



VATICAN - WORDS OF DOCTRINE Rev Nicola Bux and Rev Salvatore Vitiello - "The threat of secularism and Christian missionaries"

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - "First fill their bellies and then speak about Christ". This slogan heard in various missionary circles in recent decades has led no few missionary operators to think that funds collected must be used for social assistance first and only then for the propagation of the faith. This is quite the opposite to the activity of powerful Arab-Islamic centres in order to promote the Koran in Europe and the rest of the world, in particular in the so-called 'third world'; but above all it goes against the words "Human beings live not on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God"(Mt 4,4) with which Jesus replied to the Tempter and "This is carrying out God's work: you must believe in the One he has sent."(Jn 6,29), with which He replied to those who misunderstood after the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand.

This means that the fundamental purpose of the Church's mission in the world is to lead people to meet Jesus Christ. If mission workers in primis, those who organise locally the distribution of the material resources generously offered by the good faith of the people of God, fail to put this first, they are no different from any other social worker, and God forbid, from wolves in sheep's clothing in the Lord's fold. What is more they are accused of exploiting the needs of so many hungry, destitute people: using social work as a Horse of Troy to spread Christianity (cfr. Encyclical "Deus caritas est" n 32-36). Mother Teresa instead, as we know, never failed to tell everyone that charity comes from Jesus and made it a rule for her daughters to start every day with an hour of adoration and to say a prayer before helping the poorest of the poor.

Yes, prayer and adoration: a missionary kneeling in front of the tabernacle in a hut converts more hearts to God than all the social and charity work in the world. But we have come to a sensitive issue: conversion. Are we certain that missionary activity has this goal? Or is the aim really to tacitly let things remain as they are? That the pagans or the rest of the world in their own religions will save themselves anyway? But the point of mission is not to abandon them in their ignorance of Christ. Otherwise, why leave home, family, country to spend one's life? At the beginning of his mission the Lord called for conversion: "Be converted and believe in the Gospel"(Mk 1,15).

Religious relativism in recent years, we know, has led missionaries to doubt the Christian faith: is it really necessary for salvation. This worm of doubt, where it has failed to lead many to abandon the mission, it has led others to continue but watering it down with social works. Please God, mission funds will never be used for similar abnormalities. We will not quote the whole Conciliar and Papal Magisterium, from Ad Gentes to Redemptoris missio and Dominus Iesus, urging us to plan missionary activity in view of spreading the Gospel for the salvation of mankind. Here we have the other word: salvation, or help to rediscover the meaning of life, so often unconsciously sought by men and women today. And something not given with a piece of material bread.

This awareness has been present since the beginning of the Church in the Sunday Eucharist. Justine recalls: "we always commemorate these things and those of us who have possessions help those in need and we live united and in all our offerings we bless the Creator of the Universe, through the Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit...those who are rich and wish to give, do so at the discretion of each and the sum collected is placed near the person who presides the assembly; he himself gives help to orphans and widows and those who are neglected because of sickness or some other reason and those who are here for a short time as visitors: in a word,[he] provides for all those in need" (I Apologia 65 67; PG 6, 429).

Addressing the clergy in Krakow Pope Benedict XVI warned: "The faithful expect only one thing from priests: that they be specialists in promoting the encounter between man and God. The priest is not asked to be an expert in economics, construction or politics. He is expected to be an expert in the spiritual life." (25 May 2006). What a good idea it would be if missionary priests, like the Apostles, were to entrust the management of financial matters to lay people. This would be a sign that the Church is in a state of constant renewal. (Agenzia Fides 28/9/2006; righe 51, parole 758)