



VATICAN - WORDS OF DOCTRINE by Rev Nicola Bux and Rev Salvatore Vitiello

Vatican City (Fides Service) - Culture and Inter-religious Dialogue. Some see the arrival of Muslims in Europe as a 'sign of the times'; it could be in the framework of a vast migratory movement of non Christians who come to Europe for a variety of reasons at a time when the Europe's Christian identity is in crisis. Of what could this movement be a sign? The Lord might wish to provoke Christians to resume with words and deeds dialogue of salvation with these people which is precisely the aim of the Church's mission to evangelise. Or do we consider them a reality impermeable to the working of the Spirit?

This can be true for us as Europeans and mainly Christians, conditioned to think and act according to Christian rules; if we were born in Asia we might be Muslims or Buddhists or believers in some other religion professed in that part of the world. Consequently we Christians would not have the right to judge in the light of Revealed Truth the other religions because they would be man's attempts to relate to the supernatural, and everyone must be free to search for the truth in his own way and as he is able

First of all we must remember that in the beginning Christianity addressed the Greeks as well as the Jews because it saw in their philosophical research, to quote the Church Fathers, seeds sown by the Word of God in human ratio. Rather than oppose reason to religion it united them. This will for rationality opens to the truth and to that which binds all men. On the one hand then we have position which sees within religions a degree of predisposition to Christian truth, on the other the position which sees in pluralism of religions a phenomenon diversified by an unfulfilled expectation. But a seed or «ray of truth» (Declaration Nostra aetate,2) present in other religions, is not the truth. This is why Christian worship, an expression of a biblical, realistic faith which cannot be reduced to myth or symbol, valued all that was good in those religions. And Greek philosophy encountered biblical faith in a providential way. Therefore we must agree with the theory of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger ("Faith, Truth, Tolerance", Sienna 2003, p 96-98) that we cannot speak of "Hellenisation" without the necessary explanations.

Secondly the above mentioned quite diffused opinion is in contradiction with an ordinary phenomenon: man, professing a religion, adheres to one particular idea of God; then, if he is not convinced by this idea he searches for a better one. Generally a person in search of the truth understands which religion meets his expectations. Therefore Christianity comes not from a culture, even if the culture is European, although it embraces every culture, it comes from God's revelation, as it was seen in the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost with the miracle of the apostles understood by the people of all different tongues in Jerusalem at the time.

Lastly, Christianity cannot be considered a European religion because, apart from the fact that it was born in the Middle East, the history of the Church in successive stages of evangelisation demonstrates that it is "inter-cultural" or universal, in other words catholic. Let us dwell on this term, in fashion today, although a little less since 9/11/2001. Cardinal Ratzinger speaks of the case of the Greek Plato, which Christianity valued except for what was anti-Christian, and Augustine seeing the novelty and otherness of Christianity, left Cicero's *Ortensio* for the Bible: he had to experience, as exodus, a "cultural fracture" involving death and rebirth, as it happened for Abraham and the people of Israel (ivi, p 90-93). We can say that the Christian faith bursts in from the outside, like a new birth, it does not come from any interior experience, and this is declared by the sacrament of baptism. In spite of certain accusations against European missionaries for colonising the new world with a European Christianity and despite certain excesses, Catholic Christianity on the one hand presented itself in the form of its origins and on the other embraced the local form thus demonstrating all its versatility. It suffices to think of the work of unification and diversification of the Latin Rite in the different languages and services undertaken after the Council of Trent and again after Vatican II. It would appear that "interculturality" is that which is born of transcending or purification and transformation of the best aspect of all cultures; a culture which

does not more than insert itself into the series, would be a senseless operation. We wonder how people can be content with a pluralism does not tend towards encounter in a greater unity and in the truth
To promote all this, quite rightly Pope Benedict XVI decided to make the Pontifical Council for Culture and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue into one. (Agenzia Fides 16/3/2006 - righe 56, parole 815)