



VATICAN - WORDS OF DOCTRINE by Rev Nicola Bux and Rev Salvatore Vitiello - The Pope and the message of Lourdes: a trustworthy hope interrogates secularism

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - Anyone who imagines that a revolution will resolve the problems and the life of a people or a nation for centuries, must think again. France today – like the rest of Europe – is shaken by migrations and a re-mixing of social classes. The Catholic Church herself in France, still intimidated, wonders at the miracle of her survival after Jacobinism and a wave of secularisation which left her socially irrelevant. Once again a lay head of state was needed to open a new perspective: “positive secularism”.

For some time, like a watchful sentinel, Joseph Ratzinger theologian and cardinal, had patiently woven discernment of Enlightenment, reason and healthy secularism; now that he is the Bishop of Rome, the net is gradually unravelling; a net whose ends have already been grasped in Germany and in Italy, by people who realise that Europeans cannot live as if God did not exist, without experiencing self-destruction and disintegration, the “leave-taking from history” of which Joseph Ratzinger has frequently warned.

Therefore the Holy Father's pastoral visit to France for the 150th anniversary of the Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Lourdes presents its own logic without contradictions: to announce to that great nation, after more than two hundred years of revolution, and once again in search of liberty, equality and fraternity, a theological hope which appeared, as always in gentle manner, on the edge of that great nation, to an illiterate young girl, in a remote Pyrenees town.

Benedict XVI wrote in the introduction to his encyclical: « SPE SALVI facti sumus » – ”—in hope we were saved, says Saint Paul to the Romans, and likewise to us (Rom 8:24). According to the Christian faith, “redemption”—salvation—is not simply a given. Redemption is offered to us in the sense that we have been given hope, trustworthy hope, by virtue of which we can face our present: the present, even if it is arduous, can be lived and accepted if it leads towards a goal, if we can be sure of this goal, and if this goal is great enough to justify the effort of the journey. Now the question immediately arises: what sort of hope could ever justify the statement that, on the basis of that hope and simply because it exists, we are redeemed? And what sort of certainty is involved here?”

“ The virtue of hope responds to the aspiration to happiness which God has placed in the heart of every man; it takes up the hopes that inspire men's activities and purifies them so as to order them to the Kingdom of heaven; it keeps man from discouragement; it sustains him during times of abandonment; it opens up his heart in expectation of eternal beatitude. Buoyed up by hope, he is preserved from selfishness and led to the happiness that flows from charity.(1818).

Didn't Nietzsche say that if Christians sang better songs and looked like people who had been saved, he would have converted to Christianity? Now France receives a regenerating shock from the Pope, and what is more, as in the past, it is in harmony with Marian charisma that Petrine charisma moves. As Bernadette replied to those who accused her of deception: “I was asked by the Lady to tell you, not to convince you”.

It would seem that God's method is always the same, as in Nazareth: “ Casting down the mighty from their thrones and lifting up the lowly.”

Secularism – which for the people should mean something good, true and free - will be healthy and positive if it takes all this into account. And if it understands that Lourdes is much more than mere pious devotion. (Agenzia Fides 18/9/2008)