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VATICAN - WORDS OF DOCTRINE, Rev Nicola Bux and Rev Salvatore Vitiello - Real hope for eliminating poverty

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - Since the Catholic Church is not a party or a union, how can she contribute towards changing the world, especially in the fight against poverty? Simply by living her nature, a fraternal community gathered together by God from all corners of the earth, without distinction, which shares roof and table as Jesus did and taught. Therefore the Church's mission is to make Jesus known, because without Him mankind is radically poor. Nothing can come before Him: He is our hope. Christmas comes every year to remind us that He chose to live among us in poverty. Those on mission at the frontiers of the world must know this and remember it, so as not to be misled into programmes of liberation however heavily clad in 'theology'' they may be.

This is why the start of the Church's mission is prayer, the act of recognising before God our radical poverty. Without this 'disarming' in and of the spirit, charitable work for neighbour is simply a projection of our desire to be the centre of attention.

In the Encyclical Spe salvi Benedict XVI explains “Being in communion with Jesus Christ draws us into his “being for all”; it makes it our own way of being. He commits us to live for others, but only through communion with him does it become possible truly to be there for others, for the whole. In this regard I would like to quote the great Greek Doctor of the Church, Maximus the Confessor († 662), who begins by exhorting us to prefer nothing to the knowledge and love of God, but then quickly moves on to practicalities: “The one who loves God cannot hold on to money but rather gives it out in God's fashion ... in the same manner in accordance with the measure of justice”[. Love of God leads to participation in the justice and generosity of God towards others. Loving God requires an interior freedom from all possessions and all material goods: the love of God is revealed in responsibility for others” (28).

The Pope goes on to recall that Saint Augustine “once described his daily life in the following terms: “The turbulent have to be corrected, the faint-hearted cheered up, the weak supported; the Gospel's opponents need to be refuted, its insidious enemies guarded against; the unlearned need to be taught, the indolent stirred up, the argumentative checked; the proud must be put in their place, the desperate set on their feet, those engaged in quarrels reconciled; the needy have to be helped, the oppressed to be liberated, the good to be encouraged, the bad to be tolerated; all must be loved” (29). In this way the mission of the Gospel is to “hand on hope – hope springing from faith” (30).

This is why Christian mission, exhaustively, is to carry Jesus to the world. The missionary who says this is not sufficient because first of all it is necessary to “fill bellies”, would be building on the sand. Whereas those who know that hope cannot be placed in ideologies of liberation which claim to solve injustices definitely, and instead enslave man even more and cause, in turn, even greater poverty. The Christian knows that “human affairs depend in each generation on the free decisions of those concerned […].Hence, while we must always be committed to the improvement of the world, tomorrow's better world cannot be the proper and sufficient content of our hope. ” (Ivi).

Certainly “we need the greater and lesser hopes that keep us going day by day. But these are not enough without the great hope, which must surpass everything else. This great hope can only be God, […]God is the foundation of hope: not any god, but the God who has a human face and who has loved us to the end, each one of us and humanity in its entirety. His Kingdom is not an imaginary hereafter, situated in a future that will never arrive; his Kingdom is present wherever he is loved and wherever his love reaches us. His love alone gives us the possibility of soberly persevering day by day, without ceasing to be spurred on by hope, in a world which by its very nature is imperfect. (31).

Therefore, as the Pope writes in his Message for World Peace Day 2009: “What the fight against poverty really

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needs are men and women who live in a profoundly fraternal way and are able to accompany individuals, families and communities on journeys of authentic human development.”. This is the mission of the Catholic Church all over the world. (Agenzia Fides 18/12/2008)

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