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VATICAN - WORDS OF DOCTRINE by Rev Nicola Bux and Rev Salvatore Vitiello - The goal of faith is the triumph of reason

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - There was considerable reaction from Media communication after a recent statement of Benedict XVI, when the Pope affirmed that in actual fact, there can be no dialogue between religions, but only dialogue between cultures. This is, as it is known to those familiar with the thought of Joseph Ratzinger, the well known theory, amply documented in a most important book: “Fede, Verità, Tolleranza” [Faith, Truth and Tolerance] (Cantagalli, 2003). But what exactly does it mean?
Comparison between religions, according to this shared theological position, would involve confrontation of 'religious awareness', that is, the awareness these religions have of themselves and would, in itself, go beyond the 'theological' as we Catholics understand it, or should understand it, that is, based on Judaic-Christian Revelation and Church Tradition.
Therefore the common basis for interreligious dialogue can only be reason. And it was this comparison which the Pope proposed in his historic lecture at Ratisbona. If this position is not adequately understood it is because the idea, but above all the experience of reason is not shared. For Christianity, and the Holy Father keeps repeating with Petrine concern, reason cannot be the prisoner of a merely empirical horizon, nor can it exclude or censure elements which it acknowledges as present in man, and therefore as constitutive in man. Reason which relegates the religious sense within mere subjective options, must inevitably interpret interreligious dialogue outside its horizon proper, as “theologically” founded (and therefore, in this vision, it would be non-reasonable, being “dogmatic”).
Could there also be a type of theology which fails to acknowledge reason's own adequate horizon? Theology so deeply absorbed in dialogue with modernity and post-modernity, and with 'weak' (or humble, as some hold) thought, that is loses all awareness of its own identity, its elementary epistemological statute?
On the contrary, Benedict XVI asks himself in the Encyclical Spe Salvi al n. 23: “But when does reason truly triumph? When it is detached from God? When it has become blind to God? Is the reason behind action and capacity for action the whole of reason?”. The Christian answer to these queries is clear: “Only thus does reason become truly human. It becomes human only if it is capable of directing the will along the right path, and it is capable of this only if it looks beyond itself. Otherwise, man's situation, in view of the imbalance between his material capacity and the lack of judgement in his heart, becomes a threat for him and for creation” (Ibidem).
Precisely because of this different idea of reason and experience of reason, the real and essential relationship between reason and faith and how the latter has reason at heart, is not understood, to the point that is it continually “recalled” to its proper stature, its proper victory over any reductive attempt, imposed by the prevailing culture.
The Pope continues: “reason is God's great gift to man, and the victory of reason over unreason is also a goal of the Christian life”. For these reasons, true inter-cultural dialogue is founded on reason and is therefore able to keep in mind human religious sense. More and better, than so-called interreligious dialogue. (Agenzia Fides 27/11/2008)

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