

Press release no. 43

36th EDITION

MEETING FOR THE FRIENDSHIP AMONGST THE PEOPLES

#meeting15

20th-26th August Rimini Fiera

With Francis, a fairer and opener administration

Church and money: according to cardinal Pell, minister for economic and administrative affairs of the Holy See, the Pope's interventions for the "substantial progresses" in the reforms in the Vatican finances

Rimini, 22nd August 2015 – “Jesus understood the devastating power of money and for this reason he used to admonish how one cannot be servant of two masters. But in his parables he praised the treacherous administrator who used to earn friends with his deceitful riches and mistreated the servant that didn't invest the talent his master had given him”. Cardinal George Pell, minister for economic and administrative affairs of the Holy See, confronted one of the most delicate themes this afternoon – which puts constantly the Holy Seat under the attention of the public opinion – such as the connection between Church and money. So much an important question that it has brought him to prefigure that “the next wave of attacks against the Church could be provoked by monetary irregularities”. Roberto Fontolan, director of the international center of Communion and Liberation, has presented the cardinal by reminding how money is maybe the most deceptive of all illusions, a shortcut to which men's lacking hearts often surrenders.

The cardinal, recalling Jesus' teaching, has clarified at once that Christianity “is not Manichaeism, because the flesh has its value” and that, if it is true that money can make men greedy and bring to perdition, they can also help men and their mission. “Money doesn't ease conversion – just remember the Rich Young Ruler and the eye of the needle” explained Pell, “but, as Margareth Thatcher used to say, the Good Samaritan couldn't have helped the poor man beaten up by the bandits if he hadn't the money to pay his injuries and the lodging in the hotel”. Then, the Gospel condemns the rich man making fun of Lazarus, but not the Good Samaritan who makes a good employment of his money.

Speaking then of the story of the first twelve centuries of Christianity, Pell has recalled the birth of the modern concept of interest, justified by the growing complexity of commercial trades and by the extension of their ray. Moreover, he observed how the clergy – the ruling class of those ages – has supported and accepted the birth of the lending institutions, once called “mons pietatis”, in which the application of an interest between the 4-12% could be considered necessary to sponsor the new-born banking system. For historical reasons too, then, there is no condemnation of money in itself according to the cardinal.

Our means can't deprive us of our poverty of spirit nor replace the spiritual richness of simplicity. “Pope Francis adhesion to a simple life” Pell said “is one of the causes of his popularity”. Money must be well managed and spent for charity and solidarity endeavors, “by keeping in mind, however” scolded the cardinal “that charity is not philanthropy”: Jesus says that “the first commandment is to love God and from this it comes love for one's neighbor. Justice and work, for Christianity, are Christ-centric”.

By examining the current situation, Pell affirmed that today's men of Church “go perilously wrong when they don't care of the economic aspects and don't judge – enlightened by the faith – about the use of money by saying they're not competent in such matters, for there are many others – spiteful ones – ready to engage themselves in them”. Clerical authorities “have the moral obligations of control so that others can't take advantage from Church's patrimony”. The cardinal took as an example those real estates rent at very low prices to some friends and the 200 million euros that didn't appear in the Vatican's official balance.

“We have to organize our economic activities” proceeded the lecturer “and take everything into account in transparency. We also have to make a better use of money: by starting with the conclave the cardinals have insisted that order is vital”. “For this reason” continued the cardinal, “we have established a council for

economy with high-level nonreligious people and cardinals, together with a nonreligious general auditor who can enter all our systems and verify the propriety of the accounts; we created an institution against money laundering, we made a balance sheet of all Church's properties".

Pell also reminded that an old aristocratic lady once described to him the Church as a decadent noblewoman – at the mercy of scoundrels and profiteers. "Along with Francis" he affirmed, "we are working so that this conception changes and, thanks to him, we are going on. Without his support, a real reform would not be possible". In closing, the minister for Vatican's finances has showed not to have forgotten his origins as a pastor which comes first than the economist one: "Remember, however" he concluded "that it is simpler to manage the Vatican's finances than to provoke a conversion".

(D.B., Ant.C.)

Press Office Secretariat
tel. 0541/1832517 mail: press@meetingrimini.org
Fondazione Meeting per l'amicizia fra i popoli
www.meetingrimini.org