

Discern Where God Is Working Second Week of Easter Friday, April 8, 2016
8:15 AM **Acts 5:34-42;** Jn 6:1-15 (It is very clear that the Second Vatican Council said, which is repeating actually the beliefs in the early Church, that in every age and in every culture God is addressing everybody with the message of salvation in some way or another.)

“For if this endeavor or this activity is of human origin, it will destroy itself.”

Is this reasoning valid? This was the reasoning of Gamaliel, and he was trying to warn the Sanhedrin against any sort of rash judgment; and of course warning against rash judgment is sound. But the reasoning that if it's of human origin, it will fail is not exactly true. **Many movements that are purely of human origin last a long, long time and do a great deal of damage.** Not only this, but **the human spirit is often aided by other spirits, often in rebellion against God**, the whole world of the demonic. So we have to be a little bit cautious about imagining that because something lasts a long time it is from God.

On the other hand, we should not assume that if people are different from us, they are not from God. If their beliefs don't quite square with Christian beliefs, that would be a contrary indication that it was inspired by the Holy Spirit, but it would not be an indication necessarily that they are evil or false or deceitful or wicked, which is unfortunately what many Christians have assumed in history, that other religions are wicked or demonic or devilish because they are different. So we are in a situation in which we really don't know one way or the other. **It is very clear that the Second Vatican Council said, which is repeating actually the beliefs in the early Church, that in every age and in every culture God is addressing everybody with the message of salvation in some way or another.** This is the work of Christ, and it is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is the work of God in every age, in every place, in some way.

Does this mean that God, that Christ, that the Holy Spirit are using other religions? That's not necessarily true. **That Christ is available to everyone at all times and places, that is clear.**

It is clear from the Apostles Creed where Jesus descended into hell, that he went to save those who in previous ages had really served God, but who could not go to God because, as it were, the gates of heaven were not opened, meaning there is no human way for human beings to unite with God until God became incarnate in human nature and made that union possible. **But now the role of other religions is all very iffy.** Can the Holy Spirit inspire prophets outside of Israel? Yes, that's been already established. Does that mean that everyone is in fact a prophet who claims to be? Well, no, **there is such thing as false prophecy.** How do we know? **We have to discern, and we discern by seeing where it leads.** We know the goal of God is communion: communion, union, fellowship, sharing of life in the Trinity. Anything leading to that is from God; anything leading away from it is not from God. So we all have this work to do and can't do it all by ourselves. We have to work together to discern where the Holy Spirit is at work, where Christ is at work beyond the borders of the explicit discipleship, beyond the borders of the body of Christ, beyond the borders of the Church, which itself understands itself to be Christ, so beyond that.

Among those who don't even know God in a Christlike way, how is Christ working?

We must never assume we could answer that question in any sort of simple black-and-white way. And this is the beginning of a long process of discernment. That is why the Second Vatican Council and Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict and the present pope, Francis, have spent so much time trying to **dialogue** with other peoples, with peoples of different beliefs and faiths and religions, because only when we **listen to what they believe and try to see how Christlike it is or how contrary to Christ it is** will we know how God is working. So this is an ongoing process. We have no book to go to to see the results. We have to find them for ourselves.