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VATICAN - WORDS OF DOCTRINE rev Nicola Bux and rev Salvatore Vitiello - Reform within the Church

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - Universal reform within the Church was all important for the Saints who followed the example of the Apostles and started with themselves: this is the trademark of authentic reform within the Church.

The mission of the Church all over the world is to render glory to God and save all men and women, only in this way does she obey her calling to be a reflection of Jesus Christ the 'light of the world'. Now, He alone can help renew the attitude of the men of the Church, so urgent in every generation. Ecclesiastics, more than the rest of the People of God, are placed like a lamp on the lamp-stand to draw souls in need of conversion. To be placed on a lamp stand, according to Revelation, means reflecting every virtue and even before this being a torch of faith, so that Christ may exercise His power to draw everyone to be saved. This is the first fundamental criteria of the reform: to draw gently not by force, aware that the faithful in general follow ecclesiastics willingly even when they are given bad example which they are unable to discern immediately. This means being of scandal to the faithful or, as Saint Peter says, upsetting the family of God. If instead the clergy are humble and obedient, the same can be demanded of the other members of the ecclesial body.

A second criteria for serious reform is careful diagnosis of the evils from which the Church suffers, her "wounds" as Antonio Rosmini called them, and prescribe a suitable remedy for each. In our days these evils have been indicated many times by John Paul II and now by Pope Benedict XVI. Beginning with the "Rapporto sulla fede" by the then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, we have an excellent diagnosis and at the same time the therapy for renewal "in capite et in membris", starting with those placed at the head, so that example may affect the members. From the Pope to the cardinals, from patriarchs to archbishops, from bishops to parish priests, all have been ordered to take care of the Lord's flock, rather than nourish themselves. If we reflect on the Greek and Latin etymology of their titles we see they refer to the root of being a leader for others: "pater" for the Pope, "cardo" Cardinal, "arch" for patriarch or archbishop "super" for bishop or parish priest: being a leader, in actual fact, means being similar to the Lord supreme, the Shepherd of our souls, as Saint Peter says. Now, do we render glory to God and edify the faithful if at the beginning of our ministry we place ourselves instead of the glory of God? Do we render glory to God, if when we have reached the age limit for doing all that we were called to do, we continue to occupy the place to which we were called? Do we render glory to God and edify our brothers and sisters if instead of preaching the name of Jesus as demanded by the priestly office assumed, we are choked by earthly, economic, social and political concerns? Gregory the Great was deeply saddened when clergy or bishops lived in this manner and to render the reform effective he included himself: "We abandon the ministry of preaching and we are called bishops, but perhaps for our condemnation, since we posses the honorary title but not the qualities…but how can we correct the lives of others when we neglect our own?".

Today, as in the past, the re-form of the Church must begin with great attention for the formation of the faithful, to teach them the few essentials for the exercise of virtues: the tool is the Catechism of the Catholic Church; it has been revised and it is time for bishops and clergy to make it an essential and regular tool for the formation of the faithful. Nothing is more urgent and indispensable than education to Catholic doctrine since it enables us explain the reasons for our faith, especially today, in the face of so many opinions, cultures and religions. If the faithful receive the faith of Church as children, at an early age, with the Catechism and the Sacraments rather than the opinions of certain clerics, ecclesiastical vocations will flourish, including those to found the family and the policies necessary for the renewal of society.

Purity of faith and behaviour is fundamental teaching and practice for reform. Therefore those charged with education in the faith, which is the same as education to what is human, as Christ said and did, must have the pre-eminent traits of goodness and fear of the Lord. Saint Leo the Great after stating that the vision of God is

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reached with purity of heart and to merit this we must be at peace with Him, underlines: “I cannot claim to posses this peace or these close bonds of friendship, or the most perfect of likeness of character unless I am in harmony with the will of God. Outside this sublime peace we find only conniving and association to delinquency, evil alliances and pacts of vice”. Since the Church is friendship with Christ the Son of God as Pope Benedict XVI said at the beginning of his ministry, on this we, ecclesiastics especially, need to meditate.

Hence certainly reform is neither easy, nor ever fully achieved, indeed it must continue until the end of time. What is more, it requires no little effort, but because the aim is to render glory to God and save all mankind, this cleansing in the Church, according to the familiar meditation in the Via Crucis by Joseph Ratzinger, reform must be remembered every day and often. The Lord for this task creates great souls who constitute in themselves the great and simple means He employs for this immense undertaking. (Agenzia Fides 19/10/2006; righe 62, parole 936)

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