



VATICAN - WORDS OF DOCTRINE Rev. Nicola Bux and Rev. Salvatore Vitello - "The Church and Tolerance"

Vatican City (Fides Service) - "The Church and Tolerance". If for the Jews God is 'one', also for Christians God is "one". This is understood precisely from the Jewish roots. The affirmation that God is not only unique but also one has a powerful 'demythologising' force which overcomes superstition, formalism and the double truth of public worship and private scepticism: Christianity bursts in reconciling reason and religion. Precisely because truth is neither a myth nor a ritual formula nor a state ideology, but "vir qui adest", according to Augustine, a Man present, here lies the root of tolerance.

Christians are familiar with tolerance they were born if it: "Each citizen may follow the religion most suited to conscience". This was one of the formulas of the famous Edict of Constantine issued in Milan on the year 313 recognition of freedom of conscience in embryo. Another formula gives: "Christians and all citizens the freedom to follow each the religion of his or her choice". There had been signs before of tolerance after waves of persecution, the novelty here lies totally and exclusively in the concept of religious freedom: the right of the divinitas to be adored as it wishes, as the basis of the individual's right to follow the religion of choice (cfr M.Sordi, I cristiani e l'impero romano, Milano 1984). This is foundation for the secular nature of the state as we say today: the state recognises an instance other than itself of whose rights it is not the source and to which therefore it is not called to make concessions and with which it can enter into relation. Here in nuce is the concept of freedom which recognises that the state is not the absolute source of power. Therefore religious freedom is not a concession born of the state: instead it originates from the I of the person which the state must recognise. If we recognise that divinity has the right to be adored as it desires, then all men and women are free to practice religion according to conscience. This is the 'healthy secularism' mentioned by Pope Benedict XVI when he met the Italian president Mr Ciampi.

Moreover in the 11th century Pope Gregory VII had relations with the Chief of Mauritania, while St Francis went to visit the Sultan of Egypt. It was known that Christianity and Islam were different but this did not prevent contact despite of the asperity of the times. There were, as always, clashes between worldly interests, that is cultural, economic and political interests. No scandal: by chance in our epoch has dialogue prevailed over armed conflict as a means to solve them?

Christianity has a special part to play because it is the most universal of religions, not limited to any place, epoch, or to any one language even though the historic root of the Incarnation is fundamental. The educational experience of the Church is true for the whole world.

"I will make you an armed tower before your adversary". This is the Church described in the Shepherd of Erma, an early Christian work. She has shared tongues and cultures, she has maintained everything of value, indeed she has fused them in the language of love: this Pauline method allowed men to go beyond Babel to build a well armed tower, the tower of Erma. The intention of Babel was also to reach Heaven: all told, humanity desired a God who was close, it desired to touch the Mystery. There was confusion of languages because they failed to recognise the language of origin, the Logos who was in the beginning. The Logos of St John is everything, by Him the world was created, by Him it is saved. (Agenzia Fides 6/4/2006 - righe 40, parole 593)