



Abp Fisichella reflects on 25 years of *Veritatis splendor*



Twenty-five years have passed since the publication of the encyclical *Veritatis splendor*, addressed by Pope St John Paul II to the Bishops of the Catholic Church. In an interview with Vatican News, Archbishop Rino Fisichella says he fears that those who appeal to *Veritatis splendor* to criticize Pope Francis are not being faithful to the tradition of the Church.

By Amedeo Lomonaco

The encyclical *Veritatis splendor* is a reflection on fundamental questions concerning the moral teaching of the Church, and explains the “reasons for a moral teaching founded on Sacred Scripture and on the living apostolic tradition.” In the encyclical, Pope John Paul II writes, “People today need to turn to Christ once again in order to receive from him the answer to their questions about what is good and what is evil.” In this interview with Vatican News, Archbishop Rino Fisichella, the president of the Pontifical Council for the New Evangelization, recalls some of the key aspects of *Veritatis splendor*, and emphasizes that there is no reason “to challenge the magisterium of Pope Francis in the light of the previous magisterium.

Vatican News: *Veritatis splendor*, the encyclical of John Paul II, in a changed cultural context strongly determined by a certain secularism, and consequently also by a strong philosophic relativism, presents – as indicated also by the title of a work by von Balthasar, “Fixed points” – the fundamental points that remain as references for Christian doctrine.

With regard to fixed points, what does Pope Saint John Paul mean when he speaks of immutable truths, of universal moral norms?

Archbishop Fisichella: First of all, when we speak about the truth, we must always have a dynamic concept. The truth is not a “fixistic” [Italian: *fissista*] dimension. The truth, for the Christian, is first of all that living Word that the Lord has left us. Let us not forget Jesus who says: “I am the way, the

truth and the life". Therefore, the dimension of truth opens to a personal encounter: it is the truth of the Gospel, it is the truth represented by the person of Jesus Christ. All that is the content that Jesus wanted to transmit to His disciples, and that comes from the Apostles to us, is a truth that opens up more and more to a discovery of the mystery that has been revealed. There are some fundamental points that remain as milestones in the dogmatic and moral teaching of the Church. These are elements that remain in their immutability. Obviously, all this then requires from the theologians - as the encyclical *Veritatis splendor* also supports - a great work of interpretation. The immutable norm is based on the truth of the Gospel. That principle of instance that is inserted, remains in its validity, in its criterion of judgment, which must, however, be continuously opened through the discovery of the truth of the Word of God.

VN: So we are faced with a dynamism of permanent truths firmly linked to tradition. So there is a continuity that is always renewed ...

RF: Absolutely. The Catholic Church, in my opinion, cannot accept an idea of truth closed in on itself. Truth, by its very nature, refers to fidelity and also to freedom: "The truth will set you free." A truth that opens up more and more is a truth that makes every believer, every man, discover a more profound freedom. However, this also requires fidelity. The link between fidelity and truth is a typical link in the biblical conception of truth.

VN: This reading, this work of interpretation therefore requires fidelity. Some sectors of the Church criticize Pope Francis because, in their opinion, he diverges from Catholic doctrine – and they make reference, in particular, to *Veritatis splendor*. How do you respond?

RF: The magisterium must never be used instrumentally to place a contrast in the development of the doctrine. When there is an instrumental use, then I fear there is no desire for a discovery of the truth, and also that there is no fidelity to the tradition of the Church. I don't think there are any grounds that justify challenging the teaching of Pope Francis in the light of the previous magisterium. On the contrary, we need to reiterate how much continuity there is in development. I think, however, that it is also important to carefully consider the whole teaching of Pope Francis and not just a single particular aspect of it: the mosaic is produced by the whole deck, not by a single card.

VN: The magisterium of Pope Francis, then, is a mosaic that cannot be read only by looking at the individual pieces. What then is the overall aspect of this magisterium, of this elevated teaching Pope Francis?

RF: That of a great openness in the work of evangelization. That of not anticipating the norm of the proclamation. It seems to me these must be the necessary degrees: the encounter with the person of Jesus; the constant proclamation that the Church must make, which pastors are called to do in order to reach out to everyone. This is the idea of the Church "going forth," and therefore also being able, as is said in *Evangelii gaudium* - to accompany our contemporaries, to walk beside them in order to help them understand, to really understand its application, and sometimes also, perhaps, to take a step back. And so this dimension emerges together with the need for mercy. The Jubilee of Mercy was the concrete sign of how Pope Francis identifies and orients his Pontificate.