



VATICAN - THE WORDS OF DOCTRINE by Rev Nicola Bux and Rev Salvatore Vitiello - Politics, Catholics, witness and mission

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - “Look: as Yahweh my God commanded me, I have taught you laws and customs, for you to observe in the country of which you are going to take possession. Keep them, put them into practice, and other peoples will admire your wisdom and prudence.” (Deuteronomy 4,5).

Moses' statement to the people of Israel should be meditated by Catholic politicians who, in the name of climbing over “fences”, intend to separate from their identity. We could analyse the phrase: “and other peoples will admire your wisdom and prudence”, in this way “and other peoples will admire your identity”.

If Party comes from part, how can “two parts” stay together in it, how can two substantially different and opposite identities consider themselves one?

The answer is: in the name of secularism. Alright: what kind of secularism?

For Catholic Social Doctrine, secularism is autonomy of the civil and political sphere from the religious and ecclesiastical sphere, but not from the moral sphere (cf. “Doctrinal note on certain matters regarding the commitment and behaviour of Catholics in political life” n. 6). This is “healthy secularism” or “secularism properly understood” as the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI has so often said, whereas “badly understood” or misunderstood it is “injurious to democratic life, a conception of pluralism that reflects moral relativism. Democracy must be based on the true and solid foundation of non-negotiable ethical principles, which are the underpinning of life in society.” (Ibidem, n. 3).

Not by chance we have seen in various social fields an increasing number of demands for ‘ethic codes’: in actual fact the latter are simply, a “climbing back through the window”, unfortunately in a caricature version, of the Mount Sinai Decalogue “shown to the door” by certain home-grown and European ideological secularism. There is a return, in a decentralised form, of state ethics reminiscent of Hegel which replaced the ethics of God and deified itself in Nazi and Communist forms of state. This deserves meditation on the part of Catholics ready, in an irenic and ideological manner, to promote meetings and moratoriums on the proper values of peace and the moratorium for the death penalty, with anyone, but reluctant to unite with brothers in the faith in order to “keep and put into practice in the country” at least the ethics of Sinai, if not those of the Sermon on the Mount. Should they not bear witness to these ethics, as the roots of a nation such as Italy and a continent such as Europe, today increasingly a territory for mission and new proclamation of the Gospel? False harmony, the fruit of identity compromise in the name of values, firstly of the false peace built by man and according to the dictates of the world's major powers, is the work of the Anti-Christ, as forecasted by Solov'ev at the beginning of the last century.

The profound significance of being Christian, today as always, is represented by two inseparable elements, unity and mission. The quest for unity among believers in Christ, “that all may be one”, and mission, evangelisation as an indispensable element of Christian life, as obedience to Christ's command, should characterise every Christian life in every field, including the field of politics. Evangelisation is an absolute priority today and essential in Europe shaken by a crisis of faith unequalled in history, as well as on the other continents: “The mission of Christ the Redeemer, which is entrusted to the Church, is still very far from completion. As the second millennium after Christ's coming draws to an end, an overall view of the human race shows that this mission is still only beginning and that we must commit ourselves wholeheartedly to its service.” (Redemptoris missio,1).

And Moses' discourse continues: “Once they know what all these laws are, they will exclaim, No other people is as wise and prudent as this great nation! And indeed, what great nation has its gods as near as Yahweh our God is to us whenever we call to him? (Dt 4,8).

It is necessary to overcome that “human respect” which brings complaints of “inference”, from secularists and integralism even from Catholics, every time a Catholic continues to be a Catholic even if he or she is sitting in a

parliament of one of the world's democracies. As the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI said to the Fathers taking part at a recent general congregation of the Society of Jesus: “you must also take care that your work and institutions always maintain a clear and explicit identity, so that the goal of your apostolic activity is neither ambiguous nor obscure and that many others may share in your ideals and join you effectively and enthusiastically” (Discourse 21 February 2008).

Does this not apply also to Catholics involved in politics? Not only must moral values be present in the political competition! Catholics themselves must be a presence, in visible unity, wherever they are in the world. To be a true witness to the Gospel is the mission to which the baptism received calls us and no believer in Christ may shirk the supreme duty to proclaim Christ to all peoples. (Agenzia Fides 28/2/2008; righe 59, parole 828)