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VATICAN - WORDS OF DOCTRINE- Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue

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Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - At the beginning of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, it would not seem out of place to reflect on what should be an acquired fact in every ecclesial sphere: the clear and unequivocal distinction between ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. A multiplication of initiatives under the heading "time for dialogue", creates confusion and leads people to confuse dialogue among baptised believers in Christ striving to rediscover catholic unity with dialogue between Christians and followers of other religious traditions. Among the latter an eminent place is given to Judaism and Jewish-Christian dialogue to which a special day is dedicated every year.

This sort of confusion which hides behind and invokes an imaginary "absolute truth", although never actually specifying who is this truth and above all who incarnated it definitively in history, is to be absolutely avoided. It is born of that "ideology of dialogue" which continues to confuse the means with the goal. Dialogue is not and cannot be a goal, it is a means to be used in all its many aspects, but to be recognised for what it is: the means, not the goal.

The purpose of the Church's existence can only be evangelisation, frank and convincing proclamation of Jesus of Nazareth Lord and Christ, the only Saviour of all humanity. "Beatified by Benedict XVI, Charles de Foucauld is considered 'an example of respectful dialogue among religions, an anticipator of Vatican II '. Well, this anticipator of Vatican II, who went to live among Muslims to convert them and was killed, translated the Gospel into Tuareg with the following intention: 'It is not a good idea to teach the Tuareg Arabic which would lead them to the Koran, from which on the contrary they must be kept away. Instead they must be taught Tamershak, an excellent language and very simple, gradually introducing terms indispensable for expressing religious ideas, Christian virtues […].When conversions start coming a catechism in Tamershak will be necessary" (A. Gnocchi-M.Palmaro, Contro il logorio del laicismo moderno, Casale M. 2006, p 106).

May then the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity be an important occasion to rediscover with unequivocal clarity and fidelity to Jesus Christ, Christ centred faith without which there can be no authentic encounter, since precisely the Lord Jesus is the one and only "place" the one and only possible "reason-logos" of encounter.

Dialogue as Joseph Ratzinger says more than once in his "Fede, Verità, Tolleranza", must always be "dialogue of truth": a realistic human effort, assisted by the Holy Spirit when the dialoguer is baptised, to seek and above all accept a truth which, in the case of Jesus Christ, is not constructed by man, it is given, like every fundamental element of reality.

A Christ-centred faith which accepts the person of Jesus Christ according to the totality of the factors which constitute this person, cannot fail to have a positive effect also on ecclesiological conceptions, which, free and freed of factious or party logic, restore to the Church her true identity: divine presence in the world.

May the Week of Prayer for the Unity of Christians be an opportunity to rediscover common belonging, also affective, to the Jesus of history and the Christ of our faith, who are the one and the same Christ the Lord. Only this awareness will give all Christians the missionary spirit of which Europe and the world today have such great need, offering witness which will touch and edify other religious traditions. (Agenzia Fides 18/1/2007; righe 43, parole 575)

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