



VATICAN - THE WORDS OF DOCTRINE by Rev Nicola Bux and Rev Salvatore Vitiello - Catholic impact on the life of the world depends on being Church

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - From America to Europe, passing by way of China - as we were reminded by this year's meditations for the Stations of the Cross on Good Friday composed by the Archbishop of Hong Kong - in the present situation, politics watches Catholics: whether they fearlessly reveal their thought with regard to the human person and to major ethical matters of our day, or instead, limit themselves to making generic statements with regard to values. The results are conflicting: in the East they are persecuted, in the west they are standardised until they become insignificant. Two opposites, the result of listening or not listening to the living teaching of the Church.

If the early Christians had emancipated from the teaching of the Apostles, no one in the Roman Empire would have noticed and they would soon have disappeared. What prevented this? We are all familiar with the famous verse of the Acts of the Apostles which offers an extreme synthesis of their life: "These remained faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers." (2,42).

It is the duty of Catholics of every generation to "remain faithful" to apostolic doctrine and to "persevere" in life: this means living it, announcing it always and everywhere, in ways suited to the profession of each, remaining always faithful to the form in which it was received. The faithfulness of the early Christian community "in listening to the teaching of the apostles", refers consequently to the theme of the reception of the Magisterium of the Church today. Admittedly, also on the part of many lay faithful and even non believers, there has been a great increase in attention to Church statements on various matters concerning faith and reason, nevertheless we wonder about its impact or, as they say today, its grade of reception, in other words, to what point the conscience of the faithful allows itself to be illuminated and formed by the teaching of the Successors of the Apostles, the Bishop of Rome and the other bishops in communion with him; to what extent the living Magisterium is accepted as the actualised Word of God to which to be subject with respect, since it offers the essential criteria of judgement with which to compare everything, every reality, personal and community; in a word, if the conscience of the faithful tends to be ecclesial or to remain private, or even divided between the thought of Christ and the thought of the world, between being a member of the Church and conforming to the cultural mode of the day.

The Book of the Acts speaks of "teaching" in the singular, precisely to underline the fundamental doctrinal unity of the Church, against any form of relativism which would reduce that teaching to an opinion, or democratism which would have it sifted by the majority. It is no secret that, in the general levelling of communication, directly proportional to the increased amount of information, there is an attempt to emancipate from the ecclesial Magisterium, in particular by those Catholics who think this would render them "adults", when instead Christians should always remain children in spirit (cfr. 1Pt 1,14; 2,2).

This phenomenon is seen especially in reception of Papal teaching: the "teaching of the apostles" we know, has authority to the extent that it is in full communion with that of the apostle Peter and his successors. Apart from all the known canonical distinctions of grade of the Magisterium and the assent which is due to it, the fact remains that, also according to the common sensus fidei of the people of God, in no way may the teaching of the Pope be considered one of various opinions in the Church, instead it is the criteria by which to verify the authenticity of the teaching of a bishop or a Conference of Bishops. The Magisterium of the Pope expresses in synthesis the authentic thought of the Church and, in whatever field they operate, Catholics must accept it if they are to continue to be like the early Christians "faithful in listening to the teaching of the apostles".

On this depends Catholic impact or non impact on the social and political life of the world: being salt in order to preserve the world from corruption, or being insipid and therefore swept away with it. (Agenzia Fides 28/3/2008; righe 46, parole 630)