



VATICAN - THE WORDS OF DOCTRINE by Rev Nicola Bux and Rev Salvatore Vitiello - The presence of the Lord Jesus goes ahead of the liturgical assembly and remains after it

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - At the beginning of the post conciliar liturgical reform, an idea advanced that the tabernacle was an obstacle to Mass celebrated 'facing the people' despite various instructions which considered it legitimate (cfr "Inter Oecumenici" n. 95 and "Eucharisticum Mysterium" n. 54). Some were saying: Jesus Christ becomes present with the consecration during Mass, to leave Him in the tabernacle would mean giving contrasting signs.

This idea, in actual fact, is found in the same Instruction (cfr EM 55) and appeared to be consistent. However what happened was that gradually, the "diverse" or "principal modes of the presence" of Jesus Christ (cfr "Lumen gentium" n. 48; Catechism of the Catholic Church n. 1373; EM n. 9 and n. 55) came to be considered, more or less, equivalent: to be brief it was in this area first of all that relativism began to make headway. Still today many Catholics cannot distinguish between the different forms of "Christ's presence" in the holy signs.

When the Council was about to start its final session, Paul VI issued on 3 September 1965 the *Mysterium Fidei* Encyclical. To tackle the reduction and the negation of the Lord's real presence in the Blessed Sacrament, he stated that Sacrifice and Sacrament, are one and the same mystery, that the sacrament is the flesh of the crucified and risen Christ; that it is the greatest of all miracles: that through transubstantiation it is a new ontological reality; that the Blessed Sacrament is to be preserved in churches and chapels as the spiritual centre of every community, the whole Church and the whole of humanity.

However that was not enough. While the Pope with his encyclical defended the Eucharist, symbolist reduction had penetrated the Church and the first and most obvious effect was seen: the Tabernacle was removed from the centre of the altar. The motive was precisely, the "conflicting signs" between Permanent Presence and the Sacrifice of the Mass. This apparent conflict with its relativistic consequences, has come down to us. What is to be done?

It is necessary to explain that Christ "is always present in His Church" (SC n. 7; CCC n. 1088), especially under the Eucharistic species, in which he through *antonomasia*, that is in a bodily and substantial way, as God and Man, wholly and continually. The ever valid classical formula is: body, blood, soul and divinity of Our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Blessed Sacrament (cfr MF in EM n. 10).

It is necessary to explain that in the sacraments He is present through his "virtue" or power. Thirdly it must be made clear that in the priest who celebrates, in the Church gathered in prayer and in the proclaimed Word He is present in spirit. Therefore his presence is not multiple it is one permanent presence, by definition, the eucharistic presence (SC n. 7; CCC nn. 1373-1374).

In the meantime another theory has advanced: the presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament is equalled to his presence in his Word. Yet Vatican II says that Christ is present in the Word "when Sacred Scripture is read in church" (SC n. 7), on two conditions: when the reading takes place "in church", - a reality composed of hierarchy and faithful, - not privately, and when Sacred Scripture "is being read": it is not enough for the Book to be on the altar or the lectern, (or, nowadays, anywhere, for example in front of the tabernacle, or on top of it or at the foot of a statue).

His presence in the Word is connected with its use, it is a "moral" presence connected with an act of the spirit, the spiritual condition of the individual and limited. Whereas the Presence in the Eucharistic Sacrament is substantial and permanent. So it is very important to emphasise the inseparable and at the same time asymmetric relationship, which exists between the Word and the Eucharist (cfr "Dei Verbum" n. 21, with the indispensable notes of explanation).

In conclusion, without making a serious doctrinal error, we cannot go on saying that the real presence in the

Eucharist is connected with “the use” and “ends with it”, that it is a matter of grade not substance, without making a serious doctrinal error. Recently, after counterposing the ecclesiology of Vatican II to that of Trent, some are still writing about different modes of presence, lamenting that the sacramental presence continues to be understood in an ontological manner: have they forgotten perhaps that Paul VI affirmed that after transubstantiation, the bread and wine “acquire a new significance and new purpose since they contain a ‘new reality’, which we rightly call ontological” (“Mysterium Fidei” n. 47).

Therefore the presence of Christ “precedes” the liturgical assembly, like the pillar of fire that went ahead of the pilgrim people of God, “remains” after the assembly and it is not “produced” by the assembly. (Agenzia Fides 10/7/2008)