



VATICAN - WORDS OF DOCTRINE

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Vatican City (Fides Service) - Faith and Reason. "The Second Vatican Council embraced all the efforts in theology and philosophy of two hundred years in order to unlock the doors which separated enlightenment and faith and initiate fruitful exchange": this key thought was expressed by the then Cardinal Jozeph Ratzinger in a letter to the President of the Italian Senate Marcello Pera. Now that he is Pope Benedict XVI, we understand what he means when he says he wishes to continue to promote the implementation of the Council and to remove the confusion in this regard created by certain people. He is convinced, as every Christian should be, that when we tell people about God we are offering them the very meaning of life: when the Church is incapable of showing it, the Christian proposal is weakened; there is an organic connection between the Church and man because "the mystery of man finds light only in the mystery of the Incarnate Word". This was a central statement of the Council.

Some people are of the opinion that the evangelisation of the world has come to a standstill. Certainly in the West progressive secularisation would appear to be unstoppable, ever fewer are the places where faith can be made manifest and the number of believers continues to decrease. Also in the other continents mission encounters problems and difficulties. Why, we ask, is Christianity losing ground? Are we responsible in any way? Our people no longer know who Jesus is, what the real mission of the Church is, what the Sacraments are or what moral precepts stem from faith, they no longer know anything about the Mystery of God. Nevertheless they laud centres for immigrants, for drug addicts, foundations run by ecclesiastics. This sort of Church is comfortable because it offers solutions to many problems which the State is unable to solve. Voluntary work has taken the place of charity. Is the Church today not mistaken for a well deserving philanthropic association? Beyond good intentions, dialogue has been misunderstood: from being related to every person's need for salvation, it has become for some members of the Church almost an ideology. If the martyrs of the first centuries were to return they would not die for the truth of the Christian faith since it is no longer considered such.

The Council certainly never imagined that in this way, precisely from within the Church, there would come such a massive contribution to relativism. It suffices to think of the diffused idea which considers coincident the God of the Jews, the Christians and the Muslims: if this were so there would not exist three religions. Their existence instead confirms man's nature as a "searcher for the truth". "Their search looks towards an ulterior truth which would explain the meaning of life. And it is therefore a search which can reach its end only in reaching the absolute" - said Pope John Paul II (Fides et Ratio, 33). But 'weak thought' supporters object that highlighting differences is a form of absolutism, so relativism is better: to say no to relativism would mean saying no to dialogue in all its forms and being in favour of absolutism. In actual fact, the relativism of which we speak is the one exercised with regard to the truth; whereas "the absolutisation of that which is not absolute but relative is called totalitarianism" Benedict XVI told young people (Cologne, 20 August 2005). Now, the truth of Christ is absolute and therefore it has to be proclaimed.

The Pope is aware that from a numerical point of view Christians are still the majority in Europe, nevertheless this majority is tired and no longer attractive: what can we do? Why does the Christian faith find it hard to reach the men and women of today? This is what the believer, the priest and bishop of the Church, in the first place, must ask himself. The decisive reason is that the proposed style of life is no longer convincing, because it appears to set limits to life. Instead it must show in all its breadth and freedom that it lives the bond of love not as a limiting dependence but as an opening to all of life's magnificence. And the Council's renewal must go deep. To achieve this the Holy Father says there must be convinced minorities who have the courage to live as men and women who have found in Christ the "precious pearl" and who in time bring to the fore the value of reason, in order to open it and heal it from its tiredness and sluggishness. These minorities composed of Catholic laity, the searchers

and the believers, will be “creative minorities” who draw from the perennial energy of the Church helping to give her new life and show to the world that in Christianity rationality has become religion. (Agenzia Fides 3/3/2006 - righe 50, parole 744)