



VATICAN - "STONES, SOUNDS, COLOURS OF THE HOUSE OF GOD: The Vocation of the Artist (1) **by Bishop Mauro Piacenza**

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - In the Letter to Artists written on the occasion of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, Pope John Paul II made a bold comparison between the creative activity of God and that of artists. After quoting Genesis 1, 31: « "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good" (Gn 1:31)», the Pope compares the pathos with which God looks upon creation, the work of His hands, to the sentiment which « artists of every age, captivated by the hidden power of sounds and words, colours and shapes, you have admired the work of your inspiration, sensing in it some echo of the mystery of creation with which God, the sole creator of all things, has wished in some way to associate you»[...]. The opening page of the Bible presents God as a kind of exemplar of everyone who produces a work: the human craftsman mirrors the image of God as Creator» (John Paul II, Letter to Artists 4 April 1999, 1).

Powerful words but not for this should they instil fear or pride in those who feel they are written for them; instead these words should serve as a basis for a solid spirituality in the artist, called to a path of sanctification through the special gifts granted to him. First of all we must underline that because God alone gives life where before it did not exist; someone who uses something which already exists is the author. So when we say an artist «creates» something, we say this obviously analogously .

Secondly, the foundation of man's ability to be the author or, if you will, «creator» of something, is the condition of being created by God «in his image and likeness», with the consequent duty to subdue the earth (cf Genesis 1, 27-28). If this can be said of all human activity, it is particularly true in artistic creation, in which man reveals himself to be an excellent image of God. But the Holy Father adds that the artist « accomplishes this task above all in shaping the wondrous "material" of his own humanity » and then through his art. Hence a spiritual vocation precedes and supports the artistic vocation to be author of one's own life, making it in a sense, «a work of art, a masterpiece, » (Letter, 1-2).

The spiritual and moral vocation must be distinguished from the artistic vocation, which consists in acting according to the demands and special needs of art, however these callings are connected because a work of art will necessarily be a reflection, a mirror of the artist's interiority. If we take the example of Francis of Assisi, he was first of all a man in peace with God; from this spiritual condition is derived his friendship for people, his love for God's creatures and his poetic inspiration which transpired in the earliest lyrics of Italian literature.

It is known that the Greek version of the Bible, Septuagint, to indicate that God sees all He has created as «very good», uses the word «kalón», or, «beautiful» (Genesis 1, 10 ss); moreover the «good Shepherd» (cf John 10, 11) is literally «beautiful Shepherd, kalòs», synthesis of integrity and beauty, like the «good works», necessary to be disciples of Christ (cf Matthew 5, 14-16), are literally «beautiful works, kalà», since they express the interior goodness of the author and produce joy in those who benefit from them. This is certainly not lacking in consequences for art, since there exists an essential relation between the good and the beautiful, which already Greek remarked, in the sense that « In a certain sense, beauty is the visible form of the good, just as the good is the metaphysical condition of beauty». Therefore « In a very true sense it can be said that beauty is the vocation bestowed on him by the Creator in the gift of artistic talent» (Letter, 3).

Pursuing this goal the artist must realise that his work can foster deeper understanding of reality, because he is gifted with more profound sensitivity than others. At the same time he must be aware that art is not neutral from the point of view of communicating of moral values. If art is rightly the expression of artistic afflatus, which acts as an interior power, to which the artist himself cannot escape without betraying his inspiration, it is also true that it has clearly a social and educative role, which implies responsibility towards the beneficiaries, young people especially. It is not so much a question of obscenity or blasphemy, certainly to be banned, but instead

contradictory absolute nihilism often found in certain desperate and despair producing plastic, literary or musical works.

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