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VATICAN - THE WORDS OF DOCTRINE by Rev Nicola Bux and Rev Salvatore Vitiello - The infallibility of the Pope in the Church

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - Three years since the beginning of his ministry as Supreme Shepherd, what emerges most clearly in the teaching of Benedict XVI is the emphasis he places on the capital difficulty: the personalisation of the life of the Church, in other words the genesis, new understanding of the life of the person. This is the goal of new, as well as first evangelisation. On this depends the effectiveness of pastoral care which would be better referred to as “apostolate”, a term which reminds priests and lay people that they are called by Someone and that their task is to carry Him, and Him alone, to every human person.

During his pastoral journeys the Holy Father always fosters in the clergy and faithful the awareness that the Catholic Church must approach the individual with maximum vigour. Nevertheless in no few themes of pastoral visits, homilies, messages and gatherings this is rarely present: the problem would appear to be another. Various types of catechesis and pastoral care take it for granted that men and women today are open to the Church and that Christians have no personal problems. In a word, that the change of heart from which the Gospel starts, is not the permanent goal, the condition for the ecclesial community to be born and to live. Why is this? It would seem that the figure of Jesus is practically rejected or reduced to an inspiration, and that quite the opposite is done with regard to the so-called “challenges”, a word, as we have said several times already, now regularly used in ecclesial languages influenced by the language of the world. It is therefore no surprise that national programmes and pastoral plans are to a great extent disregarded and ineffective. Is this a matter of distraction? Let us hope so. However there is more.

In the Church we see 'soft' protest coming from certain bishops and lay adults: what the Pope says must never be discussed. “They protest against him but never discuss what he says. They realise that he speaks of highly important matters and therefore refuse to discuss or even to speak of them, or make them known. And so they close themselves in prejudicial rejection of the 'anti-modern' Pope ” (cfr Il Pontefice visto da Sandro Magister, “Mi ricorda sant’Agostino” by R.Fontolan, Tracce-Rivista internazionale di CL 2008/4 p 33).

Perhaps because, unlike the normal procedure of experts and analysts, the Pope does not “make religious ‘geo-politics’ one of the pillars of his pontificate” ? Indeed “the vision of which he is the bearer is different, it is more a theology of history than geopolitics” (ivi). We agree with Magister who identifies “the essential nucleus of the thought of Benedict XVI” in his two encyclicals, his book Jesus of Nazareth and three discourses, to the Roman Curia, at Regensburg and to the La Sapienza University. The aim of these cited documents is to reflect not on the Church and the organisation of the Church, but on Jesus, the way, the truth and the life, and on the implications of this for mankind; this is, in a word, the Gospel handed on to the Church by the Apostles. Now “ In order to preserve the Church in the purity of the faith handed on by the apostles, Christ who is the Truth willed to confer on her a share in his own infallibility. By a "supernatural sense of faith" the People of God, under the guidance of the Church's living Magisterium, "unfailingly adheres to this faith” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, art. 889; cfr Lumen gentium, n 12 and Dei Verbum, n 10).

Where this is not questioned, we may see it reduced in the Church to the opinion that the Pope's Magisterium is infallible only when it proclaims dogmas. Otherwise it is a thought and opinion to be respected but to only a certain extent and by each as he wishes. This relativism in the Church feeds especially on ignorance of doctrine. It can be overcome if the Bishops take the lead in teaching the Catechism, which is the compendium of tradition including the renewal of Vatican II. Some complain that the faithful are not familiar with the Council documents: but can the masses be expected to know the contents of those documents? The Catechism, instead, can be approached by all and should be known to all. Here is what the Catechism of the Catholic Church says on the matter: “ Divine assistance is also given to the successors of the apostles, teaching in communion with the successor of Peter, and, in a particular way, to the bishop of Rome, pastor of the whole Church, when, without

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arriving at an infallible definition and without pronouncing in a "definitive manner," they propose in the exercise of the ordinary Magisterium a teaching that leads to better understanding of Revelation in matters of faith and morals. To this ordinary teaching the faithful "are to adhere to it with religious assent" which, though distinct from the assent of faith, is nonetheless an extension of it. cfr Lumen gentium, n 25)". (CCC 892). Unless the doubt is not only about the Church's infallibility but also about the truth of Jesus Christ.

In truth all of us, clergy and faithful alike, are required to live humility and obedience, two virtues proper to Jesus Christ, the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints, which are indispensable if we intend to become saints. Without the latter it is not enough for an increase in the Church of "consensus", as we say today, towards Benedict XVI, as it happened with John Paul II after the initial impact and hostility which situated him in pre-Council Poland. One detail: no wonder then that without these virtues no one listens to Motu propria, Instructions and documents of Roman Curia or diocesan curia. (Agenzia Fides 30/4/2008; righe 60, parole 880)

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