agenzia fides
Fondata nel 1927
Organo di informazione delle Pontificie Opere Missionarie
http://www.fides.org

Special Issue - SPECIAL - WORDS OF DOCTRINE by Rev Nicola Bux and Rev Salvatore Vitiello
SPE SALVI, the second Encyclical of His Holiness Benedict XVI

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - A magnificent fresco on Christian hope, the new Encyclical by Pope Benedict XVI: Spe Salvi facti sumus, “In hope we were saved” (Cf Rom 8,24) is the title and I wager it will occupy no little time and study of Christians and other men and women of goodwill.
After giving us “Deus caritas est”, on Charity, the Holy Father gives the Church this text on the virtue of hope, the one Péguy referred to as the “little one” of the three theological virtues, which the elder ones faith and charity appear to lead by hand, but which in fact leads and sustains both.
The text is dynamic, with 50 paragraphs, not officially subdivided in parts but which is in fact composed of an ample definition of Christian hope, with no few explanations and corrections of errors in understanding this virtue, and a second part with the title “Settings” for learning and practising hope”, in which there emerges all the Pope's paternity and pastoral support for his children and all men and women, to return, as Church, to educate to hope.
The first 13 paragraphs are a passionate biblical-theological analysis of hope. The Pope asks: “ what sort of hope could ever justify the statement that, on the basis of that hope and simply because it exists, we are redeemed? And what sort of certainty is involved here?” (n. 1). And it emerges, very clearly, that Christian hope is certainty, not doubt, founded on faith, indeed that 'hope' is the equivalent of faith” (n.2). Hope then, is a Person, it is Christ himself, because only One who is able to offer hope which conquers death, gives true hope!
So eternal life is the real measure of human hope. The struggle against death, to free oneself from death has always represented a characterising element of human existence; but “ do we really want this—to live eternally? Perhaps many people reject the faith today simply because they do not find the prospect of eternal life attractive. What they desire is not eternal life at all, but this present life, for which faith in eternal life seems something of an impediment. To continue living for ever —endlessly—appears more like a curse than a gift. Death, admittedly, one would wish to postpone for as long as possible. But to live always, without end—this, all things considered, can only be monotonous and ultimately unbearable” (n. 10).
The Holy Father leads us to a radical question, the fundamental question of every human life: “there is a contradiction in our attitude, which points to an inner contradiction in our very existence. On the one hand, we do not want to die; above all, those who love us do not want us to die. Yet on the other hand, neither do we want to continue living indefinitely, nor was the earth created with that in view. So what do we really want? Our paradoxical attitude gives rise to a deeper question: what in fact is “life”? And what does “eternity” really mean?” (n. 11). The answer to this question occupies a greater part of the journey of the text, and it is an extraordinary and fascinating path which leads the reader not only to deepen his knowledge, but also to a great introspection, comparison with self and with the radical meaning of one's own existence.
The historical analysis of the concept of hope of modern times (nn. 16-23) brings a great contribution, also critical, to the drifts of a thought which, anthropocentrically reduced, measuring everything with man, ended up wanting to exclude God. It is the ideology of progress which has deceived and deceives man, identified with extraordinary clarity, by the ideas of Bacon, of whom it is said: “ Francis Bacon and those who followed in the intellectual current of modernity that he inspired were wrong to believe that man would be redeemed through science” (n. 25).
And Pope Benedict XVI, as a great expert on the heart and the reality of man, affirms: “It is not science that redeems man: man is redeemed by love. This applies even in terms of this present world. When someone has the experience of a great love in his life, this is a moment of “redemption” which gives a new meaning to his life. But soon he will also realise that the love bestowed upon him cannot by itself resolve the question of his life. It is a

I contenuti del sito sono pubblicati sotto Licenza Creative Common - http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/deed.it

love that remains fragile. It can be destroyed by death. The human being needs unconditional love. He needs the certainty" (n. 26). And again: " we need the greater and lesser hopes that keep us going day by day. But these are not enough without the great hope, which must surpass everything else. This great hope can only be God " (n. 31). Most important the analysis, undertaken by the encyclical, of the relation between hope and freedom, in which it is said that having reduced hope to the strict confines of worldly realities, to the humanly achievable, excluding the salvific dimension of a hope which is not only the fruit of human action and progress, in a conception which in fact is auto-redemptive, has determined also the reduction of freedom: " a hope that does not concern me personally is not a real hope. It has also become clear that this hope is opposed to freedom, since human affairs depend in each generation on the free decisions of those concerned. If this freedom were to be taken away, as a result of certain conditions or structures, then ultimately this world would not be good, since a world without freedom can by no means be a good world." (n. 30).
In his concern as the Shepherd of the Universal Church to indicate to his sons and daughters and all men and women of goodwill, where hope can be 'learned' the Holy Father identifies three fundamental "places" : first of all Prayer (nn. 32-34), then human action and suffering (nn. 35-40) e, ultimately, the Last Judgement (nn. 41-48). The text ends with a magnificent fresco dedicated to Most Holy Mary, "Star of Hope" (nn. 48-50). (Agenzia Fides 30/11/2007; righe 69, parole 1.011)

I contenuti del sito sono pubblicati sotto Licenza Creative Common - http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/deed.it