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# VATICAN - WORDS OF DOCTRINE by Rev Nicola Bux and Rev Salvatore Vitiello - The relationship between I and we, in the Church and in the liturgy

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - In the well known book “Rapporto sulla fede” (1985), the then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger observed that the prayer which precedes communion in the Roman liturgy, “Domine Iesu Christe…ne respicias peccata mea, sed fidem Ecclesiae tuae…”, had been changed in the Italian version: Look not on “our” sins …After pointing out that this change was symptomatic of the dissolution, in Mass, of the sins of each individual, he went on to say that “ ‘perhaps subconsciously’ one might intend this as “look not on the sins of the Church but on my faith ”… If this were to happen the consequences would be serious: the sins of individuals would become the sins of the Church and the faith would be reduced to a personal fact, to “my” way of understanding and recognising God and His demands. It is to be feared that today this is a widespread manner of thinking and reasoning: it is a sign of how far the common Catholic conscience has drifted on many points from the proper understanding of the Church ” .

“What should we do then ?” Messori asked. “We must go back to saying to the Lord: ‘We sin, but your Church does not sin, she is Yours and the bearer of faith’. Faith is the Church's response to Christ; she is Church to the extent in which she is an act of faith. And this faith is not an individual solitary act, the response of the individual. Faith means believing together, with the whole Church” (pp. 51-53).

This shows how far a de-responsibilising mentality has penetrated into the Church even to the point of finding expression in the liturgy. The Church is the “we” of the Christian, says Saint Jerome. A priest who sins, soils and scandalises, but he does not change Catholic morals; one who has relativist ideas, is mistaken but he does not express the doctrine of the Church. The same distinction is true at the historical level when we say the Church is not identifiable with all that was done during the Inquisition.

Man has an inordinate desire to dominate and to possess, a reality which can tempt even ecclesiastics. One example: in the liturgy the homily is often a sort of “show”, an exercise of theological and moral opinions, often trivial and at times erroneous. If they are short of subject matter, surely they should turn to the Catechism of the Catholic Church or the papal Magisterium?

The reform of the Church (and of the liturgy) always starts from us: this is an invitation to be more humble so that Jesus Christ may increase. For Charles de Foucauld “the priest is an ostensorio, his task is to show Jesus. He must disappear so that only Jesus is seen …A man can never imitate Our Lord more fully as when he offers the sacrifice - he is the ‘hostia’, that is, the victim - or administers the sacraments ”. The humility of the priest is expressed, in the liturgy, in the poverty and simplicity of the actions, by virginity or celibacy, which renounces any exhibition, by obedience to the liturgical law, because we administer and serve something sacred, the liturgy of the Lord.

The liturgy needs ascesi, it needs spiritual renewal, to help the people reach Jesus Christ, God in our midst; as it is often celebrated, it is in danger of looking more like a path of sensations, New Age style, in which to let go of oneself. And when we speak of inculturation of the liturgy, the goal must be to put the people in contact with Jesus Christ, not with abstract symbols, which can open the way for subjective sensations.

The Second Vatican Council calls for truth in our signs: only Christ is the truth and our signs either point to Him or they express our narcissism. Christian worship is logical and spiritual because, when it is celebrated in the “we” of the Church and not by an arbitrary “I”, it leads the people to the truth of God the Father: worship as adoration in spirit and truth. In the liturgy too the faith of the Church and the reasoning of man enter into a relationship. Faith allows reason to better grasp the truth of the mystery of Jesus Christ, and in this way the I and the we merge in harmony. (Agenzia Fides 23/5/2008; righe 52, parole 665)

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