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

VATICAN - THE WORDS OF DOCTRINE- Beware of proponents of a new pantheon

Rev Nicola Bux and Rev Salvatore Vitiello

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - In these times of ours rampant declarations and initiatives with the banner of "dialogue among religions" hoisted on their respective standards, find proponents even among persons with a rather vague sense of religion and even more so of dialogue, except "pro domo sua". The recently re-proposed idea to construct a 'palace of religions', is not new. It was already suggested on the eve of the Jubilee of the Year Two Thousand. The proponents are usually former or post-Marxists who, having put aside Marx and Feuerbach's criticism of religions, behave, on alternate days, like new emperors of religious pax and a secular state. While they claim to be open and tolerant, essentially what they want is to scale down the role of Catholicism.
We prefer to stay with Emperor Constantine who wrote: "Every citizen may follow the religion most suited to his conscience ". This is one formula of the famous Edict of Milan issued in 313, recognition of freedom of conscience 'in embryo'. And another says: "Christians and all others are granted the authority to worship as they please". There had been even earlier signs of tolerance, after waves of persecutions, what is new here lies wholly and exclusively in the concept of religious freedom: the right of the divinitas (deity) to be adored as it wishes, is the basis in individuals of the authority to follow whatever religion they desire (cfr M. Sordi, I cristiani e l'impero romano, Milan, Jaca Book).
This is the foundation of the secular state, as we say today: the state recognises an instance other than itself, of whose rights it is neither the source nor the moderator, and to whom, therefore, it does not make 'concessions', and with whom it can and must enter into relationship.
Here is the seed of that idea of freedom and democracy which recognises that the state is not the absolute source of power. Therefore, religious freedom is not a concession born of the state: instead it belongs to 'I', an inalienable right of the individual, a right which the state is bound to recognise.
If we recognise the right of the deity to be adored, there follows the freedom of individuals to practice each their own religion and faith according to conscience. Constantine laid the foundations for the recognition of the rights of every person, rights which are unconditioned and non available. He recognises freedom of worship not only as an individual right, but also as an associative right, of an original social body, such as the Church. He recognises the right of Christians to be the Church. Certainly, he sees her functional, with political realism, in view of the unity of the empire, but convoking Nicea and affirming the divinity of Christ, he lays the foundation of the original Christian claim compared to all other religions.
Recognition of religious freedom, as a personal freedom, and the Church's freedom from the state allows the truth of Christianity to emerge in the ancient world of the gods with devastating power, with respect to the ancient religions, the polytheism of the Pantheon, to which the gods were admitted.
The affirmation of God, not only as unique, but as One, has an enormous de-mythologising effect, and conquers superstition, formalisim, the double truth of public worship and private scepticism: Christianity bursts onto the scene as reconciliation between reason and religion.
Precisely because the truth is not a myth or a ritual formula or a state ideology, instead it is "vir qui adest", according to Augustine, that is a Man present, we have here the root of tolerance. Christianity has a special role to play, since it is the most universal of all religions: not limited to any place, epoch, or language, although the historical rooting of the Incarnation is fundamental. The educational experience of the Church is true for the whole world.
With regard to the concept of dialogue, it is none other, at least for Christians, than the continuation of the great dialogue initiated in the beginning by the 'Logos' through the prophets and, in the last two millennia, with the Incarnation (cfr Letter to the Hebrews 1,1): is not, the Gospel, perhaps, 'dialogue between God and man' of every

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

generation? Not dialogue among religions, which shows itself to be an abstraction, because of sealed systems, but among cultures and, better, philosophies.
Precisely in Regensburg the Pope underlined that we have urgent need of this dialogue to broaden our understanding of reason and its use. Here is not the place for systematic in-depth reflection on the matter. He also recalled that the West, by censuring God, is incapable of dialoguing with the other world cultures which are shocked by our secularisation, seen as rejection of reason, the sacred, and precisely, of God.
It follows then, that our so-called interreligious dialogue needs a change in method: in Bavaria the Pope gave a signal in the same direction. The faith-reason question, today, concerns Muslims and Christians and non believers, inside and outside of Europe. Let all who agree with this analysis unite! This again is an indication of Pope Benedict, treated when he was Cardinal Ratzinger. There is no need for 'palaces' of dialogue in Rome, the United Nations 'palace' in New York is more than sufficient. (Agenzia Fides 21/2/2008; righe 68, parole 838)

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