



VATICAN - THE WORDS OF DOCTRINE - Christian unity in society Rev Nicola Bux and Rev Salvatore Vitiello

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - In these times of renewed ecumenical effort, the difficult arises for Christians to be united on some of the most important ethical issues of our day: Catholics and Protestants in particular are divided on issues concerning life and the family.

One is bound to ask: what is the point in persevering on the way to Christian unity, if this unity is not visible in the world on issues which affect how the faith is lived? In other words, if there is no consistency between faith and life? The second position which no ethical application of the faith can be deduced, is considerably schizophrenic since it reduces the faith to a sentiment outside reality and ethics to a code which in the wake of the apostolic writings, takes a position on the behaviour of Christians in the surrounding pagan world, indicating what should distinguish them: famous is the emphasis "they share the table but not the thalamus" (allusion to all kinds of concubinary menages).

Consistency between faith and life is not a recent invention, it is part of the nature of the Ecclesial Body of which Christ is the Head; the Ecclesial Body is one and the same as the Eucharistic Body.

Could a Catholic, in any sort of situation in the different countries of the world, discern, as St Paul would say, the Body of Christ: approach Communion, recognising the Body to which he belongs, without verifying or at least desiring to be one with all the members of this body?

We are One! Idealistic romanticism or recognition of a unity which is "given" and comes from on High, together with realistic efforts to build day by day relations of unity with our brothers and sisters in the faith? Will Christians then not strive to be united in the witness they offer society? What is the use of privileging with subtle distinction, one's own interpretation, instead of first of all, putting into practice the Church's words of doctrine? In recent times there have been several cases of Catholics wanting to take the place of the Magisterium, "correcting it" and bending it to suit their own arguable opinion. Not that this is new, of course, but history should teach something on the ephemeral duration of such impositions.

Therefore unity of Christians in the world, the unity of Catholics in society, is a precious treasure, as St John Chrysostom was known to say, precisely because it is documented with the visible unity of moral conduct. Should we not invoke, in these times of dominant relativism, the urgency of ethical codes to support shared behaviour? We Catholics understand this effort, but we reply, we already have a Decalogue, charged with universal reasonableness, given by Someone on a mountain top, more than three thousand years ago, and of which Jesus Christ not change even one iota, except to bring it to completion.

To be observed, at the same time, a call - actually, ever more feeble - for 'values' chosen on alternate days to remedy the ethical drifting of society, on the part of secular moralists with some Catholic "support".

In the face of fear of exploitation of ethical issues on the part of politicians, there comes to mind a thought of Cardinal John Henry Newman, known for his interior freedom: "One characteristic of a certain worldly thought is that religiosity, spirituality and culture are always pure and good. Whereas politics are bad. Catholics instead, with great realism, recognise that, since mankind is wounded by original sin, all human activity is in danger of becoming corrupted and producing negative effects [...]. The Church is structured precisely to be concerned for, or (as non believers would say), to meddle with, the world. Her members are only doing their duty when they join together and when this internal unity is used to fight the spirit of evil on the outside, at the courts of kings or among the variety of multitudes." (The Arians in the 4th century (Agenzia Fides 14/2/2008; righe 48, parole 618)