack of understanding of Heaven, what Christianity is, what man is, and grace. In other words, it makes Christianity out to be a mere philanthropic institution at best. It ignores the reality of the state of original sin, which is exemplified by concupiscence: the inclination to sin. It also undermines the missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit as well as the whole order of grace by which we are divinized and prepared for Heaven. Heaven is misunderstood as something that is earned and not freely offered, much less as a union with God- which requires divine assistance and a proper disposition on our part. Having said that the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that those to whom the Gospel of Jesus has not yet reached, *through no fault of their own* (willful ignorance not included) are not excluded from salvation (I would refer you to paragraphs numbers 1257-1261 and 839-848 for more specifics). From those paragraphs, one can draw a couple some principles that help to explain how there can be hope of salvation for such people.

First, that one sincerely seeks God and being *moved by His grace*, strives by their deeds to do God’s will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience (which of course could not be in opposition or contradiction to anything the Church teaches regarding faith or morals because of Her origin and the promise of Divine assistance). In other words, following one’s conscience entails more than just avoiding evil actions or thoughts. One *also* has to desire and habitually do things which are objectively good and virtuous. Implied in this is the recognition of objective good and objective evil and that one is moved by grace which is divine help freely given by God and cooperated with by the decisions of the person.

Second, there should be an acceptance of Divine Providence. Which is the foreordained plan of God. Accepting it would mean submitting one’s life to it knowing God is ultimately in charge. This is important because the whole point of the divine plan is the Incarnation of Jesus. So it could be argued that acceptance of Providence is also, even if implicitly, acceptance of God’s plan of Salvation. Third, and just as important, is the adoration and worship of the One true God. God not meaning some pagan demi-god, but rather the God from whom everything that exists is from and by whom everything is sustained in existence. Some might ask then whether an unbeliever could know that there is a God. The answer is yes! Every human person has the capacity, by the use of their reason, to know *that* there is a God. But human reason alone can go no deeper than that. Faith and Divine revelation tell us *Who* God is (i.e., Trinity, Incarnation). In any case, the point of the matter is that these principles must all be present for there to be hope of salvation for the invincibly ignorant (by the way, this does not bypass Purgatory). Further, this is a possibility only because of Jesus’ death and resurrection, and His Apostolic Church.

If then people who are invincibly ignorant of Christ and His Gospel *may* be saved, why does the Christian need to risk so much to evangelize? Well, ignoring Jesus’ mandate, which is an act of charity: to leave one’s neighbors ‘in the dark’ regarding salvation, or to make them aware of the sure and certain means that have been established by the God who is Love?’ Remembering that charity desires the good of the other: what is more good than Heaven? Further, if we are having such a conversation with someone they are not invincibly ignorant, and we are not to leave them in the dark. But thinking that we can bring them to the light of Christ by persuasive argument alone is wrong in that too much confidence is placed in the power of reason alone. Even though we use our intellect to evaluate the *reasonableness* of making the act of faith, the assent of faith is never the end product of an act of reason. What is most convincing is the living encounter with a person of an intense faith whose intimacy and love of God overflows into charity and full attentiveness to others; a person who has given up everything for God. In other words, an authentically heroic Christian who gives a reason for their hope!