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VATICAN - THE WORDS OF DOCTRINE by Nicola Bux and Salvatore Vitiello - "Primacy and Protagonism"

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - "Primacy and Protagonism" While certain politicians propose compulsory semesters of civil service in order to educate young people to solidarity or make great efforts to promote initiatives of interreligious dialogue, we witness media interventions, print or televised, on the part of eminent ecclesiastics on the subject of condoms or immigration camps. We observe clerics acting like politicians and politicians behaving like clerics. What chaos! And one is the message which comes across: the Church is divided. Speaking unanimously, as St Paul recommends, is undoubtedly a condition for expressing unity and communion. Imagine just how this is demanded of the bishop who is not independent from collegiality, a term which refers to being connected by a bond. But protagonism - from protos, first - is stronger: they want to stand out, almost leading to a primacy parallel to that of the successor of Peter. Yet every good bishop knows from the Council that only cum Petro et sub Petro can one offer words which edify, not just one opinion among the many. If the moderate former-diplomat Sergio Romano felt bound to fault the ecclesiastic who went into the question of transit structures for immigrants (Editorial, Corriere della Sera, 17 June 2006), then in the Church, perhaps inadvertently, some are ignoring what Benedict XVI affirmed in the encyclical Deus caritas est: "The Church cannot and must not take upon herself the political battle to bring about the most just society possible. She cannot and must not replace the State. Yet at the same time she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice"(28). That belongs to Cesar. Instead, a bishop and a priest must speak of things of God: they must have the lucidity and courage to indicate the necessity of conversion and the lofty height of holiness which Christ demands of man; they are not called to engage in the dialectic hair splitting of the reasoners of this world on minor evils in bio-ethics or structures of co-existence in politics.

Let us imagine for a moment that the Church, after the Council, followed those who closed themselves in specialistic circles continually discontent: they denied the world was in crisis, indeed they said everything was fine; then they postulated the uselessness of the Church. Happily the Catholic Church possesses an anti-virus to conformism which renders itself visible, - Dante saw this - in great love "for the Shepherd of the Church who guides her". Gregory the Great reveals his awareness when he affirms "Holy men…within, correct the distortions of sound doctrine with illuminated teaching, outside they are capable of supporting manfully all persecution" (Comment on the Book of Job 3,39; PL 75,619). And Benedict XVI, when he took possession of the Lateran Basilica, confirmed the necessity to safeguard sound doctrine because "Whenever Sacred Scripture is separated from the living voice of the Church, it falls prey to disputes among experts. Of course, all they have to tell us is important and invaluable; the work of scholars is a considerable help in understanding the living process in which the Scriptures developed, hence, also in grasping their historical richness. Yet science alone cannot provide us with a definitive and binding interpretation; it is unable to offer us, in its interpretation, that certainty with which we can live and for which we can even die." (7 May 2005).

It is evident therefore that primacy belongs to the nature of Church: without the primacy of the Pope the Church cannot stand. Because the primacy of one guarantees the unity of all. The word unity comes from one, a visible one, whereas communion refers to the community around the one. They appear to be synonyms, instead they indicate two visible realities which assume the invisible being "one in heart and mind": heart and mind of the one Jesus Christ. The more we look at Him the better we understand how the precious good of unity must be safeguarded. The Catholic Church in this way is the alternative to the system, to the succession of systems in history ; indeed the Church resists the system and inflicts on mankind the task of pursuing it (cfr J.H. Newman, Gli Ariani del IV secolo, Milan 1981, p 200). The Church, like Christ, is defenceless and as such she is exposed to the world, in view of human freedom, freedom of the prodigal son or the Nietzschean squanderer. To be ready for martyrdom is the sole primacy which Christ grants to the mother of the sons of Zebedeus. (Agenzia Fides

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