



VATICAN - WORDS OF DOCTRINE don Nicola Bux and don Salvatore Vitiello - "Authentic peace"

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - These times of 'war and peace', as Tolstoj wrote, call to mind Father Aleksandr Men'on Orthodox priest who lived his whole life sustained by the certainty that the greatness of human reason lies in learning to glimpse traces of a Presence, which alone can satisfy the human heart's longing for happiness and the infinite. This great evangeliser and educator of thousands of Christians, was killed on September 9, 1990, in the middle of the Perestrojka. You will say: what has evangelisation to do with peace? We are Catholics and we should have at heart before a value such as peace, however important, the person of Jesus Christ, because from Him all things come. The more we make known Christ the more we spread peace. St Paul said, did he not: He is our peace, because he removed the wall of division, that is enmity? He who demanded as the summit of love forgiving enemies, points to the contents and method of peace: converting our hearts to God, changing our lives and loving every human being. We cannot work for peace taking sides for some and against others.

We learn from St Francis. Pope Benedict XVI recently recalled: he was neither an ecologist, nor a pacifist, he was a man who converted his heart to Christ because "First of all peace must be built in hearts. It is in fact in hearts that sentiments which can nourish or threaten, weaken and suffocate peace are born". His conversion therefore "is the key to understanding the brotherhood to which all humanity is called" (Message for the inter-religious meeting in Assisi). Without conversion there can be no peace of heart, therefore everything else is only a tactic and almost always against one and in favour of another. No one can be a builder of peace unless he is able to consider every man and woman, even the enemy, as a brother or sister. This is the Catholic "difference". Is it really all that difficult to offer a reflection on peace as the gift of God?

Various sorts of pacifism parade in alternate waves under the same, ambiguous and controversial emblem, 'the flag of peace', (a rainbow flag popular in Italy in recent years) Are Catholics aware of the origin of this flag? It is a theosophic, we might say esoteric symbol, it takes inspiration from the rainbow, the biblical symbol of God's covenant with his people, inverting the colours (almost the cross inverted!) with the precise intention of denying the covenant God-mankind. This is why the Italian Bishops' Conference said it should not be exposed either in churches or outside them, underlining the incompatibility of this symbol with Catholic identity.

If from symbols we deduce meanings, the confusion with regard to peace is all too obvious. However those who follow Christ know that the condition for authentic and lasting peace is forgiveness which leads to the abolition of enmity, or else we must be content with armistices which do not lead to the disarmament of arsenals because hearts remain armed. But how can we abolish enmity between peoples and nations? If we listen to the Gospel, we must start from the human condition: humans are not naturally good, we do not have thoughts of peace as if by magic, on the contrary we nurture sentiments of resentment, envy and hatred because we are deeply wounded in our intelligence ab origine, a wound called sin (Cfr. Benedict XVI, Angelus 20 August 2006). A wound which introduced enmity between mankind and God and can only be healed by turning to God. This turning Christ calls 'conversion': the human person, converted in heart, is able to build relations of peace instead of affliction, precisely like God who, as the Psalm says, nourishes thoughts of peace.

In the past all this was invoked with rogations, with processions because it was clear, peace was a gift to be asked for, and only as a consequence a commitment to live. Francis of Assisi in his Rule advises his confreres to go among the infidels with a spirit of minority, - this is why they called themselves Friars Minor, - avoiding disputes and, wherever God so willed, baptising all who asked to become Christians. He had a clear understanding of peace as a messianic gift, which starts only with recognition of the One who is sent, the Messiah. In fact the very instant we welcome Him in our heart, Jesus Christ is the principium, the prince, the 'beginning' of peace. He gives us his peace, He is peace. Over the door of a Hermitage in Assisi called 'The Prisons' because of its prison-like cells, is engraved the following expression: Ubi Deus ibi pax. (Agenzia Fides 7/9/2006; righe 48,

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