



VATICAN - WORDS OF DOCTRINE by Rev Nicola Bux and Rev Salvatore Vitiello - Effective and affective harmony with the Pope

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - Masochism or self-mutilation, has marked the life of the Church for two millennia. The first was Judas, who thought it might be a good idea to make the person and the message of Jesus Christ more acceptable to worldly powers. Perhaps he did not have the time to come to know and to accept the mystery of God made man for mankind.

Something similar happened following the Second Vatican Council, and after two thousand years of reflection on Jesus Christ and investigation: Karl Rahner especially took a “turning”, - which proved to be a pause and a transformation - distancing himself from earlier epochs, convinced as he was that up to then theological reflection had overlooked, or worse, forgotten the reality of man.

In what did that "turning" consist ?

To be brief: the origin of human discussion about God and divine revelation was not God Himself, instead it was man's questions about himself. Consequently, theology must always speak of man and his salvation, pose queries about the human race and the world. We know this theory met with considerable criticism: I mention that of Leo Scheffczyk, eventually a cardinal and who died a few years ago.

That position did not remain merely a “theological thought”, it became a practice which has slowly permeated many areas of doctrine and ecclesial life. One of the most clamorous consequences was the manner in which sacramental doctrine is understood: today the Sacrament is no longer lived as coming down from on high, from God, instead it has become participation in something the Christian already possesses. The conclusion reached by Häuβling is that man in the Sacraments participates in an action which no longer really correspond to his need to be saved.

The response to this ‘sacrament’ theory, consequential to the anthropological change in a certain type of theology, was provided by Joseph Ratzinger, when he had to face liturgical deviation which tended towards separation from an act of God which is prior to every human thought and deed; tending towards separation from “before” Jesus Christ. Discussion about God and indeed even worship of God, is possible only because He addressed man first with His revelation.

The Liturgy is none other than the continuation of this Revelation, as Joseph Ratzinger-Benedict XVI wrote in his book “Jesus Nazareth”. Without the “before”, God's descent in the Incarnation and later in the Liturgy, theological discussion and Liturgy can be alienation or a human projection.

Look at the proliferation of essays on liturgical anthropology, which go as far as reducing Sacramental signs, now preferably referred to as symbols, in today's weak sense of evocative but empty signs.

The situation is serious, not only because all this is taught even at a few theological faculties (as well!), but because it would seem impossible to engage in frank and scientifically equipped debate, without being censured.

Seeing that today the rage is to look to the 'East' – at least for the sake of ecumenical correctness – it must be said that for Eastern theology the “anthropological turn” was a wrong turn, and it was taken by Western theology.

The sole fundamental subject of all theology, at all times, is and must remain, the Incarnation of the Word, the human-divine Beginning, who came into the world "for us men and for our salvation". Mankind, detached from God, has no chance of survival.

Persisting and concentrating almost all our discourses only on man, as it has happened, means God is left out of the conversation.

Guiding us along the timeless path of Catholic doctrine, Pope Benedict XVI is directing attention to God's “before”. This is indispensable, if the boat of Peter is to keep steady in the truth and secure in peace. (cfr Collect Prayer, Mass of Pope Leo the Great). (Agenzia Fides 17/6/2008)