



## **VATICAN - THE WORDS OF DOCTRINE by Rev. Nicola Bux and Rev. Salvatore Vitiello - Handing on the faith to the younger generations**

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - The Pope said recently in Australia addressing leaders of other Christian Churches and communions: "As we promote Christian values, we must not neglect to proclaim their source by giving a common witness to Jesus Christ the Lord. It is he who commissioned the apostles, he whom the prophets preached, and he whom we offer to the world." (Benedict XVI, Meeting with leaders of other Christian Churches and communions 18 July 2008).

We all know that after the Council both in the missionary field and the pastoral field a strange idea began to spread that Christ should only be announced after people's problems have been solved, or, in the case of young people, the announcement should be an educative proposal. A theory which would appear to be consequential to the anonymous Christianity of Karl Rahner. Except that that St Paul tried it in the public square and we all know what happened. On the same subject the president of the Italian Bishops' Conference, Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco, says: "The announcement of Christ is not a final completion, the event which ends the journey. It is the foundation. It is the educative, visible and concrete reference. That Christ's appeal is the beginning of an educative path - not as an academic method, but as a total experience - is clear to everyone. It is impact with that appeal which causes a profound jolt, an intuition in the face of the demands of life. And this triggers a movement of conversion, a journey; the feeling that the fullness of the human person lies therein" (Tracce, n 7, 2008, p 113).

We either trust in the power of Jesus Christ - and Christ crucified - as did Paul after his unsuccessful experience in the public square in Athens, or give greater value to our own wisdom and methodology. We may then understand what the Pope wished to say to the Italian Bishops in plenary assembly in May this year, when he said that for the Church the educative challenge coincides with handing on the faith to the young generations: man only knows himself when he encounters Christ, Vittorino rhetorician in ancient Rome was known to say. The announcement of Christ is one, even when it is an announcement for one who has dedicated his life to Christ in missionary work and the priesthood. The announcement of Jesus, true God, 'made man for us men and for our salvation', contains and reveals the fullest concept of the human person.

John Paul II taught this all through his 27 years of pontificate, beginning with his first encyclical *Redemptor hominis* (1978), where he cites the well known passage of *Gaudium et spes* 22: "The truth is that only in the mystery of the Incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light ... Christ the new Adam, in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, fully reveals man to himself ... For, by his Incarnation, he, the son of God, in a certain way united himself with each man." (n 8).

Priests and missionaries know that to be faithful to their proper call which is not to be social workers, they must announce, not the latest values, even if they are justice and peace, instead they must announce Jesus. They are not unionists charged with organising pro-justice marches and initiatives, instead they are ministers of reconciliation, charged with extending the Church as the home of reconciled men and women. The only way to make the world more human is to extend the Church. The importance of this to ensure that young people are not misguided in the educative path will be clear to every bishop who has shouldered his task to be a doctor and a teacher who exhorts, corrects, encourages and warns.

Handing on the faith to the younger generations means in a word, returning to the tradition: which in the catechumenate is emphasised in the symbols of the Creed and in the Our Father and which in actual fact means handing on Jesus Christ as the very meaning of life - He told us "I am the way, the truth and the life" - from which even the smallest fragment of the universe, sensible or supernatural, draws its value. Let adults - priests - be aware of their grave responsibility. (Agenzia Fides 24/7/2008)