



VATICAN - WORDS OF DOCTRINE : Rev. Nicola Bux and Rev. Salvatore Vitiello - Primacy at the service of a united Church

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - Seventy years ago, Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli, a Roman, was elected Pope with the name Pius XII. In those days, no one could imagine that the college of cardinals or the college of bishops would ever fail to be “in agreement in what you profess – according to the words of the Apostle – so that you are perfectly united in your beliefs and judgements” (1 Cor 1,10). Also John XXIII, in his opening discourse to the Council, could speak of “renewed, serene and tranquil adhesion to all the teachings of the Church in its entirety and preciseness, as it still shines forth in the Acts of the Council of Trent and the First Vatican Council”. Could we ever imagine that the Church, the mystical Body of Christ, could speak not in unison? Could we ever conceive ecclesiology of communion, overlooking what the Council said about the primacy (cfr Lumen gentium 13, 22 e 23) ?

Therefore, the whole Church, bishops, priests and lay faithful, would do well to reflect on the meek and argued words of the Holy Father Benedict XVI at the Major Roman Seminary and at the Angelus on Sunday 22 February and put an end to “polemics that are born where faith degenerates into intellectualism and humility is substituted by the arrogance of being better than the other ... a caricature of the Church that should be one in mind and heart”. These words express a patient exercise of Primacy and should be accepted by all Catholics with humble docility.

The Holy Father knows that Primacy has its own 'martyrological structure' because “God's message cannot be chained up.” (2 Tm 2,9) and this is true for every Pope. The Primacy of Peter exists and operates because ecclesial communion cannot be destructive, indeed the Creed calls it ‘Catholic’. On this matter it is better to turn to what he wrote as a theologian, in *Introduzione al Cristianesimo*: “one fundamental idea is documented, since the beginning, as determinant: the words refer to unity of place: the ‘Catholic church’, is only a community united with the bishop, not partial groups, which, for some reason or another, have separated themselves from it. Secondly, what is referred to here is the unity of local Churches among themselves, since they are not to close in on themselves they are the Church only if they remain open to one another, forming the one Church [...] the adjective ‘Catholic’ expresses the Church's episcopal structure and the necessity for unity of all the bishops among themselves [...]” (ed. Queriniana-Vaticana, 2005, p 335).

After observing that this idea does not constitute the primary element, he states: “Fundamental elements of the Church are rather forgiveness, conversion, penance, Eucharistic communion and then, on this basis, plurality and unity: plurality of the local Churches, which are Church only through insertion into the body of the one Church [...] Episcopal constitution appears in the background as a means of this unity[...]. An ulterior stage, again in the order of means, will be constituted by the service of the Bishop of Rome. One thing is clear: the Church is not to be seen starting from her organisation, instead her organisation must be understood starting from the Church. However at the same time it is clear that, for the visible Church, visible unity is something more than simple ‘organisation’ [...] Only by being ‘Catholic’, that is visibly one but with multiplicity, can she respond to what is demanded by the Symbol. In a torn and divided world the Church must be a sign and a means of unity, she must cross barriers and unite nations, races, classes. To what point, also in this task, has she failed, we know all too well [...] despite everything ... instead of simply denigrating the past, we should above all demonstrate that we are ready to answer the call of the present, striving not simply to confess the Catholicity of the Creed, but to achieve it in the life of our torn world” (Ivi, p 336-337). (Fides Agency, 12/3/2009)