



VATICAN - WORDS OF DOCTRINE by Nicola Bux and don Salvatore Vitiello - "The priest is a minister of reconciliation not legality"

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - "We are ambassadors for Christ - Saint Paul says - as if God were urging you on through us ... As his fellow-workers, we urge you not to let your acceptance of his grace come to nothing... now is the real time of favour, now the day of salvation is here."(2 Cor 5,20-6,2). The context is that of knowledge of Christ not in the flesh but in the newness of the Spirit.

"How little faith there is in many theories...-said Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger during the Via Crucis in 2005 - even among those who in the priesthood should belong completely to Him! How much pride, how much self-sufficiency!". There is always a temptation to know, that is, to subject Christ to human criteria, to the political modes of the moment; in this case, as it happens today, the priestly identity is undermined. Certain 'TV' priests do all they can to join politicians in marches for legality and for all manner of things, instead of attending to the work for which they were ordained : to announce Jesus Christ, to give the Eucharist and Reconciliation. This entails clear understanding that the ministry does not tolerate party attitudes for or against someone, but only a call demanding and compassionate, like Jesus, to conversion for all. Should the Catholic priest not have the heart of the shepherd who goes in search of the lost sheep, instead of spreading hatred towards them, if they should fall into criminal or even Mafia company, ending up a mercenary not interested in the sheep and therefore partisan? Are not sinners in need of the ministry of reconciliation which starts with a call to conversion, for their salvation, their repentance, as John Paul II urged in Agrigento? Is it not said that the sinner must be condemned and never the sinner? Should priests not be in front line to defend not only the 5th and the 7th commandment but also the 6th and the 9th on the questions of purity, the family and life?

If priests busy themselves mainly with socio-political questions - parallel to politicians who interfere in religious matters - it is the ordinary Christian who is scandalised and bewildered; and indeed asks why bishops lack the courage to call these "superstar" priests back to their ministry. The trouble is that even some of bishops occupy the limelight: this is the case of Mgr. Milingo; following the scandal, with great mercy, he was given time to reconsider and to change. Certainly to avoid a schism, an eye was closed on his bizarre behaviour. Suppose he wanted to make propaganda for married priests, transeat, but the fact that he had joined the sect of "reverend" Moon probably meant he had become unbalanced. Now ecclesiastic discipline requires unequivocal measures be taken, otherwise the clergy will be demoralised: because many will deduce that a bishop may do certain things, but a priest may not.

The problem of the discipline of bishops and the clergy in doctrine, liturgy and morals is urgent; this was understood by John XXIII and dramatically suffered by Paul VI, John Paul I had time to make it clear he would have addressed the matter. Today there is no time to waste for the good of the unity of the Church; otherwise, when one lacks the courage to undertake that which must be done from the outset, one pays the price of scandal among the Christian people. Perhaps in these cases there remains no other path but the reduction ex officio to the lay state, seeing that in fact they have already discarded the frock of the ministry of reconciliation.

The ministry of reconciliation entrusted to priests and bishops means the duty to make known and to have a passionate love for Jesus Christ and the beauty of Christianity and to give reasons for the faith of the Church. This means passing from conformity with the world, from following the mentality of the present day, to become a follower of Christ. "But for this passing to be perfect - says Bonaventura - suspended all intellectual activity, every affection of the heart must be integrally transformed and turned to God". Those entrusted with the ministry of the reconciliation must let themselves be reconciled with the Lord and with his Church in order to exercise this hidden, humble and profoundly effective service which is the identity card of the Catholic priest. (Agenzia Fides 14/9/2006; righe 48, parole 706)