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VATICAN - WORDS OF DOCTRINE - Rev Nicola Bux and Rev Salvatore Vitiello - Chastity and Truth

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - The recent debate, smouldering for two thousand years, with regard to the discipline of ecclesiastical celibacy for priests, is an opportunity for reflection not limited exclusively to the practical ambit and assessment of the opportuneness of chastity, but which takes an overall view and identifying the real motives of a theological and spiritual order.
In his homily at Mass concelebrated with the members of the International Theological Commission, on 6 October 2006, the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI said: «There come to mind words of the First Letter of Saint Peter, chapter 1 verse 22. In Latin as follows : “Castificantes animas nostras in oboedentia veritatis”. Obedience to the truth should “render chaste” our soul, and thus lead to truth in word and deed».
Given that truth in word and deed cannot and does not concern only theologians, it is a precise moral duty for every Christian, indeed of every human person, this link between chastity and obedience to the truth is most interesting.
It is in fact undeniable that failure to recognise the absolute prophetic value of chastity and therefore of the discipline of celibacy for priests, brings with it the temptation to disobedience to the truth, both historic truth and truth reached by theological reasoning. It would suffice to ask oneself which form of life down through the centuries has been recognised as the most effective witness and then respond in obedience to the truth.
In the context of today marked by the “dictatorship of relativism” which does not tolerate the affirmation of a universally valid truth, neither objectively nor subjectively, obedience to the truth is a challenge which with to measure our progress on a path which does not exclude that now rare virtue of self-control which controls instinct and in which chastity has its roots.
Obedience to the truth, can be much more difficult than living chastity. Not by chance in church tradition sins against truth have always been considered more serious that those against continence. Obedience to the truth implies the ability to see reality, a realistic attitude towards the world and oneself, it demands discipline, in other words being a disciple, to set out to follow reality, is not improvised, it is a fruit of authentic and constant commitment.
Rather than question priestly celibacy it would be necessary to “render chaste our souls”, render them obedient to the truth, put an end to infinite prostitution to mistruth which invades society and at times even believers, Christians, men of the Church.
Chastity, of which celibacy is an integral part, is not an accessory to the Christian faith, it represents one of its constitutive elements on which depend relationship with Christ, with oneself and with reality.
The process of “purification of memory”, inaugurated by the Servant of God John Paul II which had a qualifying moment in the recent encounter between Pope Benedict XVI and Bartholomew I, is a child of this rendering the soul chaste in obedience to the truth: the better we live chastity, the better we can obey the truth, and this will lead to the defence and cordial acceptance of the supreme value of chastity.
The question therefore is not whether to retain or to change this centuries old discipline of the Church, but rather, which Church have we in mind: a society of men able to organise themselves autonomously and in keeping with the times, or the Mystical Body of Christ whose head is the Lord and of whom we are the members? Behind the exploited anti-celibacy polemic hides the fundamental central question: in what condition is faith in the Church today? The impression is that to admit married men to the priesthood, also with regard to the number of vocations, would be merely “oxygen for the moribund”. Whereas we know: “The Church lives, the Church is young”, as the Holy Father announced at the Mass for the beginning of his pontificate; and strong in the energies proper to this life and youth we live, by God’s grace, in chastity, obedient to the truth. (Agenzia Fides 7/12/2006; righe 50, parole 679)

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