



VATICAN - WORDS OF DOCTRINE, Rev Nicola Bux and Rev. Salvatore Vitiello - "the human face of the institution"

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - The first steps of the existence in history of that divine-human mystery which is the Church, saw the Lord Jesus enter into relationship with other men, the Apostles and interweave with them a tissue of human relationships on which is founded the entire ecclesial edifice. The relationship with Christ represented for them the only reason worth their decision to follow Him, worth the 'cuts' they had to make in their lives in order to follow the Master.

The sending of the Spirit represented both certainty of the continual presence among the apostles of the Risen Lord, and guarantee of truth with regard to the teaching and handing on of the Faith. From the beginning the nucleus of the Church's self-awareness was living in the Spirit before the Risen Lord in constant assimilation of that personalistic principle which Christ himself lived in the encountering and the choosing of those "he wanted with him".

The tissue of human relations and ecclesial institutions have a common origin in the Lord's decision to choose a few men to "be with Him and whom He could send", constituting a method which is not only exemplary but also normative for the life of the Church. The Church not only followed Jesus' example with regard to the tissue of interpersonal relations which through the years have guaranteed continuity in the handing down of the faith, but in this example she saw a binding norm according to which the institution is not and cannot be separated from the human persons and therefore always has a face, a human face.

Apostolic succession in itself, all told, is a "succession of persons", a "sequence of human faces", which could be, without a theme, a subject for prayer and invocation which it is in a way in the Roman Canon. Therefore an ecclesial institution, without or 'despite' the human element is inconceivable. The cost of this hypothesis would be the betrayal of the Gospel teaching and the method chosen by Christ and at the same time, a falling into pure ecclesial idealism, totally detached from reality and, consequently, exposed to the most dangerous of ideologies, victim of the unending succession of modes of thought.

The ecclesial institution possesses a constituent human face guaranteed by the Spirit, although in the drama of that face's limits. We can say that the Spirit works through this drama: Theodrammatics, Balthasar would say. The human dimension of institutional Church rather than an obstacle to the faith, is an inseparable part of the obedience to the faith which is never mere acceptance of formulas but rather assimilation of the method which Christ chose to communicate Himself and above all, for a human relationship with Him.

That initial tissue of human relationships has come down to us through the college of bishops and the Church will be credible and faithful to the mandate received from the Lord, to the extent that she shows this face guaranteed by the Spirit.

The Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, shows every day in his acts and decisions that he is well aware of this "human face of the Institution", teaching us all in this way that Christianity is first and foremost: "a communicating friendship", friendship with Christ and, consequently, among all men and women. (Agenzia Fides 30/6/2006 - righe 37, parole 514)