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VATICAN - WORDS OF DOCTRINE Rev. Nicola Bux and Rev. Salvatore Vitiello - Acceptance of the Magisterium

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - The Acts of the Apostles describe the extraordinary beauty of the early Christian communities, Chapter 2 verse 42: “These remained faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers”. The description presents four traits which can only have been included in the text for a precise reason. The order of the information is also precise: being« faithful to the teaching of the apostles » is a condition for« brotherhood », for authentic “Fractio panis” and faithful prayer.

Unfortunately, in much post-Council hermeneutics of discontinuity, according to which Vatican II was a «new beginning» in the Church, the idealisation of the early Christian communities has often overlooked this fundamental premise: being « faithful to the teaching of the apostles». In his now famous address to the Roman Curia at Christmas 2005 the Holy Father Benedict XVI said this position was the bearer of dangerous misunderstandings, therefore erroneous, putting in its place the authentic hermeneutics of the reform according to the bimillenary saying “Ecclesia semper reformanda”.

Being« faithful to the teaching of the apostles » poses the sensitive issue of acceptance of the Magisterium. If on the one hand it is necessary to recognise considerable growth in attention, also on the part of lay people, believers and non, to the Magisterium, at the different levels in which it intervenes, on the other it is realistic to ask oneself to what extent it is really accepted, and to what point the « teaching of the apostles » is the true criteria of judgement with which to confront everything, every personal and community reality, every authentically ecclesial decision.

Not by chance the Acts of the Apostles speak of «teaching» in the singular, precisely to underline the Church’s fundamental doctrinal unity, as opposed to any form of theological relativism, or democratic decision-making, or reducing to one of various opinions of the truth handed on by the Church. It is no mystery that, in the general levelling of communication, which is directly proportional to the number of the news items, ecclesial Magisterium is reduced, at times even by Catholics, (and above all those who claim to be «adults»), to one of various possible opinions in the stagnant lake of relativism, without recognising the due supplementary authoritativeness and difference of consideration.

An analogous phenomenon can be found in acceptance of Papal Magisterium: « the teaching of the apostles», we well know, is authoritative to the extent that it is in community with the teaching of the Apostle Peter and his successors. Apart from canonical distinctions and grades of magisterium and the relative assent due, the fact remains, even for the common “sensus fidei” of the People of God itself, that the Magisterium of the Pope can never be described as one of many opinions in the Church or compared with the teaching of any other bishop or cardinal, however senior and authoritative. The Magisterium of the Pope is the authentic position of the Church and we must all heed and accept it in order to be «faithful to the teaching of the Apostles».

In the face of this truth, those who think (as it is said in certain theological circles) they can go «not against but further» than Papal Teaching, unleash a mechanism which has devastating effects for the Church’s spiritual growth: censure. This affects not only extra-ecclesial but even intra-ecclesial circles. Instead of acting like adults and engaging in frank and open theological debate, they extrapolate parts of a discourse or apply a «silencer» to Papal interventions, in the hope that in time and general distraction these teachings not conform to one’s limited point of view will be forgotten. Apart from the personal moral responsibility of this attitude, one wonders what form of communion they have in mind, their idea of the Church, of discipleship and discipline.

Among those who «imagine a Church» different from the present and real Church, would it be so strange to «imagine» interventions of Papal Magisterium becoming a regular subject for study and catechesis for all the faithful, in every Catholic community in the world, to sustain «brotherhood» born of common positions? Would it be so strange to want all the Catholic information services to obey the one and the same logic of the diffusion of

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the Good News in radical faithfulness to the Teaching of Peter, and refuse to be guided by policies extraneous to the life of the Church and the Catholic truth?

We know well that only love leads to loving, humble and obedient faithfulness to the magisterium. This fact brings with it a twofold consequence: on the one hand obedience to the Magisterim and untiring work for its full and correct diffusion and acceptance at every level of the ecclesial community, is an unequivocal indication of love for the Lord, for the Church and for all men and women, as well as for oneself, on the other it is absolutely indispensable to return to giving reason for our faith, (apo-logia) allowing the full reasonableness of magisterial pronouncements to emerge and, why not, the «common decency» of living obedience to the Church «mater e magister» of Christians and humanity. (Agenzia Fides 9/11/2006; righe 61, parole 807)

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