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

VATICAN - THE WORDS OF DOCTRINE by Rev. Nicola Bux and Rev. Salvatore Vitiello - Colonialism and inculturation.

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - Colonialism and inculturation would appear to be opposites but in actual fact they are not. They often turn into oppression and mystification, both of which are the offspring of oppressive or 'good at all costs' sentiments, both alien to anything authentically Christian Catholic! We realise this can cause scandal, but let us take a closer look.

Colonialism started from the more or less conscious presupposition, that every non European civilisation had to be brought in line with Europe's own homo and civilisation. The unconscious aspect of this presupposition was that this image of man was substantially determined by the idea of “man created in the image of God”. The negative aspect consisted in forgetting that the fact was present in all civilisations, although not thematised, and in the conviction that it should be made to emerge through the proclamation and even the imposition of the Gospel.

Inculturation starts from the positive presupposition that the Gospel must encounter every person and respective civilisation in the world, valorising all that is good therein and purifying all that is not good or erroneous. This corresponds to the anthropology of the Gospel which postulates the conversion of all men and women to the Lord, as a free and decisive act, from which a new person is born. See Saint Paul. The negative elements of this sort of inculturation lie in the postulation of a " universal man", proper to the Renaissance or Enlightenment: a man naturally good, to which “the man in Christ” would have little or nothing to add.

At the ecclesial and liturgical level colonialism is accused of Latinising; however “inculturalists” end up with an operation equal and contrary to the vituperative Latinising, imposing a Gospel and a liturgy which juxtapose themselves to indigenous rites without purifying them or leading them to participate in the one, Catholic Church. The Catechism of the Catholic Church in this regard affirms (n. 854),: “ Missionary endeavour requires patience. It begins with the proclamation of the Gospel to peoples and groups who do not yet believe in Christ, continues with the establishment of Christian communities that are "a sign of God's presence in the world," and leads to the foundation of local churches. It must involve a process of inculturation if the Gospel is to take flesh in each people's culture. There will be times of defeat. "With regard to individuals, groups, and peoples it is only by degrees that [the Church] touches and penetrates them and so receives them into a fullness which is Catholic’ (Ad gentes, 6)”.

The “Doctrinal Note on some aspects of Evangelisation”, 3 December 2007, at paragraph 6, recalls: “ in the process of inculturation, “the universal Church herself is enriched with forms of expression and values in the various sectors of Christian life[...];She comes to know and to express better the mystery of Christ, all the while being motivated to continual renewal”. Indeed, since the day of Pentecost, the Church has manifested the universality of her mission, welcoming in Christ the countless riches of peoples from all times and places in human history. Beyond its intrinsic anthropological value, every encounter with another person or culture is capable of revealing potentialities of the Gospel which hitherto may not have been fully explicit and which will enrich the life of Christians and the Church”.

And it continues at paragraph. 7: “ Although non-Christians can be saved through the grace which God bestows in “ways known to him”, the Church cannot fail to recognise that such persons are lacking a tremendous benefit in this world: to know the true face of God and the friendship of Jesus Christ, God-with-us. Indeed “there is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel, by the encounter with Christ. There is nothing more beautiful than to know him and to speak to others of our friendship with him”. The revelation of the fundamental truths about God, about the human person and the world, is a great good for every human person, while living in darkness without the truths about ultimate questions is an evil and is often at the root of suffering and slavery which can at times be grievous. ”.

The Christian must in fact give priority first to the Gospel and then to its inculturation. Otherwise those who

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

today accuse Christianity of the early centuries of Hellenising, and who are almost always 'inculturalists', end up contradicting themselves, insisting that today the Gospel must be Africanised or Americanised, etc…(Agenzia Fides 5/6/2008)

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