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VATICAN - WORDS OF DOCTRINE Rev Nicola Bux and Rev Salvatore Vitello - "Deus Caritas est"

Vatican City (Fides Service) - The title of the recent Encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI is of immense prophetic value in our times marked by great promise for dialogue and encounter and at the same time by the realistic observation that not everywhere dialogue is possible and even less fruitful. We must avoid the temptation of discouragement and rigidity on the one hand and the utopia of the «ideology of dialogue» on the other. If we understand that dialogue is a means and not an end we have made the first step towards avoiding dangerous drifting of thought which would have the unavoidable outcome of religious pluralism (or worse theocentric relativism) fails to take into consideration the question of Truth and sees dialogue as a common searching for an inaccessible truth rather than «dialogue of Truth».

Deus Caritas est focuses attention on the Christian «idea of God» helping us to contemplate the specific «face» of the God of Jesus Christ, the face of Agape, of Love. The Pope's decision to give rise to a movement to restore the semantic meaning of the word "love", used and abused and misunderstood in our day, is a path for rediscovering the specificity of the Christian idea of God. We cannot separate our "thinking about God" from Jesus of Nazareth Christ the Lord, from the idea of God He reveals to us through New Testament Tradition. We cannot, to be brief , separate our "thinking about God" from the historical dimension, from concrete history, from the Event of the encounter with the Person of Jesus (cfr. DCE n.1). We cannot separate our "thinking about God" from the place in which the history and Presence remain, from the place in which the Event of the encounter is still possible: the Church. To rediscover that «God is love» is to rediscover the face of Christ who reveals to us the face of the Father in the Spirit, this revelation comes about today in the communion of the Church, of those who are His.

The Christian «idea of God» bears within it the centrality of the Trinitarian Mystery specific to our faith and while it takes nothing from monotheistic faith, it consigns to history an authentic understanding of God as Love, as a communal Being. Only a God who is « inter-Personal relationship of Love» can be defined as Caritas. As the great theologian von Balthasar said, the Trinitarian relationship of love that is God, is the possibility of Creation and Redemption. Only a God-Love creates something other than self, giving origin to the cosmos and to humanity; only a God-Love saves his creatures from the damnation of non sense and sin, involving himself for them in history to the point of the Incarnation. The whole mystery of salvation is summed up in John's formula «Deus Caritas est» which Pope Ratzinger has put back at the centre of believers' theological and spiritual reflection.

Love, God-Love encountered, known and loved again, becomes in this way the real reason of «Christian ethics»: it is not a titanic effort destined to clash with human limits, nor is it the application of sterile regulations distant from real needs of human freedom. It is more than ever necessary for Christianity today to rediscover that Christian ethics is «derived ethics», which has its roots and its reasons in a relationship with Christ the sole normative principle of ethics. Eternal Logos made man, illuminates in this way also human reason which is sustained in the search and recognition of those fundamental truths of natural ethics (sacredness of life, matrimony, religious freedom) too often hidden by today's dominant culture becoming unrecognisable in their compelling value for the men and women of our day .

If Deus Caritas est and if man is created in the image and likeness of God, it is clear that to look at the «true face of God», in Jesus Christ, is in no way contrary to authentic human freedom and dignity, rather it means rediscovering the «authentic face of man». Also "homo caritas est", man is made for Love and finds in Love the full meaning of his existence, therefore like his Creator, his essence. In cultures like the western culture in which people appear to be hostages of «homo faber» and not less in those new growing cultures which make economic growth the only criteria to measure progress, it is essential to rediscover that the human person is made to love and be loved , in the likeness of God Creator who is Love.

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Deus Caritas est is a «rock on which to build the house which will not fall», a theological, anthropological, morale and social encyclical which leads us to delve deep for the roots of the Mystery and rediscover our identity as men and women loved and created by Love. Anthropological identity which becomes a method (path) for inter-religious dialogue and a fascinating track to follow with care, today more than ever timely in relations between non believers and Christians. Awareness that Deus Caritas est, compels us to announce to all men and women this amazing «Good News», to renew our missionary spirit, founded on the historical certainty of the Event of Christ and on the correspondence, experienced today in ecclesial communion, of his Person and his words to the human heart. Precisely this certainty compels us not to consider anyone a stranger, not to interrupt dialogue with anyone, knowing it is a means necessary for mission which is also the goal, the proclamation of Christ, the only Saviour. (Agenzia Fides 30/3/2006 - righe 63, parole 886)

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