



VATICAN - THE WORDS OF DOCTRINE - The Gospel, banner of true peace Rev Nicola Bux and Rev Salvatore Vitiello

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - Rémi Brague, professor of Arab Philosophy at the Sorbonne, in an interview with the Italian Catholic daily *Avvenire* (Brague: "Rather than values, I prefer benefits", 13 December 2007, p 29) said, among other things: "I am annoyed by all this talk about values [...] in Catholic circles in recent years. Obviously not because I question the values' content, but because I note a certain ingenuousness in the use of the term which is fashionable, but which was also used for example by Nietzsche, who was not what one would call a good Catholic. So I propose a sort of exercise: to replace the word 'value' with the word 'benefit', in the plural. A value exists to the extent in which we attribute it to a certain thing, it is therefore subjective. Nietzsche, in "Così parlò Zarathustra", analyses the question and says the act with which we give importance to a certain thing is more important than the thing itself which acquires value thanks to the act. It is here that Catholics must be careful. Benefits, instead, are objective, concrete, they meet needs and can be shared. In Christianity there is nothing which is of benefit only for Christians".

The encyclical *Spe salvi* reminds Christians, tempted as they are by subjectivism and relativism, of this objectivity, in order to demonstrate the necessity of the Gospel message. Jesus came simply to reveal to man the truth about being man: being a child of God who is Father, the supreme benefit. Surely this is something which can be proposed to anyone? Baptism, which is the beginning of this sonship, is then a gift and initiation to knowledge of divine truth; so Jesus, after sending those who were with Him to make disciples of all men and women, said they were to baptise them. Certainly the Lord's concern was not to analyse the challenges - as they love to say today - of the pagan world, but to set man free from subjection to the Evil One. To counter the latter what is needed is not sociological analysis but the power of the Gospel, which can drive away Satan and save every human person (cfr Rom, 1,16). Christians, like Saint Paul, must realise that the Word became flesh and contains the fullness of divinity, able to save and heal all convert hearts.

So, does not a little more of the energy and economic resources used by Catholic organisations for values, in symposiums on peace and non-violence, deserve to be invested in the diffusion of the Gospel?

Perhaps the time has come to refuse to be blackmailed by a power which finances cultural activities, only if they are 'neutral', that is only if they are silent about Christ, and perhaps speak of some other culture or religion. With all this talk about the Word, do we fail to understand that on its knowledge and practice depends any change in man and therefore change in everything else? Nevertheless, even among the clergy, there are some who praise non-practising Catholics or non believers, for coming to church only for funerals and weddings, and not being bigoted like the parishioners who come to mass every evening! What is evangelisation for them?

Certainly, the decision to accept the Gospel and to love God revealed in Jesus Christ, makes sense only if it is taken in freedom. We all know that there is no pleasure in loving when one is forced to love. We are consoled only when the person we love responds to our love with absolute freedom and independence. This is the risk God took when he gave man intellect and free will. Otherwise love would never be freely given and therefore would never be love. But this does not exempt us from proposing Jesus Christ.

That Jesus Christ whose Greek initials the first persecuted Christians were not afraid to exhibit X(ch) and P(r) in XPISTOC, often with Alfa and Omega, which from Revelation: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end..." indicate that the Word is the Creator and the re-capitulator of the cosmos and history. Yes, that chrism which still adorns liturgical vestments, underlined by the Benedictines with Pax, because He is true peace. A banner which speaks of Jesus Christ, Christening, the Chrism Mass, anointing, the mission which for Christians is essential, beginning with young people: without the Lord there can be no peace in or around the human heart. *Ubi Deus ibi pax* St Francis would say. This is why the proclamation of the Gospel is a necessity (1 Cor 9,16-18). (Agenzia Fides 7/2/2008; righe 54, parole 714)